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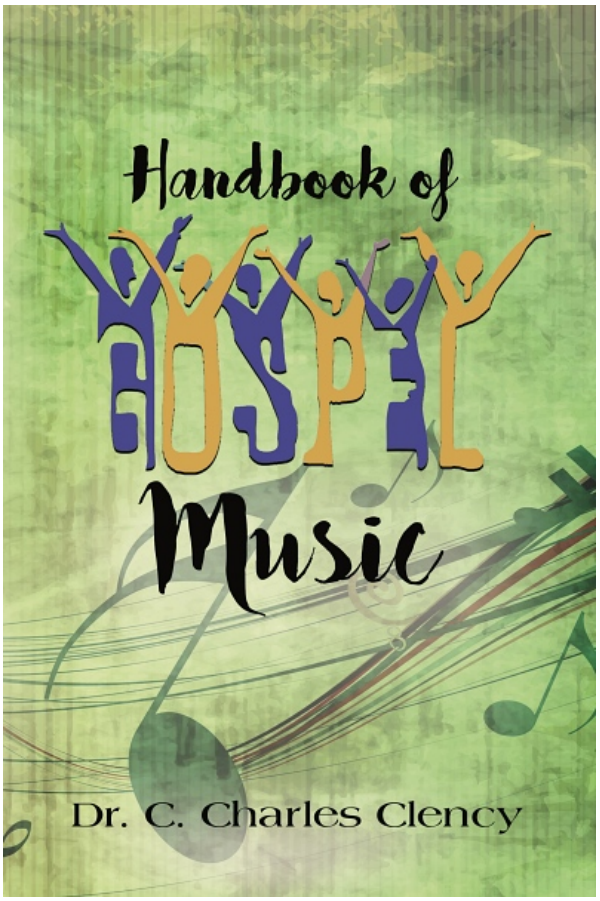

This Handbook traces the evolution of gospel music and related economic factors. Included are persons with notable contributions to the art form. Strategies are given that may help the success of aspiring directors and instrumentalists.

Handbook of Gospel Music

By Dr. C. Charles Clency

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Dr. C. Charles Clency

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Chapter IV
GOSPEL MUSIC SYNOPSIS

Black Gospel Music evolved from the Black slavery experience as West African rhythms were fused with early European protestant hymns. This fusion brought life to a style of religious music that became a thriving force in American culture. The Harvard Dictionary of Music defines the genre, thusly: "Gospel music is Black American Protestant sacred singing, an associated 20th century sacred genre or gospel song." The dictionary states further that, "The genre expresses personal or a communal belief regarding Christian life. Its roots can be traced to Biblical references and through the study of American rural folk music traditions of the early 17th century."

Such definition suggests that the term 'gospel music' is Christian music of which there are several sub-genres: Bluegrass, White Gospel, Southern Gospel, Progressive Gospel, Christian Country, Celtic Gospel, British Black gospel, and African American gospel. Gospel music therefore varies according to culture and social context. Horace Boyer writes, "White gospel music is a southern sub-genre that borrows from Bluegrass and country music. Much of white gospel is distinguished by close harmony, faster tempos, and intricate instrumental work from the accompaniment of steel and rhythm guitars."

Marovich writes, "Gospel music is an artistic response to the Great Migration, one of the most significant cultural episodes in twentieth century American history. In academic terms, gospel music refers to both a performance aesthetic and a type of sacred song composition."

Bernice Reagon states: "In African American communities, gospel music remains a way of developing and asserting a sense of individual and group identity, of finding one's own individual and collective voice in one's own time and speaking through one's heart and soul for all to hear."

Maurice McGehee former Chicago educator and church musician, describes gospel singing as a 'cry of the spirit.' In a 1983 interview with Bette Cox Yarborough, McGehee stated that the gospel song is 'America's only pure musical form and has now gained worldwide acceptance.'

