Black Music: A Bibliographic Essay

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Interest in Black music cannot be justified simply as an effort to pacify Afro-Americans or their supporters. If this music is noteworthy for economic or faddish reasons, the energy expended will ultimately be in vain. Black music is distinct from music in the Western tradition, and that difference becomes more obvious the closer its roots are to Africa. This is not to say, however, that the Black composer of symphonies and chamber music has abandoned his heritage entirely. Although many of the elements of Black culture have been absorbed into the mainstream of American life and have helped give it its unique identity, real understanding is gained by observing the extent to which Black music is distinct from that of Europe.

Until the time of World War I, musical life in the United States was based on English and German traditions. Other immigrants contributed to the musical melting pot as best they could. The anti-German sentiments which were developed early in the second decade of this century would have left white Americans without any European models had it not been for France. Waves of American musicians, almost up to the present, went to Paris for an education which bore the stamp of continental approval. What they found in France was an acceptance of what was distinctly American, diluted though it might have been: Black music.

African slaves first arrived in the United States in 1619. Over the next few centuries, involuntary importations increased the population. Although concerted efforts were made to destroy cultural ties to the motherland, the slave owners were ignorant of the fact that oral tradition and socially oriented music were part of the Black man's culture. Despite the attempts at suppression, the culture survived because of its resilient nature, and by adjusting to new circumstances.

British sympathy for the Afro-American slave was already musically evident by 1800, which was about the time that Rev. Legh Richmond
composed his song, *The Negro's Prayer*. By the time of the tour of the Jubilee Singers from Fisk University in 1873, the impact of Black and white minstrels had further qualified British interests. Also, numerous exposures to various Black-American musical idioms by the turn of the century in France had provided the French with an alternative to Germanic-Wagnerian styles.

The music of the Black American at this time varied between the extremes of James Bland's *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny* and Will Marion Cook's *Who Dat Say Chicken in dis Crowd?* On one hand there was a nostalgia, touchingly expressed in the most simple and direct means while, on the other hand, there was a ragtime frivolity which was far from the sobriety of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Small wonder that Debussy and Ravel grasped elements of this culture as alternatives to the innovations of *Tristan*.

Back home meanwhile, Black Americans experienced pulses of freedom. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s opened some doors, and the tragic assassination of Martin Luther King came (ironically) at a lucky moment within the rapidly changing society. Although some of the more irate Black citizens rejected the vacillating support of the white liberal, enough non-Blacks joined the cause to provide a basic departure point for further progress. From this has come, for example, the Black Composers Series of Columbia Records, a revival of interest in the music of Eubie Blake and Scott Joplin, and reissues of Bessie Smith, Paul Robeson, and Roland Hayes. And, no matter what reservations others might have expressed about him, Rudolph Bing opened the doors for Shirley Verrett, Leontyne Price, George Shirley, Grace Bumbry and a host of others when he engaged Marian Anderson for the 1955 Met Production of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*.

Forgetting anything which suggests racism, there is still a long way to go before the idioms of Black music and the contributions of Black musicians are granted what they deserve in the opera house, on the college campus, and in the supper club. Because Afro-Americans have not withdrawn support for their musicians (including the range from Blind Lemon Jefferson to Paul Freeman, to the extent they are aware of these contrasts), the public and college librarian is pressed to provide the historical perspective which this rich and varied history requires. To this end, the following bibliographic survey is offered.

Each title cited has been examined from within the Black Music Collection of the Indiana University Music Library, one of the most extensive collections in any public institution, and one which is ready to satisfy interlibrary loan requests. This selection is not the foundation
for a strong working collection, unless the titles are acquired and used, and unless patrons stimulate the purchase of other titles cited within these volumes and by their publishers. Information on additional materials will be cheerfully given, when available, from the offices of the Afro-American Music Opportunities Association (Box 662, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55440). This organization is compiling a comprehensive bibliography and union list of the entire field and is designed and staffed to provide detailed reference service to precollege students, graduate researchers, church musicians, orchestral conductors, and librarians.

NON-U.S. BLACK MUSIC

10. Elder, Jacob D. *Social Development of the Traditional Calypso of Trinidad and Tobago; From Congo Drum to Steel Band*. St.
Gaskin largely supersedes the following three and provides additional information. Varley covers the period to 1936, Merriam cares for 1936-50, while Thieme covers the years 1950-63. For a serious collection, all four titles will be important.

Merriam’s discography is evidence of first-rate professionalism and provides very detailed references to all aspects of the recordings. Within cultures so deeply oriented toward the oral tradition, these discs are primary documents, and Merriam treats them with great seriousness. Catalog of African Recordings . . . cites those recordings, commercial and instantaneous, held by one of the world’s largest collections of its kind.

