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# BLACK MUSIC RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

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COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO/FISK UNIVERSITY

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## Afro-American Folksong Scholarship

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by Darius Thieme, Fisk University

Originally published as the text for a brochure of the Fisk University Learning Library Program, 1982. Presented here in revised form.

The repertoire of Afro-American folksong is extensive, and scholarship in the field has been concerned with several genres, principally the blues, spirituals, gospel songs, secular folksongs, and instrumental music. The subject of the African heritage has also received attention.

For interested readers, there are several bibliographies that list and classify the extensive literature of this field. The first major compilation is given in Charles Haywood's *Bibliography of North American Folklore and Folksong*. Successive bibliographies have included those by Zelma W. George, Portia K. Maultsby, John F. Swed and Roger Abrahams, Dominique-René de Lerma, and this writer.

The Maultsby work is a model for selectivity, classification, and breadth of study. It is helpful, accessible, and thorough within its stated limits. The two-volume work by Swed and Abrahams, which lists over 6,450 entries in some 870 pages, is the first recent attempt at being comprehensive. Perhaps the best way to keep in touch with the most current writing in this field is to check the recent issues of *The Black Perspective in Music* and the "Current Bibliography" section of *Ethnomusicology*, compiled by Joseph C. Hickerson and Louise S. Spear.

The topic of African heritage and its impact upon folksong has been discussed widely. One area of interest has been special holiday celebrations,

such as the John Connu festival, described by Nancy R. Ping in "Black Musical Activities in Antebellum Wilmington, North Carolina." Replete with special costumes, song repertory, and dances, this event is clearly of African derivation. The same festival has also been reported in Jamaica by Judith Bettelheim and others, and its source lies in West African masquerade celebrations. Among the early essays that discuss the African musical heritage are the articles reprinted in Katz's *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*. Dating prior to the Civil War, these sources report the use of African and African-derived musical instruments, dances and songs. Also worthy of mention are Dena J. Epstein's study, "The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History," which traces the development of the banjo from its basic source in Africa, and Charles Wolfe's *Tennessee Strings: The Story of Country Music in Tennessee*.

Turning next to the blues, a number of significant works have appeared dealing with the genre, its country and city (or rural and urban) song types, and their history in performance. A few of the more prominent of these are LeRoi Jones's *Blues People*, Jarry L. Oster's *Living Country Blues*, Jeff Tilton's *Early Downhome Blues: A Cultural Analysis*, and Charles Keil's *Urban Blues*. Mezz Mezzrow's classic

autobiographical study, *Really The Blues*, presents the urban social context from a white musician's perspective. A very interesting footnote should be added. The literature concerning the blues has long included scholarly speculation concerning its African heritage. Michael Coolen's recent detailed analysis, "The Fodet: A Senegambian Origin for the Blues?" presents compelling evidence in a particular case. Perhaps a new ray of light may have been shed upon this vast topic, suggesting new avenues for comparative research.

A few of the landmark studies on the spiritual are John W. Work's *Folk Songs of the American Negro*, John W. Work III's *American Negro Spirituals*, and Miles Mark Fisher's *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*. George Pullen Jackson's *White and Negro Spirituals* ignited a forest fire of controversy concerning the musical interrelationships delineated, and questioned the degree of influence of one genre upon the other. Subsequent scholars have since aligned themselves on both sides of the issue of influence; others have straddled the fence. Recent studies of the spiritual include Portia K. Maultsby's "Black Spirituals: An Analysis of Textual Forms and Structure," William Tallmadge's "The Black in Jackson's White Spirituals," John E. Taylor's "Somethin' On My Mind: A Cultural and Historical Interpretation of

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Spiritual Texts," and James H. Cone's *The Spiritual and the Blues: An Interpretation*.