The following comments may provide clarity to the subject. Since the 1980s, there has been considerable discussion about the definition of gospel music and its comparison to the Blues. Both forms benefit from a delivery of passion, vocal power, improvisation, rhythm, emotion, energy, excitement, spirit, and authenticity. Although both forms share these features, the Blues (termed the 'devil's music' by some) emphasize pain, loss, depression, despondency, and hardship. Qualities of gospel music emphasize celebration, joy, and salvation in God through Jesus Christ.

Thomas A. Dorsey in the 1930s and 1940s took the qualities of the Blues form and inserted them into compositions and used religious lyrics. This was the beginning of African American Gospel music.

Author Steve Turner writes, "Gospel music came into being as a vehicle for instruction, praise, and communal worship. Its intent was to facilitate devotion and spiritual growth. Originally, there was no thought of evangelizing, cajoling or persuading, and not of making money."

These definitions reinforce that the gospel music art form is perpetuated by faith, joy, passion, and the excitement of its culture. It also reinforces that Black gospel music was created by Black people

for Black people. Since its inception in America, this music has inspired the genres of blues, spirituals, hymns, country and western, rhythm and blues, hip-hop, and soul music.

Though perhaps the least known and appreciated of the roots of American music, gospel music is marketed today as 'urban contemporary gospel' to distinguish it from the other forms of Christian music.

African and European Sensibilities

Most musicologists believe that a historical complex intermingling of African and white culture's folk-like music elements occurred in early history. In the words of Bernice Reagon, "The foundations of gospel music can be traced back to the nineteenth-century plantation slave community, whose culture was African in structure and process – the way and the why things were done – but whose ingredients were a blend with European expressions that were cauterized (ingrained) by the slave experience in the New World."

African Americans, during southern slavery, were exposed to white religious services. Some absorbed the staid, quiet, and reserved character of the white churches. After migration, they sought this style of African American church in the north. Many, in an effort to be 'accepted and approved by White standards,' preferred a repertory of European anthems and hymns, and little or no gospel music.

Historical Factors

Gospel Songs: A Choice Collection of Hymns

In 1874, Philip Bliss published Gospel Songs: A Choice Collection of Hymns and Tunes. It was probably the first published use of the term 'Gospel Song' in a title. The publication consisted of a new style of church music, songs that were easy to grasp and easier to sing than the traditional hymns of the earlier *Great Awakening* revivals. These included active memorable melodies and little ditties

with interesting rhythms and upbeat tempo. African slaves and their descendants found this music appealing. The structure was similar to folk songs, simple, repetitive, and comprised verse and refrain. The hymns were evangelistic and the forerunners of African American gospel music.

Other White composers of evangelistic songs included the earlier-mentioned George F. Root, William Doane, Charles Gabriel, E.O. Excell, and Fannie Crosby, whose compositional output was over 9,000 songs. The music of these composers, fused with slave songs and spirituals, was sung during religious camp meetings. This music underwent unique stylistic treatment in the African American church and ultimately led to African American gospel music.

After the Civil War, some African American congregations preferred the slow meter hymns of Isaac Watts. Still, other Blacks embraced Methodism since white Methodists readily adopted some of the Black camp meeting songs and repetitive choruses. In such settings, both Black and White Methodists and Black Separatist services were musically 'tame' in comparison to the emerging Black Holiness and FourSquare churches.

In the 1992 edition of NAACP's *Crisis,* Dr. Wyatt Walker states, "The human spirit is a combination of passion and intellect. The frontier religion of early America and the 18th & 19th centuries were as vibrant and enthusiastic as is today's worship." Eventually, such enthusiasm and emotion were commonly associated with the style of upbeat rhythm of African-American holiness and evangelical churches.

The name, *Gospel music* is derived from its close association with the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books reference God's goodness and mercy, and the songs speak to the Christian faith and power of Jesus Christ as 'Savior.' Gospel music is therefore the 'good news' of Jesus as biblically referenced.

