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Black Music Research Newsletter

Fisk University



Volume 2

Number 4

Spring, 1979

FROM THE EDITOR

*In St. Louis, Missouri, lives a retired judge who is an amateur researcher (in the very best sense of that term) and who has produced numerous unpublished manuscripts and other materials pertaining to black American music. A recent story in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (February 11, 1979) by George E. Curry characterizes him as an "opera sleuth" and says, among other things, that:

Nathan B. Young is a detective. Not a detective who hunts criminals or peeps through keyholes, no indeed. Young, a former city judge, is an opera detective.

For the last several years, Young has been on the trail of "A Guest of Honor," the first opera written by Scott Joplin. Joplin, considered the father of ragtime music, spent many years in St. Louis and Sedalia, Mo.

"A Guest of Honor" was first performed at the World's Fair here in 1904. And that was its last performance. The manuscript for the opera vanished without a trace shortly after the fair.

Few persons paid much attention to the disappearance.

Young believes that the work was intentionally lost--in other words, destroyed--because it featured a black person as the hero--the "guest of honor."

The act of depicting blacks in positive roles was unacceptable to much of the public in the early 1900's, said Young, whose unpublished 473-page manuscript is titled "A Guest of Honor--What Did Happen to Scott Joplin's Lost Ragtime Opera."

Some Joplin followers have speculated that the opera was lost en route to the U.S. Copyright Office; others have suggested that the music might have been left in an old trunk Joplin left behind when he checked out of an East Coast boarding house. But Young thinks otherwise.

Young said Joplin was in close contact with several well-known blacks noted for their black pride. Some of these men undoubtedly influenced Joplin, Young said. He said Joplin also had performed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where Frederick Douglass, the famous abolitionist, also spoke.

"Douglass was called the guest of honor," Young said, emphasizing the word "the." He continued, "Joplin had been indoctrinated.... He was determined to write an opera."

"He went against the grain," Young said. "Treemonisha had a female heroine.

Joplin could have made the hero a boy. He was 50 years ahead of the women's movement. There is no reason to think he wasn't advanced on race."

When asked to name whom Joplin had in mind as the "guest of honor," Young.... (said).... "It could have been DuBois, who had returned from studying in Germany.... There was a black German businessman here in St. Louis who spoke nothing but German - it could have been him. A black bandmaster was supposed to come here for the World's Fair but was refused - he could have been the guest of honor."

Young said he thinks that the opera will be performed again, after researchers uncover old Joplin manuscripts. In fact, on a painting Young did of famous St. Louis musicians, he included an invitation to the second performance of "A Guest of Honor" - April 1, 1999.

*This editor appreciates the cooperation of BMR NEWSLETTER readers in the preparation of the contemporary representative bibliography which will appear in Volume 3, Number 1. Scholars who have not submitted items are requested to do so by June 1, 1979. The inclusion of a variety of items will serve to illustrate the broad scope of research activity currently underway in black American music.

RESEARCH NEWS

*Robert Witmer, a graduate student at York University, Downsview, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3, is conducting research on Jamaican popular music. In 1980, Mr. Witmer will be researching the history of jazz in Canada. The latter study will be conducted under the auspices of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Leave Fellowship Program.

*Robert L. Eagle, of Victoria, Australia, is working on two books—an Encyclopedia of Blues and Gospel Music and a Delta Blues Book.

*George Brandon, a Ph.D. candidate at Rutgers University, is researching relationships between drum music and trance and spirit possession in African-American religion.

FOUNDATION NEWS

*The National Endowment for the Humanities has announced approaching deadlines as follows:

<u>Coming Deadlines</u>		
NEH - Div. of Research Grants	<u>Deadline</u>	<u>For Programs to Start After</u>
Research Tools Program	Oct. 1, 1979	June 15, 1980
Translations	July 1, 1979	April 1, 1980
Research Collections	Dec. 1, 1979	July 1, 1980