Recent scholarly studies of gospel music have included Jacqueline C. DjeDje's analytical work, *American Black Spiritual and Gospel Songs from Southeast Georgia*, Pearl Williams-Jones's "Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic," Horace C. Boyer's "Gospel Music Comes of Age," and Irene V. Jackson's *Afro-American Religious Music: A Bibliography and a Catalogue of Gospel Music*.

The first major collection of Afro-American folksongs was W. F. Allen's *Slave Songs of the United States*. Many other anthologies have since appeared, including Alan Lomax's *Folk Songs of North America*, Jerry Silverman's *Folk Blues*, Lydia Parrish's *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, and the collections by John W. Work III and George Pullen Jackson previously mentioned.

An intriguing footnote to the topic of folksong is the impact of modern radio, television, and recorded productions on the definition of folksong. Walter Wiora traces the history of folksong in "Reflections on the Problem: How Old Is the Concept Folksong?" Historically, the term *folksong* meant a song of a particular people, orally transmitted, and existing in a repertoire, usually with several versions. One must ask, in this context, where do composed songs that are absorbed into the repertoire fit in, as in the case of gospel song, and how does one compare a modern singer (and his repertoire) such as a Charley Pride or B. B. King with a Mississippi John Hurt or Blind Lemon Jefferson? Also, consider the case of a popular song by a black composer that is absorbed and reemerges many years later as a country song, as reported in William Kearns's "From Black to White: A Hillbilly Version of Gussie Davis's 'The Fatal Wedding'."

For a summary of the topic of Afro-American folksong as seen in its overall social and historic context, one may turn to several valuable general studies. Among these are Eileen Southern's *The Music of Black*

*Americans*, John Storm Roberts's *Black Music of Two Worlds*, John Lovell's *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame*, Harold Courlander's *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*, J. Mason Brewer's *American Negro Folklore*, Richard Dorson's *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, Lawrence M. Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, and Dominique-René de Lerma's *Reflections on Afro-American Music*.

In a yet wider context, the song is seen as a dynamic continuum—as part of a worldwide cultural matrix which, on a broad social level, may be subjected to analysis. Alan Lomax and his research associates have developed cantometrics, a methodology and system for objective song analysis, and have projected its utility in viewing the position of song as a cultural element. The methodology is described in two books by Lomax, *Folk Song Style and Culture*, and *Cantometrics: An Approach to the Anthropology of Music*. Analyses using the cantometrics method show the homogeneity of African and Afro-American musics as cultural components, and the relation to other factors in these cultures. The prospect is that the analysis of musical data by using the cantometrics method may enable comparisons on a worldwide basis among cultures, customs, traditions, beliefs, and musical elements.

In summary, the research briefly cited above has cast some light upon the complexity of the problems which scholars of Afro-American folksong encounter. Few solutions have been reached, but many promising trends have been noted in the research. Perhaps most progress has been made in describing the boundaries of the topic and the breadth and depth of the African heritage, developing qualifying terms and definitions, and moving towards a deeper understanding of folk music as an element of the black aesthetic.

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*Continued on page 3*

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## Composers Corner

by Lucius R. Wyatt, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas

### Roger Dickerson, Composer

Roger Dickerson (b. 1934), whose successful compositions have won him high praise from some of the leading critics in America, is a composer of outstanding ability. Evidence of his talent and deep commitment to composing music is demonstrated in three of his best known works: *A Musical Service for Louis: Requiem for Louis Armstrong* (1972), *Orpheus An' His Slide Trombone* (1974-75), and *New Orleans Concerto* for piano, soprano, and orchestra (1976). Concerning these musical works, critics have made the following statements: "His technique is

sophisticated," "Mr. Dickerson's confidently written, somber piece made a positive impact," and "Mr. Dickerson has achieved a personal style, which while American and clearly twentieth-century makes a distinctive and valuable musical statement." Famed actor Roscoe Lee Browne, who served as narrator in the first performance of *Orpheus An' His Slide Trombone*, was so moved by the musical content of the composition that he declared, "You are aware of someone with passionate intellect has written it."