African-American Quartets

The first African-American gospel recording was by the Dinwiddle Colored Quartet from the John A. Dix Industrial School in

Virginia. Entitled *Gabriel's Trumpet,* it was a cappella and displayed call and response among other African and early gospel traits. Such traits paralleled those in the spiritual and foretold their prominence in gospel music, along with improvisation and syncopated rhythms.

Renowned for its vocal artistry is the Golden Gate Quartet. It was the first quartet to sing at the White House when they sang in 1940 for the inauguration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The quartet was acclaimed for its nationally syndicated CBS broadcast, which highlighted many popular pieces, including *Shadrack, Take Your Burdens to the Lord*, and *The Story of Jonah*.

Originally known as Jubilee groups, African American quartets are listed in chapter one. The singing began as entertainment, but later influenced gospel music in many churches. It was popular between 1920-1980 and is the musical foundation of many African American churches.

Gospel Groups

In 1940-2015, gospel groups included the Lux Singers, Ward Singers, Caravans, Davis Sisters, Maceo Woods Singers, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Robert Anderson Singers, James Cleveland Singers, Willie Webb Singers, Gospel Chimes, Sallie Martin Singers, Gospel Clefs, Loving Sisters, Williams Brothers, Gospel Songbirds, Brooklyn All-Stars, Canton Spirituals, Original Gospel Harmonettes, Meditation Singers, Raymond Rasberry Singers, Bradford Specials, Gospel Keynotes, Staple Singers, Argo Singers, Lockhart Singers, Gay Sisters, Kenneth Woods Singers, Voices Supreme, Edwin Hawkins Singers, Walter Hawkins Singers, Andrae Crouch Singers, Donald Lawrence Singers, Kurt Carr Singers, and Kirk Franklin .

Gospel Pearls

After Emancipation and Abolition, Black sacred music consisted of traditional hymns, evangelistic hymns, and spirituals. Many of the songs were printed in the 1921 *Gospel Pearls.* This was the first African American publication, not to be confused with the 1874

publication of Bliss' *Gospel Songs: A Choice Collection of Hymns and Tunes*.

An integral part of African American churches, the *Gospel Pearls* was a positive stabilizing force from 1921 in the African American religious community. It brought together in one publication the spiritual, traditional hymn, and evangelistic song. While music sung by quartets was not printed in the publication, quartets were a part of the musical energy of the Black church until the late 1960s.

The *Gospel Pearls* joined the tradition of Black gospel publishing, started by Charles A. Tindley and William Brewster. Later pioneers included Dorsey House of Music, Martin & Morris Publishers, Roberta Martin Studio of Music, Theodore Frye Publishers, and House of Bowles. Outside of Chicago were such representatives as the Johnnie Howard Franklin Music (St. Louis), Rodeheaver-Hall Mack (Indianapolis), Elma & Carl's (Detroit) and Battle & Odom Music (Washington, D.C.).

Holiness and Pentecostal Churches

The Pentecostal movement influenced a new gospel sound that was more suited to urban life. The sound emerged in the 'storefront' Holiness, Pentecostal, Baptist, and Methodist churches in Black neighborhoods. The structure of this music, combined with creative musicianship, resulted in a more emotional and spirit-filled musical expression. Horace Boyer references "the driving musical force developed in the new Holiness and Pentecostal congregations, especially the rapidly expanding Church of God in Christ (COGIC). This was the root of heightened energy in the twentieth-century gospel music performance style."

However, non-Pentecostal ministers and congregations, including Rev. Charles Tindley, presented music in the southern rural fashion for their congregations. This music was generally slower without the upbeat rhythmic flavor of the Pentecostal church. Still, the style was widely accepted by the slaves and their descendants. It evolved as the direct forerunner of gospel music and received unique treatment in the compositional style of Thomas Dorsey and others.

Rev. Charles A. Tindley

Rev. Charles A. Tindley, the first African American composer to write Black evangelistic songs, was born a slave in 1852. Tindley taught himself to read and founded the Tindley Methodist Church in Philadelphia. It was later called the East Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church.

