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Songs of the Sage

Pensée de la semaine

*La RD Congo ressemble à
un grand piano
qui n'a besoin que d'un bon
pianiste
et d'une simple partition.*

*Elle ne ressemble pas à un
petit tambour
que tout le monde croit pou-
voir jouer
pour faire danser tout le
monde.*

Thought of the week

*The Congo (DRC)
Is like a piano
It needs a good player,
A simple composition*

*Not the little drum
That everyone thinks
They can play
A make-believe
Master-drummer
Conjuring the people
To dance*

*- Ambroise KUA-NZAMBI TOKO
(Congo DR)*

*To use poems from this column call 314-289-
4052 or send email to: voam@afriarts.org*



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In Dialogue...

In this issue, we visit the lingering and often sensitive debate on the body of works originally known as *Negro Spirituals*. The names of the contributors have been omitted to ensure privacy and anonymity. To these commentaries we have posted our opinion and thoughts on the subject. As usual, we welcome our readers to enrich the dialogue by sending us your emails and letters. Of course, for lack of space, only a few commentaries can be printed.

In reading the Sarah Bryan Miller's review in the St Louis Post-Dispatch, I observed that Ms. Hudson [soprano Marliisa Hudson] performed some "jazzy" spiritual arrangements by Mark Hayes, and I find that troubling.

The Negro spiritual is definitely not material for jazz arrangements, and any reputable black composer would have known and resisted that genre for presentation of music that came from the souls of enslaved and tortured Blacks; music born out of pain and agony endured by African slaves in a foreign land. We, as black performers should know to do likewise.

I wonder if Mark Hayes has made jazzy arrangements of traditional hymns of the Christian Church, or the National Anthem, or "America," "America the Beautiful" or "God Bless America," or Jewish liturgical or Greek Orthodox music? If we, as black musicians, don't preserve and respect the sanctity of our own music, how can we expect others to do so?

Black composers and arrangers of spirituals are many. Some

references are:

**Kenneth Brown Billups
Betty Jackson King
Lena McLin
David Morrow
Roland Carter
Uzee Brown
Robert L. Morris
Margaret Bonds
Florence B. Price
Adolphus Hailstork
Robert Ray
Wallace Cheatham
Brazeal Dennard
Don Lee White
Jacqueline Hairston
Wendell Whalum
Harry T. Burleigh
Edward Boatner
Hall Johnson
Rollo Dilworth
Moses Hogan**

and the list goes on and on and on.

Most respectfully yours,

Thank you so very much for your email. The phrase "jazzy arrangements" used by the St Louis Post-Dispatched reviewer is perhaps not one we would have used to described Mark Hayes' works on Marliisa Hudson's CD. We know the composer's work well enough to appreciate his forte creatively using contemporary harmonic language that's often leaned toward Gospel or Rag or Jazz, and indeed other genres in which he's become proficient.

Moses Hogan was known to often touch on musical trends and the creative freedom that art lends itself to. Before he compiled his collection, *Oxford Book of Spirituals*, with Oxford University Press, Moses was known to bare his opinions on existing arrangements of the Spirituals by some of the black composers on your

list, including "outsiders" like Fela Sowande and Mark Hayes.

What Mark Hayes has done, panning to a differing creative language for his Spiritual arrangements, is not unlike the works of Moses Hogan in his *Oxford Book of Spirituals*, or Wallace Cheatham in his *Three Preludes*, Lucius Weathersby in his "*Spiritual Fantasy*" or other reputable arrangers, including the "Dean of African-American Music," William Grant Still. One thing was always clear from those who chatted regularly with the late Moses Hogan, or the late Lucius Weathersby: that composers, regardless of ethnicity or racial background should be applauded for expressing artistic freedom.

And, yes: to your question if Mark Hayes used Jazz harmonic lingua for familiar hymns of the Christian Church - he has several hymn arrangements to his credit, some of which have become staples in church music repertoire.

We believe that in a world that seems to shrink so exponentially, that composers and artists help advance our common humanity by showing individuality and a freedom of expression that is genuine. To limit the creativity of any composer to any particular genre, because of the color of his or her skin or ethnic background to us is akin to creative stasis - or perhaps artistic annihilation." We African-Americans do not do our race any good service by limiting ourselves or musically inclined children to one style of artistic expression. The collorary argument is also true - and the focus of our advocacy work with established orchestras and chamber music groups across America and the globe - that African-American composers and other non-European descent composers show creative freedom in new intercultural modes of artistic expression. And that the white - dominated concert hall administrators and music institutions extend greater latitude to more non-European

descent composers. This helps to enrich existing repertoire, attract new audiences and ultimately celebrates our common humanity. It is also our opinion that we indeed do our African-American race, and "emergent African-American race" (to use a phrase used by Washington Post editor Gene Robinson during a recent talk in St Louis) proud by teaching and applauding creative courage.

Again, thank you for your thoughtful email. We look forward to more exchange of ideas that leaven the subject of black music education and discourse.

Very sincerely,

Thank you for your reply to the concern about "jazzing" up spirituals.