*The John W. Work Memorial Foundation, Incorporated announces its sixth annual competition for the John Wesley Work, III Award for Musical Composition. The \$1,000.00 cash prize will be awarded to a "worthy, promising, and capable graduate student in the field of music." The 1978 winner was Edwin McLean, a graduate student at Yale University. This year's winning entry will be announced in late August. Persons interested in applying for the 1979 competition should request guidelines from the Foundation at 910 Seventeenth Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee 37208. The final deadline for application is August 15, 1979.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- *John P. Jones is seeking information pertinent to his research on "The Black Man in Military Music of the U.S. Army." Dr. Jones may be reached at: Department of Music, Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi 39217.
- *The editor of this newsletter would appreciate receiving any available information on two minstrel comedies by Charles Luckeyeth ("Luckey") Roberts--Emaline and Golden Brown.
- *Marcia Einstein, the chairman of a committee responsible for programming and research for a proposed Jazz Museum in Baltimore, would appreciate historical information and materials related to jazz music and musicians who had some tie to the city of Baltimore. Ms. Einstein may be contacted at: Telephone Reference Service, General Information Department, Enoch Pratt Free Library, 400 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201.
- *George Brandon, 95 Halsey Street, Newark, New Jersey 07102, would like to obtain copies of field recordings related to his study on African-American drum music and spirit possession (see entry under "Research News"). He is particularly interested in Yoruba-based cult music.
- *Collis Davis, an independent black filmmaker, requests information and materials regarding composer/conductor Robert Nathaniel Dett. He would be grateful for any information concerning performances and recordings of his works (piano suites, choral compositions, and arrangements of spirituals); poetry, letters, essays, and speeches; his Rosicrucian Order (AMORC) membership; his association with Nadia Boulanger (in Paris); press clippings; and memorabilia from the Hampton Choir's European tour (1930) such as posters, programs, and photographs, including rare French Pathe sound newsreel film. Additionally, Mr. Davis is searching for D. W. Griffith's "Hampton" film footage shot in 1916 for use as a tag to the infamous Birth of a Nation. Also needed is visual material (of all kinds) on the singing of spirituals in the rural South and at black educational institutions. Mr. Davis may be contacted at: Okara Productions, 187 Beach 61 St., Arverne, New York 11692 [Phone: (212) PL7-3995].
- *The Blue Ridge Institute, Ferrum College, Ferrum, Virginia 24088, is seeking recordings of and information about Virginia worksongs. The Institute is producing a documentary record album on the worksong tradition. [Telephone: (703) 365-2121, X-107.]
- *Glenn Hinson, 815 Cleveland St., Durham, North Carolina 27701, is researching the history of the black musical community in Durham, N.C., and of the activities of black musicians in the wider Piedmont and coastal regions. He would appreciate any information concerning past or present traditional musicians (secular or sacred) living in, or originally from, North Carolina.
- *Robert L. Eagle would like to hear from anyone who can offer information about Geeshie Wiley, who is believed to have spent her early life in Mississippi or West Virginia. Mr. Eagle's address is P.O. Box 45, Chadstone Centre, Victoria, Australia 3148.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INFORMATION

- *The Jazz Index will include a "Blues" category beginning with its Volume 3 (1979) issue. The decision was made by Jazz Index publishers as a result of blues periodicals being dropped from the Music Index.
- *Clark Terry and Phil Rizzo just saw published their new book Interpretation of the Jazz Language, which is designed to "fill the gap between 'what is written' and 'how it should be played.'" The work is available at \$18.00 from: MAS Publishing Company, P.O. Box 46448, Cleveland, Ohio 44146.