Tindley was a prolific composer, and much of his music appears in the *Gospel Pearls.* Appealing because of its southern rural quality, Tindley's style was brought with the slaves during their migration from the south. The form evolved to Black gospel music.

Gospel music publishing houses followed as publishers were in the market for large quantities of new music. This market provided an outlet for the creative work of many songwriters and composers, including Thomas A. Dorsey.

Thomas A. Dorsey

Thomas A. Dorsey headed the composers of the next generation inspired by Tindley. His creativity and that of William H. Brewster significantly influenced the development of Black religious music. Dorsey, the primary pioneer of gospel music, was among the first African Americans to own a music publishing company. Although religiously converted in 1921 after hearing Tindley's evangelistic song, *I Do, Don't You,* Dorsey continued for several years a successful career in secular music before exclusively composing gospel music. The style is inherent today in all African American churches. More about Dorsey is discussed in later pages.

Choirs and Choruses

The presence of choirs in African American religious services became prominent in the north after 1900 in Methodist and Baptist churches. Attired in robes, choirs were assigned to render music in weekly services and were led by talented directors. In the south, choirs were formed later and followed the same procedure. The music

consisted of traditional hymns and Tindley's evangelistic songs from the *Great Awakening,* accompanied by piano.

The style typified Black church music for about 50 years. From 1875 to about 1925, music in the African American church, north and south, consisted of hymns, traditional and evangelistic, and spirituals. The music was sung by congregants and sometimes by choirs.

Larger churches in the north and south, especially Methodist and Baptist churches, later began emulating the practice of southern Black colleges. The churches sought trained leadership to help establish and direct choirs. Competent directors were secured who perpetuated the singing of traditional hymns and spirituals by the 'better' singers. In the north, this led to the label of Senior Choir.

The Senior Choir vs. The Gospel Chorus

The structure caused attitudes of bourgeois superiority that typified some ultra-sophisticated African-American pastors and congregations, especially in the north. The structure resulted in a dichotomy that caused 'mass and class' divisions in the country from 1920 to 1980.

Further impact was created by the presence of pipe organs. The organs had been left after white churches and synagogues sold the edifices to African-American congregations. The pipe organ was the perfect match for the music of Senior Choirs. Where there was no organ, the accompaniment was provided by piano.

Newly formed gospel choruses sang songs by Tindley, Campbell, and Dorsey while Senior Choirs continued singing cantatas, anthems, hymns, and often spirituals. The structure of the two adult choirs in African-American churches existed for the next fifty years.

Ebenezer Baptist Church

While the Ebenezer congregation and other large churches in the north were accustomed to hearing anthems and white- styled hymns, this had become staid music. It was a 'far cry' from the southern-styled soulful music of the common people and did not satisfy Ebenezer's new pastor, Rev. J. H. L. Smith. In support of his sermons,

the native of Alabama needed a choir to sing the rural-styled music of the masses, which included migrants.

This underscored the need for a type of choir at Ebenezer that would sing modern gospel music while maintaining the pioneer tradition of composers Charles Tindley and Lucie Campbell. The new style of Brewster and Dorsey met the challenge. Their gospel music represented a high level and reflected the styles of Tindley and Campbell, favorites of southern Blacks.

Dorsey in 1930 accepted Rev. Smith's request to organize America's first Gospel Chorus at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Dorsey, joined by Theodore Frye, started the first gospel choir in 1931. The new gospel chorus of 100 voices at Ebenezer, accompanied by piano, was assigned to sit up front directly behind Rev. Smith in place of the existing Senior Choir. This choir was moved to the balcony where it continued to sing European-style music and traditional hymns, accompanied by the pipe organ.