Dickerson grew up in New Orleans where he began studying the piano at a very early age. He was graduated from Dillard University with honors in 1955. At Indiana University he studied composition with Bernhard Heiden and completed the master's degree in composition in 1957. His later tour of duty in the United States Army found him performing and writing music for the USAREUR Headquarters Band in Heidelberg, Germany. Subsequently, a Fulbright grant and private sponsorship enabled him to study and compose for three years in Vienna with Karl Schiske and Alfred Uhl at

*Continued on page 4*

the Akademie für Musik und Darstellende Kunst. He also received a John Hay Whitney fellowship which assisted him in his work. Returning to New Orleans after his sojourn in Vienna, he continued to compose and work as a jazz pianist in the French Quarter.

Roger Dickerson believes New Orleans is a good place to compose music. Although he has had many opportunities to live and work elsewhere, his strong attachment to the Crescent City has been like an irresistible magnet. He feels his compositions should be rooted in his own unique cultural heritage. Thus, he reimmersed himself in the rich musical life of his native city. His association with conductor Werner Torkanowsky and the New Orleans Philharmonic brought the premieres of four major works for orchestra. In addition to composing and performing, Dickerson teaches privately and serves as an adjunct professor at Xavier University and Southern University at New Orleans, where he teaches theory, composition, and orchestration.

Dickerson has pursued other rewarding activities which attest to his commitment to creativity. His work as a consultant with the Washington-based Institute for Services to Education, Inc. resulted in his editorship of three books: *Man and His Creative Awareness* (1973), *Humanities Catalog I: Starting Points for Teaching and Learning* (1973), and *Experiments in Humanities* (1975). He has been a featured speaker and presenter on the campuses of many historically black colleges and universities. A documentary film, *New Orleans Concerto*, containing biographical information about the composer, was aired nationally on the Public Broadcasting System's network of affiliate television stations in 1978. Recently he read a paper at a festival devoted to ethnicity held at Jacksonville State University in Alabama. In his paper, "Ethnic Music: Songs of Solace, Songs of Defiance," he expresses the following philosophy: "The songs of solace are concerned with the easing of grief, loneliness, and discomfort. They serve as consolation, a relief, a comfort to the heart, mind,

and spirit. The songs of defiance inform of resistance, of open and bold opposition to authority. . . . Ethnic music occupies a profoundly important and mysterious position in the lives of people and history. The music is a true reflection of life, and, as such, changes as the world changes." He expresses his personal philosophy regarding music composition in this way: "I believe that my work is an expression of inner devotion and freedom; an expression that combines love of art with human relationships and the sense of Godly duty. I see my creativity as a release of my spiritual self and all that self reflects from the conscious and unconscious worlds we live in and move through."

Dickerson has powerful creative instincts. It is evident that he is a master craftsman in his orchestral works because of the effective writing and the superb handling of the orchestra. He is equally as successful with musical works written for other media. For instance, his *Sonatina for Piano* was included in the repertory of the 1981 International American Music Competition sponsored by Carnegie Hall and The Rockefeller Foundation.

Roger Dickerson's musical compositions provide interesting listening for the audience. For instance, *A Musical Service for Louis* begins in a slow and deliberate manner with sensitive writing in the strings, woodwinds, horns and trombones. The mood established is a meditative one with religious overtones. Eventually the tempo accelerates to a faster section in which the members of the choir clap hands with the driving rhythms carried by a jazz drummer. The musical strata in the strings, woodwinds, and brass instruments continue in a contrapuntal manner, bringing the piece into an area of increased rhythmic activity and tension. This finally gives way to an *Adagio* section in which the chief motive is an ostinato figure played by the trombone. The choir begins to sing on the syllable "Ah" with the orchestra. The piece ends quietly with three statements of the ostinato figure by an offstage trumpet. This writer believes that if Louis Armstrong were alive and had witnessed the performance of *A Musical Service*, he would have been immensely pleased with the work of Roger Dickerson.

