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Documenting Black Sacred Music and History

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HARVEST TIME 2009

- 1. Were You There?**
Traditional Spiritual
Drene Ivy, Piano
- 2. Awesome God**
Drene Ivy
Irma J. Williams, Alto Soloist
- 3. Every Day Is Thanksgiving**
Leonard G. Burks
- 4. Spirit of God**
Leonard G. Burks
Kennedy Jones, Tenor Soloist
- 5. I Love You So Much**
Beverly J. Brown
Latitia Rice, Alto Soloist
- 6. Give and It Shall Be Given Unto You**
Brenda E. Johnson
Aretha Tucker, Alto Soloist
- 7. The Lord Is My Shepherd**
Brenda E. Johnson
Jean Edwards, Soprano Soloist
- 8. They That Wait On the Lord**
Nathaniel Williams, Jr.
Lisa Williams, Alto Soloist
- 9. I Can't Thank Him Enough**
Brenda E. Johnson
Aretha Tucker, Alto Soloist
Rashawn Mathews, Tenor Soloist
- 10. Praise Give to God**
(All His People Come Bless His Name)
Nathaniel Williams, Jr.




SPIRITUAL GIFTS

For more information on works by the 2009 Harvest Time Composers, RASHAD, and Spiritual Gifts, please contact:
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**FEATURING
THE NEW SPIRITUAL GIFTS
WORKSHOP CHOIR**



Recorded Live at the Morning Star Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio

“Spiritual Gifts:
Live in Cleveland”
RASHAD, 2009
and
“Harvest Time: Featuring
the New Spiritual Gifts
Workshop Choir”
RASHAD, 2009

CD Reviews and Commentary

Documenting Black Sacred Music and History

by Regennia N. Williams

African American sacred music encompasses everything from 19th-century concert spirituals to latter day praise and worship songs. Even those with no formal ties to the church or the conservatory are familiar with canonical works, such as Harry T. Burleigh's "Deep River" and Mahalia Jackson's "Move On Up a Little Higher."

To their credit, Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, Jessye Norman, Moses Hogan and other performing artists did much in the 20th century to raise awareness about the significance of African American Spirituals. Due, in part, to their pioneering efforts to include Spirituals in their concert repertoire, concert arrangements of Spirituals are taught and performed in church and academic settings on a regular basis. When it comes to Gospel and other styles of African American sacred music, however, choir lofts

and vocal studios are often transformed into contested terrains. Music readers and those who rely exclusively or mainly upon oral traditions (rote methods) while studying music are often on opposite sides of arguments about "proper" vocal technique, performance style, and other matters.

In 2009, RASHAD partnered with singers, instrumentalists, and others in Greater Cleveland to produce two concerts and related audio recordings: "Spiritual Gifts: Live in Cleveland" and "Harvest Time: Featuring the New Spiritual Gifts Workshop Choir." Both collections were designed for use with RASHAD's growing collection of on-line curriculum materials in the "Praying Grounds" / Cleveland Memory Digital Archive.

"Live in Cleveland," for example, includes four *a capella* arrangements for mixed chorus (SATB): "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Joy Like a River,"

“This Train Is Bound for Glory,” and “Way Over in Gloryland.” With the exception of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” all songs are presented in the choral style akin to that pioneered by Jester Hairston and R. Nathaniel Dett, two of the most celebrated arrangers of African American concert spirituals. David M. Thomas, music director for the April 26, 2009 concert and arranger for “Joy Like a River” and “This Train Is Bound for Glory,” is also featured in a companion “Spiritual Gifts” video segment, which is available on-line at www.ClevelandMemory.org/pray. Spiritual Gifts, a community-based professional Black sacred music repertory ensemble, performed all songs, and their educational cd is available in libraries.

The “Harvest Time” concert and live recording features a 32-member workshop choir performing ten songs by five Cleveland-based composers. Planned as the first in a series of themed annual workshops, the 2009 project featured works by Beverly J. Brown, Leonard Burks, Drene Ivey, Brenda Johnson, and Nathaniel Williams, Jr. The Spiritual Gifts workshops and Harvest Time concerts offer opportunities for individuals to study and perform African American sacred music while promoting entrepreneurship and economic development. The 2009 demo CD contains approximately 30 minutes of music. In preparing the master, co-editors selected entire songs or excerpts from songs that would illustrate the following aspects of African American sacred music:

Instrumental Interpretation of a Spiritual

“Were You There?”
Drene Ivy, Piano

Antiphonal Congregational Song

“Awesome God”
Irma Williams, Alto Soloist

Vocal Solos

“Spirit of God”
Kennedy Jones, Tenor Soloist

“The Lord is My Shepherd”
Jean Edwards, Soprano Soloist

“They That Wait on the Lord”
Lisa Williams, Alto Soloist

Musical Settings of Passages of Scriptures

“Give and It Shall Be Given Unto You”

“The Lord Is My Shepherd”

“They That Wait on the Lord”

Praise and Worship Songs

“I Can’t Thank Him Enough”

“Praise Give to God”

Four Cleveland State University alums, all of whom either participated in workshop activities or served in an advisory capacity, agreed to contribute lesson plans for a companion On-Line Educator’s Guide. The Guide will be available in the spring of 2009 at www.ClevelandMemory.org/pray.

In presenting the workshop and the October 24, 2009 concert and live recording, RASHAD succeeded on many levels. Singers auditioned and paid for the workshop, which included six two-hour rehearsals, registration materials, sheet music, rehearsal tapes, CDs, and MP3 files, opportunities to work with five professional composers and recording artists, professional photographs, and copies of the demo CD for their portfolios. The composers, for their part, were able to observe each other in action while working with a group of highly-motivated singers—of diverse backgrounds and skill levels—in both campus and community settings. Audience participation is clearly evident on the recording, something that could not be achieved in a studio recording.

Live recordings of African American sacred music, especially Gospel, also provide numerous opportunities for oral historians to document other sounds associated with African American Christian worship and concert experiences. The sound of the singers' footsteps as they take their places on the stage, the affirming shouts of "amen" and "hallelujah" from audience members, the preacher-composer's reading of the passage of scripture that he set to music, clapping hands at points where uninitiated listeners might not expect to hear them. These sounds, when accompanied by heartfelt singing, make for a dynamic performance.

On commercial recordings, the aforementioned sounds might be dismissed as background noise. For students of ethnomusicology, however, these

verbal and non-verbal responses help provide the cultural context for the music. Together, the CD and the Online Educator's Guide have the potential to serve as useful instructional materials for classroom teachers. ❖