Thomas Dorsey at Pilgrim Baptist Church

Pilgrim's pastor, Rev. J.C. Austin, Sr., desired to emulate Ebenezer's musical decision. He enticed Dorsey, already a member of Pilgrim, to return and organize a gospel choir at the church. Dorsey returned without pay, and the results were glowing. Numbers swelled in the choir and congregation. For the next 53 years until the end of his life, Dorsey directed the Pilgrim Gospel Chorus.

Dorsey's creativity led to the composition of thousands of gospel songs. His longevity at the church was legendary. During his tenure, he merged sounds to create the new style of gospel music. Its themes were based on deliverance, instruction, heaven, and the sovereignty of Jesus.

Although Ebenezer Baptist Church is the birthplace of Black gospel music, Pilgrim Baptist Church is erroneously acknowledged because it is the church of Dorsey's longevity and productivity. Although gospel music was sung at some churches prior to 1930, the name Gospel Chorus did not exist until after gospel choruses were formed at Ebenezer and Pilgrim. Gospel Choruses then sprang up

across the city. This led to the 1933 formation of Dorsey's National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses.

In 1937 Frye went to work at Olivet Baptist Church, the leading Baptist Church in Chicago. Although involved in managing his own gospel music publishing company and serving as a music director at the National Baptist Convention, Frye enjoyed the same success in the formation of Olivet's first gospel chorus as did Dorsey at Pilgrim. Frye remained at Olivet until his death.

Ebenezer, Olivet, and Pilgrim were among the few larger churches to first feature Dorsey's upbeat rhythms, but with little handclapping. This became a common ingredient of gospel music by 1950. While the congregations of Ebenezer, Olivet and Pilgrim began to accept gospel music, the new style was not welcomed at most large churches. The rejection of gospel music was because of its similarity to blues and other pop styles. While some congregations were emotionally reserved, others were embarrassed. Most were not receptive to the growing trend of upbeat 'jazzy' music that had crept into gospel choruses.

Pastors and choir directors complained that the music had excessive vigor that might cause congregants to be rocked and swayed. Other ministers complained that the songs competed with their sermons. Some referred to the new style as the 'devil's music' and stated that the gospel was to be preached, not sung.

Despite such criticism, Dorsey persisted and was proclaimed the 'Father of Black Gospel Music' His music was better received in the smaller Baptist, Spiritualist, Holiness and Pentecostal 'store-front' churches. These congregations preferred greater emotion and lively rhythms. This led to a new sound of rhythm and greater improvisation.

Dorsey sought to disassociate from the unfortunate past of Black Americans and the distasteful nostalgia of the antebellum South. As the foremost gospel composer, Dorsey preferred to highlight the new sound of gospel music that was inspired by evangelistic songs, spirituals, and jubilees. He felt gospel music is the good news as inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The popularity of Dorsey's music spread across the country partly because of the talents of such artists as Sallie Martin and Mahalia Jackson. Their singing helped promote Dorsey's compositions. Through the business acumen and partnership of Martin, sales representative, the new style was heard by more of the churchgoing public. It was popularized by publishers and sold in gospel programs, churches, and conventions throughout the country.

In a 1975 interview with author Robert Taylor of *Genesis of Black Gospel Music*, Dorsey stated that he "took the trills, turns, movements, tempo, lilt, expression and feeling of the blues and matched them with different sentiments." "You use different words," he once said, "and then you take the blues moaning and what they call the low-down feeling tune and… shape them and put them up here and make them serve the other purpose, the religious purpose."

Chicago and Gospel Music

Dorsey was among thousands of Blacks in the Great Migration, during the first half of the 20th century, who made Chicago their new home. Key factors reinforcing the city's popularity as the capital of Black church music were its central location north of the slave states, economic possibilities, formation of gospel choruses, the organization of the 1933 National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, the popularity of small gospel groups, gospel programs, disk jockeys, recordings, and radio services. Radio churches and choirs are listed in the appendix.

After the Depression, Chicago experienced significant growth and, due to Dorsey's prolific writing, became known as the birthplace of gospel music. Its central location made Chicago the first and largest city to which descendants of former slaves migrated. Many saw the city as the Promised Land and felt that 'if one could make it to Chicago, he had it made.'

