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Black Music Research Newsletter

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale



Volume 2

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Summer, 1978

FROM THE EDITOR

*As a cursory reading of any book on the subject will demonstrate, there are many opportunities for research in the field of black American music--opportunities which impose a considerable responsibility on scholars in the field. Raoul Abdul, in his Blacks in Classical Music (Dodd, Mead and Co., 1977) relates the result of an interview with Marion and Clarissa Cumbo. The vignette suggests a need for a type of research which would combine oral history and archival investigation. The item is reproduced here with the permission of the publisher.

The Cumbo's: Living Music History

Tucked away in a charming little apartment overlooking Central Park are a remarkable couple, Marion and Clarissa Cumbo, who celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in 1976. Both of them have played an important part in the musical life of the Black community since the 1900s.

A concert cellist, Marion has appeared as a soloist as well as a member of several orchestras. Clarissa, who was trained as a singer, has devoted most of her attention to organizational activities. She has been involved in almost every major musical project in the community.

As you enter their apartment, there is a long narrow hallway lined with framed photographs of some of the fine musicians whose lives they have touched. These include Pablo Casals, William Grant Still, Hall Johnson, Kermit Moore, Ronald Lipscomb, and the Negro String Quartet.

At the end of the hall is a small dining room that has been turned into an office where Clarissa can keep an eye on her cooking while she works minor miracles as an impresario. The living room is dominated by a piano, shelves of rare books on Black culture, and Marion's beloved cello.

This lucky visitor was ushered into the parlor where the Cumbo's took time off from their busy schedule to share their half century of musical experiences. Soon the personalities behind the numerous photographs began to come vividly to life in tales told with warmth, humor and affection.

I mentioned William Grant Still, the composer who was given a birthday tribute recently at Alice Tully Hall by Clarissa's Triad Presentations. She recalled: "We met him in the twenties, when he was a struggling composer and oboe player. He played in the pit orchestra of such shows as Shuffle Along."

Of the Negro String Quartet, which once accompanied Roland Hayes in 1925 at Carnegie Hall, Marion had fond memories. "We wanted to show people that Negroes could do something else besides commit the crimes so often attributed to us in the newspapers in those times," he said.

Besides Marion, the quartet consisted of Felix Weir as first violinist, Arthur Boyd as second violinist, and Hall Johnson as violist. He related: "I had the great honor and privilege to play with those wonderful

musicians. And I got lots of experience and training playing with them."

Marion pointed to a photograph of the great cellist Pablo Casals and said, "He was one of my idols." Marion was chosen to appear under the master at the historic "Salud Casals" on April 15, 1970, in Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center, joining leading cellists from around the world.

While Marion was playing, Clarissa was planning. When Everett Lee started his Cosmopolitan Little Symphony twenty-nine years ago, Clarissa was on the board. She was also part of the committee of fifty women who spent much of their spare time raising funds for the orchestra.

Of her present activities, Clarissa said, "Two loves have I--the Symphony of the New World and Triad." For its twelve years of existence, she has served on the board and been co-chairman of the Manhattan-Bronx Friends. And she and Marion were the founders of Triad.

She explained her commitment to the Symphony as follows: "Personally, I was very much involved because I knew from experience what Marion and other musicians of his caliber had gone through. They never had opportunities to play with the major orchestras simply because they were Black."

Clarissa founded Triad because "there was no other organization that I knew of that was providing opportunities for Black artists to be heard downtown to get the critical notices so vital to help them further their careers." Since 1971, Triad has presented an annual series at Alice Tully Hall.

When I left the Cumbos' apartment that evening, I knew that we had only shared a few paragraphs of a living history of the Black contribution to the musical life of New York. Still stored away in their memory bank, in those photographs and boxes of yellowed clippings, was enough material for a book. [Copyright 1977 by Raoul Abdul]

Numerous such cases exist; graduate students and post-graduate scholars involved in black music research need not search far from their immediate locales for interesting and vital research opportunities. Of course, adequate support by appropriate funding agencies is necessary to make possible such research. One way of encouraging scholars and making possible the execution of such research is for interested funding agencies, in cooperation with scholars in the field, to develop RFP (Requests for Proposal) programs, in addition to their regular grant opportunities in the field, for short but adequate periods of time. Let us hope that sufficient interest will be aroused on the part of appropriate parties.

*There are few music history textbooks which discuss the contributions of black musicians to the history of Western music; in fact, black musicians are seldom even mentioned in general histories. For several years, this state of affairs has been lamented and criticized by black college and university professors. Edith Borroff's book, Music in Europe and the United States (Prentice-Hall, 1971), is worth examining. For those not familiar with it, a cursory perusal of the index, covering only the entries for A through J, reveals listings of the following names: Louis Armstrong, Josephine Baker, Eubie Blake, James Bland, Henry T. Burleigh, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, R. Nathaniel Dett, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin, Dizzy Gillespie, W. C. Handy, Earl Hines, and others. The index (again A through J only) includes such compositions and show titles as: Black, Brown and Beige, Blackbirds, Carry Me Back to Old Virginny, Deep River, Hiawatha, In the Bottoms Suite, In a Sentimental Mood, and In the Evening by the Moonlight. Other listings relating to black music in this section include: "African music ganut," "Fisk Jubilee Singers," "Jazz Improvisation," and "Juba

Dance." Conspicuously absent, unfortunately, are the names of the early nineteenth-century black Philadelphians: Francis Johnson, James Hemmenway, Henry Williams, et al. [These statements are not intended as an evaluation or endorsement of Borroff's book, but are only given as information.]