Listening to a taped performance of the *New Orleans Concerto* by pianist Leon Bates and the Symphony of the New World conducted by Leonard De Paur is a memorable experience. The piece, written in three movements and requiring a high level of technical facility on the part of the pianist, is ably performed by Bates. Movements one and three are very rhythmic while the second movement is slow. The soprano soloist in the middle movement is used as an instrumental voice in the texture since a text is not used.

Because of his demonstrated success as a composer, America is sure to hear more from Roger Dickerson in the future.

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### The Music of Roger Dickerson

#### Orchestra

*A Musical Service for Louis (Requiem for Louis Armstrong)*, 1972. Southern Music Publishing Company, Inc.  
*Orpheus An' His Slide Trombone* for orchestra and narrator, 1974-75.  
*New Orleans Concerto* for piano, soprano, and orchestra, 1976.  
*Concert Overture for Orchestra*, 1957.  
*Ten Concert Pieces for Beginning String Players* for youth orchestra, 1973. Southern Music Publishing Company, Inc. Reviewed by Dominique-René de Lerma in *The Black Perspective in Music*, 7 (Fall 1979), 267-268.

#### Chamber Music

*Variations for Woodwind Trio*, 1955, fl., cl., bn.  
*String Quartet*, 1956.  
*Quintet for Wind Instruments*, 1961, for woodwind quartet.  
*Music for String Trio*, 1957.  
*Prekussion* for percussion ensemble, 1954.

#### Chorus

*Fair Dillard* (SATB), unaccompanied, 1955.  
*Psalm 49* (SATB), and three timpani, 1979.

#### Keyboard Works

*Sonatina for Piano*, 1960. Southern Music Publishing Company, Inc.  
*Chorale Prelude: Das Neugeborne Kindelein*, for organ, 1956.

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## Voice

*Music I Heard*, for soprano and piano, 1960.

*The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, for soprano and piano, 1961.

## Solo Instrument

*Sonata for Clarinet and Piano*, 1960.  
*Movement for Trumpet and Piano*, 1960.

*Incantation for Violin and Piano*, 1983.

*Expressions for Violin and Piano*, 1983.

## Band

*Essay for Band*, for symphonic wind ensemble, 1958.

*Fugue 'n Blues*, for jazz band, 1959.

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serves his city, students and the human spirit." *Scholastic*, 122, No. 8 (April, 1981), 22-24.

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The Music of Roger Dickerson is represented by:

Southern Music Publishing Company, Inc., 1740 Broadway, New York 10019.

## A Selected List of Music for Organ Solo by Black Composers

The following was prepared by Dominique-René de Lerma (Morgan State University) and Herndon Spillman (Louisiana State University), based on research conducted by Dr. Spillman, Clarence E. Whiteman (Virginia State University), Lorna Daniels (Wilmington, DE) and Eugene W. Hancock (Manhattan Community College). Dates following titles indicate year of composition, when known. Works without an indicated imprint are probably available only from the composer.

**Bankole, Ayo, 1935-1976**

*Toccata and fugue*. IFE-IFE: University of IFE Press, 1977. (IFE music editions, 8)

3 *Toccatas*.

**Beard, Ivy Lee, 1943-1978**

*Lyric piece*.

**Charlton, Melville, 1883-1974**

*Double fugue, E minor*.

**Childs, John, fl. 1980**

*Prelude* (1974).

**Clark, Edgar Rogie, 1913-1978**

*Prelude bachinegras* (arr. from the original piano version by Eugene W. Hancock).

**Coleman, Charles D., 1926-**

*Impromptu for pedals*. Detroit [?]: Northwestern School of Music Press.  
*Sonata, no. 1*. Detroit [?]: Northwestern School of Music Press.

**Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel, 1875-1912**

*Album*. London: Augener.

*Ariette, F major*. London: Novello, 1898. (The village organist, 16)

*Elegy*. London: Novello. (The village organist, 15)

3 *Impromptus*, op. 78. London [?]: Weekes.