Chicago's reputation for music and religion was enhanced by the presence of leading large traditional churches. These included the city's first Black church, Quinn Chapel AME, Metropolitan Community Church, and Olivet, Ebenezer, and Pilgrim Baptist

Churches. Pilgrim hosted the newly formed National Baptist Convention in 1921, when Dorsey joined the church.

Other Chicago churches contributing to the city's reputation as the mecca of African-American church music included the congregations of Progressive Community Church, West Point, Antioch, Berean, Liberty, South Shore, Morning Star, Mozart, and Original Providence Baptist Churches. Churches, with pipe organs, included Greater Bethesda Baptist Church, Park Manor Congregational, Church of the Good Shepherd, St. Stephen AME, Blackwell Memorial AME Zion, Carter Temple CME, Metropolitan Baptist Church, Metropolitan Community Church, Monumental Baptist Church, St. Mark United Methodist and Hartzell United Methodist Church. At most of these churches, anthems, spirituals, and hymns were the musical fare of Senior Choirs.

Representative directors of Senior Choirs were J. Wesley Jones, James A. Mundy, Henry Fitzpatrick, Cora Winters, Talman Thomas, Eddie Davis, Hortense Love, Wiley C. Jackson, Omega King, Isaac Yarbrough, Mable Lewis, Lorenzo Stallings, Nathaniel Henderson, Betty Jackson King, Augustus Winkfield, Mattie Robertson, and George Gulatt. Most of the choirs were accompanied by pipe organists. Representative pipe organists were Catherine Adams, William Best, Marie Carey, Delores Chandler, Charles Kendricks, Florence Madison Stith, Herman Taylor and George Williams. Later pipe organists include William Berry, Mark Davis, Arthur Griffin, Keith Hampton, Sylvia HamYing, John Handy, Jacob Haywood, Rufus Hill, and Franz Tyson.

Representative pipe organists outside of Chicago included James Abbington of Detroit, Patrick Alston of Baltimore, Roy Belfield of Virginia, Jon Berryman of New Haven, CN, Carl Brown of Norfolk, Leo Davis, Jr. of Memphis, Nathaniel Gumbs of New Haven, CN, Charles Jones of Miami, James Jones of Atlanta, Joyce Jones of Atlanta, Danny Kelley of Houston, Edna Porter of San Antonio, and Johnny Weeks of Boston.

Since 1980, the structure of Senior Choir and Gospel Chorus has practically disappeared. Churches average one adult choir that is expected to sing all types of religious music, but focusing on gospel

music, as based on the director's training. Factors for such changes include an increase in church broadcasting audiences and choirs, increased demands for gospel music, and costly repairs of pipe organs that have fallen into permanent disrepair. This has led to the presence of the Hammond organ and piano, instruments that are better suited to the rhythmic needs of Black church music. These instruments provide the traditional framework needed to accompany gospel music. Although a few pipe organists play gospel music, most are proficient as accompanists for Senior Choir anthems and hymns.

Other Choirs in the 1950s

The appeal of gospel music dramatically increased in America in the early 1950s largely as a result of popular recordings by the choirs of Greater Abyssinian Baptist Church of New Jersey, Church of Our Prayer of Detroit, First Church of Deliverance, Institutional Church of God in Christ of New York, Metropolitan Spiritual Church of Christ of Kansas City, Missouri, and St. Paul and Victory Baptist Churches of Los Angeles. Recordings by the latter two choirs were among the first live choir recordings to effectively promote gospel music. Representative Directors in the 1950s were Alex Bradford, Charles Craig, Jr., Julia Kennedy, Ralph Goodpasteur, Simon Payne, Michael Charles, J.C. White, Albert Goodson, Thurston Frazier and Earl Hines.