RESEARCH NEWS

*Lucius Wyatt, of Prairie View A and M University, is nearing completion of a six-year independent research study on "Black American Doctoral Recipients in Music." The document resulting from this study will include listings of recipients' names, their residences and places of employment, names of degrees earned, fields of concentration, and dissertation topics. A preliminary report indicates that "the first black American was awarded a doctorate in 1942. Since that time the number has grown to about 150 in the United States."

*Lewis Porter, of Tufts University, is writing a thesis on Lester Young. Essentially, the research amounts to an analysis of Young's recorded performances.

*Velma Jones, a graduate student at Morgan State University, has completed a thesis on "The Life and Works of Mark Oakland Fax." A biographical study based on information gathered from primary sources, the paper also includes a complete and classified listing of Fax's compositions.

*James Nathan Jones, another graduate student at Morgan State University, has now completed his study, "Alfred Jack Thomas, 1884-1962; Musician, Composer, Educator." The subject of the study was the first black bandmaster in the United States Army, who later became a significant figure in the musical history of Baltimore.

*Melvin Nathaniel Miles, also at Morgan State, has prepared an arrangement for band of the first movement of William Grant Still's "Afro-American Symphony." The arrangement includes an analysis of the movement, as well as separate parts for performance.

*Pete Lowry, of Rosendale, New York, has been doing research on "Black Music of the Southeastern United States." The study, underway since 1969, focuses on "blues styles, their history and development." Resulting recorded material is being released on TRIX Records and Flyright Records. Lowry is currently seeking funds which will allow him to develop a book on this subject.

*Franz Hoffmann, of Berlin, West Germany, is currently compiling a "Red" Allen bio-discography. So far, he has completed a two-hundred page "working book" of reviews, LP "cover-critics," photos, a discography, and commentary.

FOUNDATION NEWS

*COMSEARCH Printouts, computer listings of foundation grants reported during 1977 in 57 different subject categories of giving, are now available from The Foundation Center, the country's leading nonprofit research and publishing agency in the field of philanthropic foundations. COMSEARCH Printouts were first introduced

in 1977 to provide low-cost information on the giving interests of major U. S. foundations. Paper copies of the printouts in each subject category may be purchased for \$11.00; microfiche copies cost \$3.00 each.

These listings of recent grants by subject area are important research tools, because a foundation's grant-making history is the best indicator of its future funding interests. By studying previous funding patterns, a grant seeker is able to determine which foundations would be most likely to fund particular projects. Last year, over 7,000 copies of COMSEARCH Printouts, both paper and microfiche, listing 1976 grants, were sold.

Each copy of COMSEARCH Printouts contains the names of those foundations reporting to the Center that made awards in 1977 in the particular subject area, and lists all of their grants in that category. Grant listings include the amount of the grant, the name, city, and state location of the grant recipient, the date of the grant authorization, and a description of the activity funded.

Orders for COMSEARCH Printouts and requests for additional information about this publication or about the Center itself should be sent to: The Foundation Center, 888 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*Pete Lowry, Drawer AB, Rosendale, New York 12472, would welcome information on the whereabouts of one George Washington (a/k/a "Bull City Red," or "Oh Red"), a guitarist and washboard player who performed with Blind Boy Fuller, Sonny Terry, Buddy Moss, and Brownie McGhee. Washington was last seen by Lowry's contacts in the early forties. It is rumored that he may have settled or stopped in Richmond or Philadelphia. Lowry is also trying to locate or determine what happened to Arthur Blake (a/k/a "Blind Blake"), from northern Florida, who seems to have disappeared ca. 1932.

*London Branch, Black Music Research, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois 62901, is seeking information regarding foreign recordings on which Oscar Pettiford performed, either as leader or as sideman.

*R. M. W. Dixon, 34, Vasey Crescent, Campbell, A. C. T., 2601, Australia, is currently revising his Blues and Gospel Records, extending its scope to include 1943. He would appreciate details of relevant recording sessions in 1943, as well as additions and corrections to the main listing, 1902-1942.

*W. A. Brower, 3901 Suitland Road-No. 1102, Suitland, Maryland 20023, would like assistance with the identification and documentation of musician-controlled, community-based organizations devoted to the performance and perpetuation of Afro-American music, à la Cal Massey, AACM, BAG. Help in the form of leads for interviews, memorabilia, and private recordings will be appreciated.