One source which treats cultural continuity from Africa to the United States is the book by Oliver, who is a major authority on the blues, although by profession an English architect. Roberts, also British, is editor of the New York-based journal, Africa Today, and has issued several discs which illustrate his interest in acculturation. Black Music of Two Worlds describes the degree of cultural continuity from Africa to the United States and the southern Americas.

Blacking summarizes much of his previous research in Africa and his training in Europe, providing humanistic perspectives on the social roles of music.

Elder offers one of the few papers concerning the core musical styles of the Caribbean, issued shortly before Jamaican reggae began to move toward its current popularity.

THE SPIRITUAL


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The spiritual (earlier termed “religious folksong”) grew up in slavery and was, as Lovell points out, sometimes a kind of *musica reservata* for communication among the slaves. This author from Howard University is the outstanding specialist in this field—particularly with respect to the social relationships.

Marsh was not the first to compile spirituals (the Allen anthology of 1867 is included in *Black Cultural Leaders in Music*, cited below), nor was he the only one to deal with the Fisk University chorus. Other early examples of the music are in Barton, including jubilees (the post-slavery expressions of joy). Ballanta was a native of Sierra Leone who captured versions of the songs tenaciously retained in this coastal area. After Fisk, the major site for continuing the tradition was Hampton, particularly under the guidance of Dett, and this anthology had already undergone editions in 1874, 1891, and 1909 before Dett’s work. The tradition at Fisk was continued and enriched by the efforts of Work, and his publication also provides important data on this history of the spiritual in the opening pages. Johnson was yet another major figure in Black music documentation.

What might appear to be missing here is homage to the work of Frederick Hall, Jester Hairston, Hall Johnson, and Harry Burleigh, but such lacunae are cared for in Lovell’s study.

MINSTRELSY


Simultaneous with the evolution of the spiritual were the caricatures of the Black man through minstrelsy by the Anglo-American (aided by a few Blacks later on, who had no other outlet for their theatrical talents). This was an odious and offensive era in American music, but it is part of the history, and one can as easily find satires of the Irish and Germans in this literature. One also finds a few Black gems, such as the music of James Bland.
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GENERAL AFRO-AMERICAN MUSIC HISTORY


Within this category are particular riches and many surprises, few of which have found their way into more traditionally oriented studies. A great deal on music and peripheral areas are found in Cunard and
Brown, particularly as aftermaths of the almost abortive Black Renaissance. Black Music in Our Culture is an exploration of many areas by a wide range of specialists, and contains appendices that have proven to be of immediate (if not temporal) value to teachers, performers, and researchers, while substantive matters and firm stands are revealed in Reflections on Afro-American Music.

The most scholarly journal in the area of general Black music is The Black Perspective in Music which contains articles as well as other documentation central to the topic. The AAMOA Reports convey news of immediate interest, intentionally avoiding any duplication of the function served by the former journal. AAMOA Research Papers consist of monographs designed to assist research, teaching, or performance, and are primarily a reference source. Ethnomusicology is not totally dedicated to Black music, but its services in this area are too important to ignore, even in this brief survey of the literature.

Southern's book has no competition yet, either as a text or reference book. Goines's book has not been issued at this writing, but his research and other publications promise important results. Southern's anthology brings together items otherwise difficult to locate which appeared between 1623 and 1969. Trotter may have been the first to give serious attention to any form of American music, and his book shows the dignity of a tradition that was already well-established soon after the Civil War. Katz's book is akin to Southern's but is not a duplication and both are important. Walton's sociological survey joins sociology, history and aesthetics with documentation and a minimum of rhetoric.

JAZZ, BLUES AND RAGTIME

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No idiom is more important to American music than jazz, certainly not in Black society. Schuller is essential, and one should be ready for the following volumes as they are issued. Stearns is the standard source, and is both popular and provocative. Hodier provides the European perspective.

Topical areas follow (4-11), with Kimball's work worthy of special mention because of its physical presentation and its subject (Sissle and Blake are alive and revived at this time, offering fin-de-siècle Black music as they did sixty and seventy years ago). More specific coverage is offered by 12-17, including Schiffman's history of the most important Black theater in music, the one autobiography included here (15, with apologies to Louis Armstrong), and the major anthology of the militant and gifted LeRoi Jones.
Only three periodicals in jazz are cited (a full list is found in the AAMOA Resource Paper, no. 4). The first (18) is partially in English; Down Beat is the patriarch of its field, with England’s Jazz Journal not too far behind. Additional sources for bibliography are given by 21-24, the first three of which are not in competition. Kennington is more annotation than citation.

Two miscellanies are offered by 25 and 26. The former, based on a 1962 dissertation from New York University, is a valuable reference, and Langridge should be of particular interest to librarians because of its consideration of classification.

Major discographies complete this section (27-34), all of which should be acquired, with Henderson equally recommended as an incisive and significant supplement.

