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Letter, 1972 August 25, from Eileen Southern to Eva Jessye

Eileen Southern

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YORK COLLEGE
OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK

25 August 1972

Dear Dr. Jessye,

I am delighted to hear from you! As a matter of fact, your communications to me this summer kind of piled up, for Joe and I spent the summer in AFRICA! We did have an exciting time and all kinds of experiences. I have been planning to answer your last letter when yours of August 23 arrived today, and so I am sitting down at the typewriter immediately.

It is perfectly wonderful that you have a new apartment. Your description of it sounds as if it is just the thing for you. Now you seem to have plenty of space for everything. Don't be surprised if I drop by one day. Of course, I'll be sure to let you know beforehand. It seems as if the coming year will be a quiet one for me. By this time last year I had several lectures scheduled; so far, I have only three appointments for the entire year. I am very pleased, for last year was absolutely frenetic what with my traveling so much and, in between, preparing the lectures and making slides and recordings to illustrate the lectures. All of this to say, that at the present time it does not seem that I will be in your area, but who knows what the next mail will bring. In addition to the fact that by now MOBA is old hat and I am no longer a novelty, the fact that I raised my fee probably also contributes to the falling off of requests. I discovered last year that it is not profitable for me to leave home for less than 300 dollars per lecture. To me that seems a very modest fee, but you would be surprised that most colleges consider that excessive. And these colleges, by the way, would probably think nothing of paying from 500 to 2,000 to entertainers or even other kinds of lecturers. But, as I say: it's just as well. Last year left me completely exhausted, and I don't really need the money as my salary is quite good. Did I tell you that I was promoted to full professor.

I am thrilled by the accounts of your activity. And the press notices, la la! Thank you for sending them to me. I wish I could have heard the production. We were in Dar es Salaam during that time. I do hope that the work can be produced in New York with the good singers, etc. that you had in Washington. Hope that your visits to Memphis and Rust College were productive and pleasant. My, you have been busy this summer.

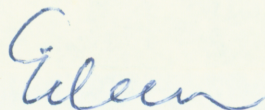
I've not read either of the two books you mention. Since returning from Africa, I've mostly recuperated (from the change in time, food, water, etc.) and tried to catch up with the correspondence that piled up while I was away. Also I caught up with some homekeeping chores, such as using scraps of cloth to make pillows, watching my husband decorate the basement living room, pulling millions of weeds in the flower garden, etc. In two weeks, classes begin and I can hardly believe it. I've not had enough vacation yet. I'm working on a history of music in Philadelphia during the 19th century (a big job that will take a long time). Meanwhile, I have a project in mind. I'd like to publish a journal devoted exclusively to black music. That subject is almost completely ignored in white music periodicals and equally as much in black general periodicals, except for entertainers. I would use my royalty fees to finance it. Wouldn't you like to write an article for it? I'm lining up the articles for next year now. Hopefully, the first issue would come out about March 1, but it takes about six months to get all of the loose ends tied together, especially for the first issue. If you did decide to write something, we could put in all of the

material about the production in Washington in the little blurb on the author. It would be perfectly permissible, you know, to use your article as a kind of publicity item for your book on Porgy and Bess. You've seen the kind of footnote that states: "this article is a chapter from the author's forthcoming book on her experiences as the musical director of Porgy and Bess, to be published...etc."

Another of my projects that might interest you concerns the publishing of a dictionary of black musicians. I do not believe that we will ever get the correct amount of attention and space in dictionaries published by whites, and many people really want information about black artists. Scarcely a day passes that I don't receive requests for information of one kind or another. I've just finished writing a batch of articles for the new GROVE'S DICTIONARY to be published soon, and it was quite depressing. The list of persons about whom I was allowed to write was too, too short and the number of words allotted each person was too, too small. Imagine having to tell "all" about William Grant Still in 200 words. Moreover, would you believe that I had to fight for the right to get even a minimal number of blacks included. The last edition of GROVE'S included about six black Americans, I believe. The forthcoming edition will include about 26, those who have been recorded for the most part. Can you understand that I feel we should publish our own dictionary, including all black Americans who have made a contribution to the music of the world? You could help by furnishing me names of outstanding musicians that I might not know about. I have forms already (left over from writing MOBA) that I could send out. Hopefully, my royalties will stretch enough to include both the journal and the dictionary.

Well, this is a long visit. I hope that very soon it will be person-to-person. Joe sends warm regards. Take care of yourself and do write when you have the time and the inclination. My very best wishes for your continued success (such as the Washington affair, for example),

Affectionately,



Eileen Southern

Please include zip-code and phone no. next time