*Richard Davis, School of Music, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, would like to be put in touch with Linus A. James and a Dr. Brook, both of whom were associated with the preparation of an unpublished paper entitled, "A Bibliography on John Coltrane."

*Franz Hoffmann, Perlebergerstr. 13, D-1000 Berlin 21, West Germany, would appreciate receiving information and materials on "Red" Allen as follows:

pre 1929: In Louisiana, and his three trips to St. Louis.
 1937-1940: With Louis Armstrong and several blues singers.
 (Photos of Blue Lu and Danny Barker/Lee Brown/Helen Proctor/
 H. P. Jaxon/Anna Robinson/Ruby Smith/Rosetta Howard/
 Johnnie Temple)
 early 1940s: With the bebop men at Minton's, and Cafe Society.
 1940s-1950s: Travels in USA, esp. West Coast; New Orleans, to visit
 and play with his father, Allen Sr.; Alvin Alcorn; George
 Lewis (recording, 1951).
 1958: The Art Ford Jazz Parties, on WNTA/TV.
 1963-1967: Trips to England and Europe (Alex Welsh band; Keith Smith).

Mr. Hoffmann has indicated his willingness to pay for photocopies of reviews and copies of photographs.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INFORMATION

*A special session entitled MUSIC BY BLACK AMERICAN COMPOSERS: AN ANTHOLOGY AND A COMPUTERIZED DATA BASE will be presented at the 1978 meeting of the College Music Society. The presentation will be made by Samuel A. Floyd and John M. Eddins on Saturday, October 28, at 10:30 A.M. The presentation will be devoted to research findings and procedures relating to the development of Floyd's NEH-funded project "Music by Black American Composers: An Anthology," the subsequent emergence of the idea of a computerized index of musical scores by black American composers, and a demonstration of the use of the index as a research tool. General information on the 1978 CMS meeting may be secured by writing to: Craig Short, Executive Secretary, The College Music Society, c/o Department of Music, SUNY, Binghamton, New York 13901.

*A month-long CARMAN MOORE FESTIVAL was held at La Guardia Community College in May, 1978. Coordinated by Nick Rossi, the festival included two concerts, a "Sunrise Celebration," a "Dialogue" session, and a reception. Twelve compositions by Moore were performed during the festival. These included Solar Music for Brass, Percussion and Synthesizer (1978), Saxophone Quartet (world premiere), In the Wilderness (1960), and Gospel Fuse (1975). The music was performed by faculty and students of La Guardia College; in addition, the "Sunrise Celebration," which was hosted by The Honorable Andrew Young, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, included the American Brass Quintet among the performers.

*A RETROSPECTIVE CONCERT OF THE MUSIC OF T.J. ANDERSON was held in Chicago on June 11. The program included Anderson's Five Bagatelles (1963), Watermelon (1971), Block Songs (1972), and Re-Creation, a liturgical music-drama. Among the performers were Elliot Colub (violinist and concertmaster), Vivian Taylor (pianist), and Elsa Charleston (soprano). The concert was held in the studio of sculptor Richard Hunt, who sponsored the concert and commissioned Re-Creation especially for the occasion.

*A NOAH FRANCIS RYDER COMMEMORATIVE CONCERT was held in Norfolk, Virginia in April. The concert included compositions by Robert Nathaniel Dett, Undine Moore,

Franz Schubert, Bruno Huhn, George Frederick Handel, and fourteen works by Ryder. Performers included The I. Sherman Greene Chorale; The Norfolk Staters, directed by Carl Haywood; The Crusaders; The Norfolk State College Sextet; Ralph Hill, pianist; Barbara Morse, soprano; and others. The program finale, Ryder's Great Day, was performed by five combined groups, conducted by Georgia Ryder.

*A new album, Urban Hymnody, released in May by New World Records, has one side devoted to black gospel, compiled by Tony Heilbut. Stash Records will release Heilbut's compilation, All of My Appointed Time: Forty Years of A Cappella Gospel, in August, 1978.

*Bob Holmes' The Time Capsule: 1865-2065 was premiered earlier this year in Nashville, Tennessee. The composition of the piece, written for symphony orchestra, jazz trio, and several instrumental soloists, was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

*Natalie Hinderas Plays Sensuous Piano Music has just been released by Orion Records. The album includes Saint George's Adagio, and works by Ravel, Ginastera, Berg, Rachmaninoff, and Liszt.

*THE AMBASSADORS' ENSEMBLE AND CHORUS, reputed to be an outstanding group of singers, instrumentalists and (occasionally) dancers, is available for performances in groups of 12 to 30 members. The repertoire of the group consists of African chants, spirituals, work songs, gospels, anthems, opera, popular and show music, and "classical" compositions. The group is directed by Evelyn Simpson. For further information contact: Joanne Rile Management, Box 27539, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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BMR NEWSLETTER is devoted to the encouragement and promotion of scholarship and cultural activity in black American music, and is intended to serve as a medium for the sharing of ideas and information regarding current and future research and musical activities in universities and research centers.

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