*Melody*. London: Novello. (The village organist, 12)

**Cooper, William B., 1920-**

*Air on a child's flute* (1976).

*Bread of heaven* (1976). New York [?]: Dangerfield Music.

*Diferencias con quattro* (1962).

*Fantasy on the spiritual "John saw the*

*holy number*." New York: St. Philip's Press, 1969.

*In the beginning* (1962).

*Lord, keep us steadfast in thy word; chorale prelude*. Dover: Flammer.

*Meditation on "I'm so glad trouble don't last always"*. New York: n.p. [?], 1969.

*Meditation on "Steal Away"*.

*Paraphrase on "Every time I feel the spirit"*. New York: n.p. [?], 1966.

*Pastorale* (1973). New York [?]:

Dangerfield Music.

*Procession liturgique*.

*Rhapsody on the name F-E-L-A-S-O-W-A-N-D-E* (1977). New York [?]: Dangerfield Music.

*Symphony*, organ.

*Toccatina* (1975). New York [?]:

Dangerfield Music.

**Da Costa, Noel, 1929-**

*Chilio-lo, based on an African lament* (1970). New York: Atsoc Music.

*Maryton; hymn-tune variations*

(1955). New York: Atsoc Music.

*Prelude, procession, postlude* (1971). New York: Atsoc Music.

*Prelude for organ after an East African lament, Chilio-lo*.

*Spiritual set* (1974). Melville: Belwin-Mills, 1977. (Contemporary organ series)

*Triptych* (1973).

**Dickerson, Roger Donald, 1934-**  
*Choral prelude on "Das neugeborne Kinderlein"* (1956).

**Duncan, John, 1911-1974**

*Diversion, no. 4*, organ.

**Fax, Mark, 1911-1974**

*Bridal procession* (1968).

2 *Choral preludes* (1974).

*Fantasy on "We shall gather together"* (1968).

*Offertory in F* (1972?).

3 *Pieces* (1965).

6 *Pieces*.

*Postlude on "I'll never turn back no more"* (1972).

*Prelude and chorale* (1952).

3 *Preludes* (1964).

*The quiet church* (1974).

*Study on Morecambe*.

*Toccatina* (1974).

*Variations on Maryton* (1960).

**Hailstork, Adolphus Cunningham, 1941-**

*Prelude* (1967).

*Suite* (1967).

**Hancock, Eugene Wilson, 1929-**

2 *Negro spirituals*.

*An organ book of spirituals*. Dayton: Lorenz Publishing Co., 1966.

*Swing low*.

**Hayes, Joseph, 1920-**

*Praeludium*.

**Henry, Joseph, fl. 1980**

2 *Hymn-tune preludes*, "Eugen" & "King's Lynn" (1973).