I, too, was well acquainted with Moses Hogan and his oeuvre. In fact, I have both volumes of his choral compositions. While his composition style is quite "ornately modern," it borders nowhere along the lines of jazz. Moses, as a member of NANM, considered the spiritual as a sacred art form that was not to be translated into the jazz idiom. Some of us adore Fela Sowande's organ works (especially *Ka' Mura* which he wrote for his mother), as did his best friend, Herman D. Taylor, the late Lucius Weatherby's organ teacher at Dillard University. Dr. Taylor, too, would definitely frown on transcribing Negro Spirituals into the jazz idiom. And no [clear-thinking African-American composer] would dare think of jazzing up *Ka' Mura* or any composition by another artist for creative expression. It would do disrespect to the integrity of the piece.

The pain and suffering of a people does not translate into jazz though 'blue' notes are traditionally incorporated into express-

ing the message given by the Spirituals. Every composer is free to create in the manner that best expresses himself/herself and his/her creativity is not limited to any particular genre. That, however, does not allow one to take compositions of others (known or unknown) and assign them to categories not intended by the original composer. And yes, I deplore "Too Hot to Handel," the jazz Messiah. But we should be able to agree to disagree in friendship.

Sincerely,

Yes, we should agree to disagree in friendship. As a mission, the African Musical Arts organization works to advance African-descent composers. But in principle, we are leery of a world of absolutes. For example, we would agree and be supportive that the Yoruba tune *Ka'a Mura* should be malleable to any harmonic medium.

Naturally, we too adore Fela Sowande, and perhaps have acquired much of his known compositions. But the truth is that Sowande was and still is widely criticized by some of our preeminent African music scholars for his treatment of some Yoruba revered melodies. As was Bartok, or Kabalevsky. As was the conservative Mussorgsky who frowned endlessly on what he considered "too liberal" Tchaikovsky, etc. (Ironically, it took other musical "liberals," Rimsky Korsakov and Maurice Ravel to revive much of Mussorgsky's legacy). So, we dare expound that the geniuses of our time are those who excel at prevailing canon as well as dare further to stretch contemporary thought. Such should be the organic nature and metaphysics of creative art.

Yes, "Jazz Messiah" has its place and ought not be deplorable. Perhaps

the larger issue we might dare explore in the future is what the term "Jazz" has evolved into - what are its varying forms; the now widely diversified schools of thought here in the United States and around Europe. There indeed is a distinction between a musician who "jazzes up" a tune and a composer who lays out and conforms to a proscribed scalar, harmonic parameter, or one who capriciously develops a musical idea. The great Duke Ellington was able to do both, though in his lifetime hardly accorded due credit for his work in the latter genre.

In our opinion, larger thought is whether a composer simply arranges or writes for fun or God-forbid, pun, or that we instead challenge ourselves to create art that future generations can appreciate and hopefully study. No promoter of any merit should produce a composer if his/her work does not show creative depth or sensitivity. Mark Hayes' Spiritual arrangements have tremendous merit and depth, comparable to Moses Hogan, William Dawson or Wallace Cheatham or other notable arrangers of the Spirituals. That he is white should be no excuse for his censure or for us to malign him. Hopeless as the prevailing evidence may suggest with the continued marginalization of non-European-descent composers, it remains our hope that no arts organization engage in any kind of racially or ethnically-based discrimination - especially not in the arts. We agree that this is a subject that should be proposed for a future conference to elicit these varying ideas and viewpoints.

Again, yes, we should agree to disagree in friendship.

Very sincerely,
Editor, VOAM

2011 Togo International Choral Competition & Music Festival

In a very short span Jean Dogbe transformed from a choral music enthusiast into a visible force for the choral music community in the greater Lome region of Togo, and in the process found himself a catalyst for cultural tourism in his native country. Sure, like his beloved country Togo that the larger world hardly knows much about, Jean's visibility was happenstance. He started out with that insatiable aptitude for singing innate among his peers. And like many of his contemporaries, he was self-thought in choral conducting and basic music theory. But what Jean lacks in music training he amply makes up well with a deft acuity in motivating and managing people.

The inaugural Festival International de Chant Choral de la Fraternite de Lome (FICCFLO) was held 2007, and attracted mostly local choirs from around Togo. The



Jean Lolonyo Dogbe, FICCFLO Founder, Festival Director, at the Opening Ceremony in Lome, Togo

put his country on some kind of cultural destination map internationally.

Back in 2006 he had made the acquaintance of friends in Ghana who had mentioned a US organization, African Musical Arts and its mission to promote African-decent composers. When he heard the organization's founder Fred Onovwerosuoke was visiting Ghana, Jean and his two associates set out from Lome by road to Accra, Ghana to meet and introduce themselves.

Shortly afterwards, Jean was invited to the United States for mentorship by the African Musical Arts of St Louis and to learn skills requisite for effective arts management. On that first US trip he traveled 18 states by road with African Musical Arts directors, observing music workshops, attending concerts and helping to coordinate an ongoing tour of a visiting African choir. By the time he returned to Togo, Jean was ready with a formula to plan his bigger FICCFLO yet.