GOSPEL, RHYTHM AND BLUES, AND SOUL MUSIC


Gospel music was an outgrowth of the blues, starting near the end of the first third of the twentieth century. With the blues, gospel music exhibits an intense personal expression and the text is sometimes merely changed from the secular to the sacred, leaving the music alone. Rhythm and blues is the Black counterpart and major progenitor of white rock. In its later evolution, rhythm and blues has been termed soul. In any event, it is stylistically akin to gospel music (although the texts are not religious) and to blues. The first three titles trace this history and identify the major performers. Morse discusses the Detroit record company and its artists. Dixon’s discography cares for the classic period of his subject.
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**DANCE**


Dance is recognized as one of many elements within Black culture which must be considered as part of its fabric (actually, we should expand the subject range to include folklore, religion, sociology, anthropology and other disciplines, but the titles recommended will stimulate this latitude). The first two titles are historical considerations. *Feet* is the only journal of a Black dance group in the United States.

**PRINTED MUSIC**


Educators will find 5 and 6 of value in precollege teaching, while the remainder should prove of interest to the general music-reading public. The Joplin collection is almost a *Gesamtausgabe*, including his piano works and the piano-vocal score of his opera *Treemonisha*.
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Charters reprints popular tunes from the turn of the century, while Brewer exemplifies Huddie Ledbetter's stories with a variety of unaccompanied repertoire. The Dett anthology consists of his piano suites, long out of print. Civil rights are documented by the many tunes in Carawan, and the Brown and King books should prove to be great fun for their fans. Clark offers a rare collection of earlier songs by classic figures which should be known by more Black singers.

EDUCATION


Each of these has more information than the titles suggest. Butcher includes important articles on both African and Afro-American music. Standifer is a valuable reference which also offers new teaching techniques. The third title does not neglect music, and is particularly imaginative.

MIXED MEDIA

Black Music: A Bibliographic Essay


*Master Drums of Ghana* was developed by such specialists as Mantle Hood and J.H. Kwabena Nketia, and includes consideration of construction and performance. *Black Cultural Leaders* is a goldmine of microfilmed source materials, many of which are otherwise very difficult to locate (even in reprints). Kits 3 and 4 involve Billy Taylor, first on the history and second on the appreciation (assisted by Bob Cranshaw and Bobby Thomas). Fox is historical, and the last item surveys the material from slavery to the civil rights movement. Booklets for all provide transcripts of the recorded narration.

**CONCERT MUSIC ON RECORD AND IN PUBLICATION**


8. ———. *The Ordering of Moses.* Silver Crest TAL-42868 (Jeanette Walters, soprano; Carol Brice, contralto; John Miles, tenor; John Work, baritone; Mobile Symphony Orchestra; Talladega College Choir; William L. Dawson, conductor). New York, J. Fischer & Bro., 1937.

9. Kay, Ulysses Simpson. *Choral Triptych.* Cambridge CRM-416 (King's Chapel Choir; Cambridge Festival Strings; Daniel


21. Walker, George. Address for Orchestra: Passacaglia. Desto DC-7107 (Oakland Youth Orchestra; Robert Hughes,
The "art" music of every culture is based on the music of its people, to a greater degree than is normally considered. Too often, educational institutions (perhaps including libraries) attempt to portray folk art as a primitive foundation on which things of real substance are based. T. J. Anderson's reaction to this attitude in Reflections on Afro-American Music follows: "when you define art as being symphonies and ballets, you miss the boat. So-called primitive people have been dancing for years, and that's art. Black women have been singing over washtubs, and that's art. When you say that a string quartet is the ultimate in terms of sophistication, I say that's bunk." It is central to the question that we have significant holdings in all aspects and idioms of Black folk art, but the picture is incomplete if we do not let our patrons know circumstances have permitted and stimulated certain talents to express themselves in other styles, and it will be seen by most of the works cited above that the composer brings with him elements of that vocabulary he learned as a jazz musician, as a youthful member of a storefront congregation, as the grandchild of singing laborers.

The first work cited is that of Anderson, and it may pose challenges to those new to this style to relate his music to his words, but it can be done—certainly with reference to his published comments that appear within items listed previously. Anderson is now head of the music department at Tufts University. Coleridge-Taylor was active in Victorian England and his father came from Sierra Leone, while Roque Cordero is Panamanian and da Costa is pure African. Dawson and Dett are two major figures from their generation. Kay has been an established composer for several decades. Perry is only one of many Black women in music, but is the unique example offered in this list, which is limited to those composers whose most outstanding works appear on currently available discs and are also published. Roldán's brief life was filled with various roles in Cuban music. Saint-Georges was a fascinating person in eighteenth century France and his music is of charm and historical importance. Smith is celebrated in various areas of musical activity, while Still is termed the "Dean" of Afro-American composers with filial respect. Swanson's repute
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originated with support from Mitropoulos in the early 1950s, and Walker (Rutgers) is a man of exceptional talents.

The scores indicated may be of use to the professional musician, but this brief sampling of recorded concert music will prove an exciting terra incognita to all library patrons.

Reference