*Continued on back cover*

- Kay, Ulysses**, 1917-  
*2 Meditations* (1950). New York: H.W. Gray, 1951.
- Kerr, Thomas H.**, 1915-  
*Anguished American Easter* (1968).  
*Arietta*. Evanston: Summy-Birchard. (American organ music, 2)  
*Concert variations on a merry Xmas tune, Good King Wenceslas* (1951).  
*Somber variations on Handel's "Thanks be to thee."*  
*Suite Sebastieene* [sic] (1974).  
*Thanksgiving* (1969).
- King, Betty Lou Jackson**, 1928-  
*A nuptial suite*.
- Lampley, Calvin Douglas**, fl. 1980  
*Lament and variations*.
- Lateef, Yusef**, 1921-  
*Fantasia*.
- Lovinggood, Penman**, 1895-  
*Meditation*. Compton: Lovinggood, 1965.  
*Nocturne*. Compton: Lovinggood, 1969.
- Phillips, Arthur A.**, 1918-  
*Chorale, variations and fugue, C minor*.
- Pichardo Vicioso, Miguel**, 1939-  
*Preludes*.
- Price, Florence B.**, 1888-1953  
*Adoration*. Dayton: Lorenz Publishing Co.  
*An elf on a moonbeam*.  
*Evening*.
- Hour glass*.  
*Impromptu*.  
*In quiet mood*. New York: Galaxy, 1951. (Plate no. G.M. 1882-4)  
*Offertory*.  
*Sandman*.  
*Sonata*.  
*Suite*.
- Price, John Elwood**, 1935-  
*Meditation for April third* (1956).  
*Organ piece I* (1977).  
*Piece* (1967).
- Ross, George J.**, 1938-  
*Miniature, op. 4*.
- Simpson, Ralph Riccardo**, 1932-  
*Jacob's ladder*.  
*Roll, Jordan, roll* (1963).  
*Swing low, sweet chariot*.
- Still, William Grant**, 1895-1978  
*Elegy*, published in *The California organist* (November 1963).  
*Summerland*, arr. from *Visions* (1936) by Edouard Nies-Berger. Glen Rock: J. Fischer & Bro.
- Sowande, Fela**, 1905-  
*Gloria*. New York: Ricordi, 1958.  
*Jesu olughala*. London: Novello.  
*Jubilate*.  
*Ká múra*. London: Novello.  
*Ká mo rokoso*.  
*Kyrie*.
- The Negro in sacred idiom*. London: Chappell, 1955.  
*Oyigijigi; introduction, theme and variation*. New York: Ricordi.  
*Prayer; oba a bake*. New York: Ricordi, 1958.  
*Yoruba folk theme*. New York: Ricordi, 1958.
- Sweeney, John Albert**, fl. 1980  
*Prelude*.
- Terry, J. Roy**, fl. ca. 1950  
*Sonata, D minor*.
- Walker, George**, 1922-  
*Chorale prelude, Liebster Jesu* [withdrawn?].  
*Invocation* [withdrawn?].
- White, Clarence Cameron**, 1880-1960  
*Magnificat*.
- White, Don Lee**, fl. 1980  
*By the waters of Babylon*.  
*Christmas fantasy*.  
*Jesus, keep me near the cross*.  
*Magnificat* (1961).  
*Thanksgiving fantasy* (1966).
- Williams, Julius P.**, fl. 1980  
*Sounds of colors*.
- Wilson, Olly**, 1937-  
*Expansions* (1979).
- Work, John W.**, 1901-1967  
*Frolic*.  
*From the deep South*.  
*Plaint*.  
*Spiritual*.  
*A summer evening*.

## A.A.C.M. 19th Anniversary Festival

May 11, 12, 1984, 8:00 p.m. May 13, 1984, 3:00 p.m.

The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, Inc. will be celebrating nineteen years of presenting innovative, original music at its *Anniversary Festival*, May 11, 12, and 13th. The venue for the three day musical extravaganza is **Columbia College's Ferguson Theater**, 600 South Michigan. The AACM will be providing Chicagoans with the latest compositions of such composer/musicians as multi-reedists Anthony Braxton, Mwata Bowden, Douglas Ewart, and Edward Wilkerson. Other members expected to participate are Ernest Dawkins, Steve Berry, Malachi Favors Maghostut, Ameen Muhammad, Reggie Nicholson, Hanah Jon Taylor,

Joining the AACM's celebration this year will be world renown alto saxophonists Jackie McLean and his quintet featuring his son, Rene McLean; Amiri Baraka, poet; David Murray, saxophonist; Steve McCall, percussionist and one of the founders of the AACM; and trumpeter extraordinaire, Don Cherry.

Tickets will be available beginning May 1, 1984 at the following costs:

**General Admission:**  
Series Ticket, \$20.00  
Students with I.D., \$15.00  
Single Ticket, \$8.00  
Students with I.D., \$6.00

**For Further Information Call:**  
(312) 752-2212 between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

**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 activities in universities and research centers.

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