"The original goal," Jean says, "remains the promotion of choral music, but my visit and what I learned in the United States showed me other areas of music - like the

African-influenced instrumental compositions - that my country and indeed all of Africa should also be advancing." Through the help of the African Musical Arts organization, he engaged Philip Brunelle, the legendary founder of VocalEssence of Minneapolis, violinist and orchestra studies professor Jean

Rudy Perrault from the University of Minnesota-Duluth, flutist Wendy Hymes from St Louis, Italian pianist Silvia Belfiore and, of course, his friend and mentor Fred Onovwerosuoke from St Louis. To this roster, he invited his usual staple of French professionals - Jean Marie Pacquetteau and Christian Pariot, and his handful of Togolese compatriots and other choral practitioners from Gabon, Congo, Senegal, Ivory Coast and Burundi - to spearhead the 2011 edition of the festival.

Participants attended FICCFLO 2011 from Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Congo DRC, Congo Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), France, Morocco, Ghana, Nigeria, Italy, Senegal, South Africa, and the United States. All in all, 31 choirs, over 500 singers participated in the four-day choral and music showcase and competition, performing for thousands of admiring audiences that attended from near and far. Barring a few, negligibly tardy corporations who could not fulfill their financial pledges, local support was overall impressive.

FICCFLO 2011 was the largest interna-



Jean Dogbe (seated left) and some of his international guests pay courtesy call on the veteran Togolese Minister, Elom Dadzie (standing in the middle, in blue shirt) at his home. Below: Les Messagers from Benin Republic at one of many choral showcases



second edition in 2009 attracted a few more choirs. In fact FICCFLO 2009 was a major step up, with singers and choral directors attending from neighboring Ivory Coast, Benin Republic, Ghana and even from France. But Jean's passion and vision aimed for something bigger, huge enough to help



Italian pianist Silvia Belfiore prepares for a concert. Below: Conducting workshop on piano techniques



tional gathering of that scope in West Africa. But more than that, the gathering was major triumph for Jean Dogbe and his native country of Togo. Together, they proved that Togo though small in size and lacking in resources can rally her citizenry to host the world on a grand scale.

Synergies, New Horizons



Angelics Voices from Winneba, Ghana, won 1st Prize in the Classical Music Division. Below: ChoeurQuibat from France, in concert.



VocoPro from Senegal wowed audiences with their stylistic blend of America's Take 6 and South Africa's Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Below: Divine Providence from Cote d'Ivoire who clinched 1st Prize in the Traditional African Music Division.



American flutist Wendy Hymes poses with flute students Djedji Metuschael, Amani Sylvain from Ivory Coast and John Gueli from Togo. Below: Workshop session with Djedji and Amani.



University of Minnesota-Duluth music professor Jean Rudy Perrault, African Musical Arts founder Fred Onovwerosuoke and VocalEssence of Minneapolis founder Philip Brunelle who lectured and played key roles. Below: Workshop session with singers.



2011 Goodwill Africa Tour: Sights and lasting memories...



Counter clockwise from top: At a stall honing bargaining skills, the blissfully vast beachfront in greater Accra (Ghana), chanting with the women awaiting fishing boats in Lome (Togo), with children at a village near Winneba (Ghana), the fabric shop owner in Lome (Togo).



2011 Goodwill Africa Tour: Sights and lasting memories...



Clockwise from top: Kente looms in Bonwire, Kumassi (Ghana), artisans and their crafts in Lome (Togo), musical chairs in Lome, balancing acts in Cape Coast (Ghana), refreshment with artistically presented pineapple in Togo.

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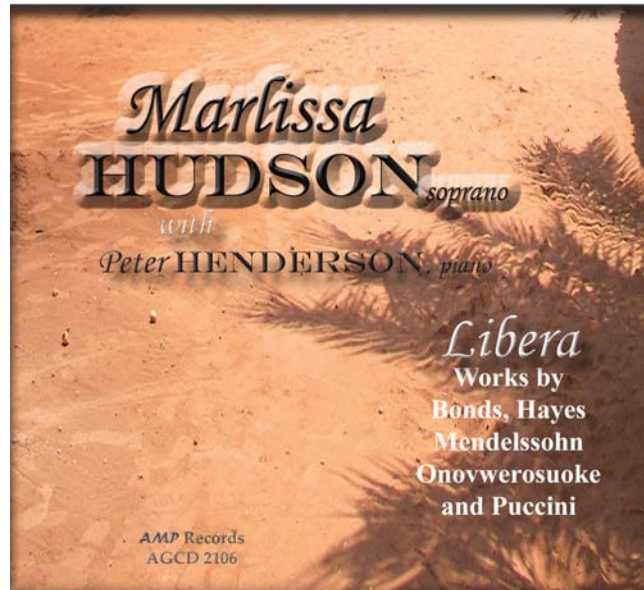
to foster a better understanding of Africa's rich cultural heritage through music and other art forms.

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to develop, produce, and present choral performances in original African languages.

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deserves great art.*

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