- *Arnold Shaw is offering a program at the University of Nevada titled "The History of Black Popular Music." For additional information write or call: Division of Continuing Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada [Phone: (702) 739-3394]. (Shaw's book, Honkers and Shouters, has been lauded by Rolling Stone [December, 1978-January, 1979] as "a monumental and fundamental study" and that it "immediately establishes itself as essential." We concur in that publication's assessment that, in its field, "Shaw's work is virtually unmatched.")
- *Frances Walker's new album, which includes Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Twenty-five Negro Melodies (complete) and William Grant Still's Seven Traceries, has been released by Orion Master Recordings, Inc. (ORS78305/306). The price is \$11.99. Direct inquiries to: Theophilus-Rosa Foundation for Blacks in the Fine Arts, Inc., P.O. Box 23318, Hollis, New York 11423.
- *The College of Charleston announces the appointment of duo-pianists Wilfred Delphin and Edwin Romain to its faculty as Artists-In-Residence. In addition to teaching private lessons to selected piano majors, Delphin and Romain, probably the only professional two-piano team in the country, perform regularly throughout the United States. Persons wishing more information should contact the College of Charleston, School of Music, Charleston, South Carolina 29401.
- *The Fisk University Jubilee Singers are continuing to perform in all sections of the country. Among their appearances in recent seasons were two concerts in Boston's Symphony Hall and, in 1979, a guest appearance on a television special which featured Della Reese, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and others. Under the direction of Matthew Kennedy, assisted by Ann Gamble Kennedy, accompanist, the group is available for concerts and guest appearances.
- *Walter Anderson recently received tribute for his years of service as Director of the Music Program of the National Endowment for the Arts. A luncheon in his honor was sponsored by the United Church Board of Homeland Ministries and was held in the Metropolitan Opera Club at Lincoln Center in New York City. Dr. Anderson was praised by Board of Homeland Ministries officials and by MEA Chairman Livingston Biddle, for his service to the arts and to the Endowment, in his capacity as Director of Music Programs. Dr. Anderson will now serve as special assistant to the chairman and will be responsible for developing policy on behalf of the Endowment having to do with international philanthropic, labor, business, minority, and religious opportunities.
- *The Library of Congress' new recording, Folk-Songs of America, commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the Archive of Folk Song. In one of the folk-songs, Ben Harney sings his own composition of 1894, "The Wagon," considered to be the first ragtime song ever written. Other songs on the recording range in styles from sea shanties and spirituals to blues and southern fiddle tunes. The album also includes a booklet with an illustrated biography of Robert Winslow Gordon as well as the lyrics and stories behind each song. Priced at \$10.00 plus 50 cents postage if mailed, the recording (AFS L68) may be ordered from the Recording Laboratory, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540, or purchased in person at the Information Counter on the Ground Floor, Library of Congress Building.
- *James Standifer, of the University of Michigan, recently participated as a consultant in the research and writing of the proposal which resulted in the funding of the television series From Jumpstreet: The Story of Black Music. Funded by a contract award of \$1.6 million from HEW's Office of Education, this twenty-part series on the history of black music will begin to address the general need for secondary school music education and the specific need for directed exposure to the black cultural heritage. From Jumpstreet is a production of WETA/26 which is expected to premiere on national television in the fall of 1980.

*The North Carolina Museum of History and the N.C. Office of Folklife Programs have recently released an album documenting nineteenth-century traditional black music of N.C. The album, Eight-Hand Sets & Holy Steps, contains twenty-one selections, with the first side devoted to secular music and the second to sacred material. The music on the recording covers a wide range of musical styles, from fiddle and banjo playing to congregational singing and bones rattling to unaccompanied quartet singing. Also included is a buckdance piece during which the guitarist keeps time with her dancing feet. The album is available for \$5.00 from the N.C. Museum of History, 109 E. Jones St., Raleigh, North Carolina 27611.

*Fisk University's Institute for Research in Black American Music announces the commencement of its Black Music Seminars, the first of which will be held during the Fall Semester of 1979. Designed to allow for the interdisciplinary exploration of concepts and ideas related to black American music, each seminar is open to all scholars, but will consist of a discussion nucleus of eight to sixteen students and senior scholars from Fisk and other schools in Nashville's university community. Additional details will appear in the next issue of BMR NEWSLETTER.

*Fisk University's Institute for Research in Black American Music is seeking experienced scholars and young scholars with potential who may be interested in conducting research on one of the following three topics: "The Jubilee Singers of Fisk University: A View from 1980"; "Two from Fisk--Jimmy Lunceford and Willie Smith"; "Alton Augustus Adams: Writings and Musical Accomplishments, 1912-1945." Published researchers interested in receiving additional information should write or call Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., Director, Institute for Research in Black American Music, Box 3, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee 37203 [Phone: (615) 329-8630].

EDITOR

Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.

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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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