As a result of the appeal, growth of gospel choirs accelerated in such cities as Indianapolis, St. Louis, Memphis, Nashville, Birmingham, Atlanta, Cleveland, Washington D.C., Baltimore, San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, Philadelphia, and Newark. Also, community choirs came into existence.

Between 1948 and 2018, the popularity of gospel music was further expanded by community choirs. Representative Community Choirs in Chicago were the Rickey Dillard Singers, Ecclesiastic Ensemble, Southside Community Choir, Treadwell Singers, Thompson Community Singers, Wooten Choral Ensemble, Helen Robinson Youth Choir, Voices of Praise, Voices of Triumph, and Voices of Melody. As community choirs, they had freedom to present a more diverse repertoire than church choirs.

The Voices of Melody, active between 1962 and 2012, sang a unique diversity of music, though labeled a gospel choir. Conducted by this author, half of their presentation consisted of foreign languages, oratorio, anthems, ballads, motets, hymns, and spirituals, some a cappella. The other half were varied gospel songs with Hammond organ, piano, and drums. The choir of 60 singers recorded six albums that attest to their unique versatile choral skills.

Other community choirs throughout the country included the Atlanta Chorale of Atlanta, Brockington Choral Ensemble of Philadelphia, Garden State Choir of Newark, Michael Fletcher Chorale of Detroit, Harold Smith Majestics of Detroit, Savettes of Philadelphia, Utterbach Ensemble of New York, Donald Vail Choraleers of Detroit, Voices of Hope of Los Angeles, and the Voices of Christ of Oakland.

As the number of community choirs dwindled in the 1980s, a new style was popularized that ironically coincided with the end of Senior Choirs. The style, known today as urban contemporary gospel music, features crossover secular sounds, melodies, and harmonies. It is the result of prolific composers, such as Edwin and Walter Hawkins, Richard Smallwood, Thomas Whitfield, and Kirk Franklin.

National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses

Thomas Dorsey's inspiration led to the 1933 organization of the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses. Assisting Dorsey in this formation were Sallie Martin, Theodore Frye, Willa Mae Ford Smith, Gus Evans, and Magnolia Butts. Chartered in St. Louis, the NCGCC is the oldest African American gospel music convention.

The NCGCC, the 'mother' of Black gospel music, seeks to train and equip aspiring gospel singers, instrumentalists, and choir directors. Further, it aims to give support to the presence of gospel music in churches. A final goal is to spiritually motivate individuals who serve in music ministry to live the messages of the gospel songs.

In the 1930s, NCGGC was pivotal to thousands of migrants during their sojourn from the southern states. Like the earlier 1921 National Baptist Convention, the 1933 National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses met the musical needs of many blacks. As a model, it inspired the careers of gospel celebrities such as Clara Ward, Aretha Franklin, Roberta Martin, Delois Barrett Campbell, Eugene Smith, Willie Webb, Thurston Frazier, Maceo Woods, James Cleveland Albertina Walker, and 'Little' Lucy Smith Collier In the 1980s, a documentary, entitled *Say Amen, Somebody***,** was produced in St. Louis. It featured one of the convention's organizers, Willa Mae Ford Smith, from her home to church services and to emotionally galvanic singing conventions. Included in the documentary were her mentor, Thomas Dorsey and others associated with the NCGCC organization such as Delois Barrett Campbell and the Barrett Sisters.

Currently, there is effort by Johari Jabir, professor of African Music studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, to recapture the convention's accomplishments. Jabir has formed a symposium to collect Dorsey's old music scores and photos, ensure the preservation of gospel music, present oral histories, and examine the convention's historical role in gospel music.

There is also effort to revive Pilgrim Baptist Church to serve as a museum of gospel music. As such, it would house gospel artifacts and memorabilia. It would also contain state of the art facilities for gospel music recordings. The National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses meets each summer at varying venues throughout the country, attracting several thousands of delegates. The focus continues to be traditional gospel music, especially the compositions of Thomas Dorsey. Chapters still exist throughout the country. Jabir envisions leading a cross-country symposium of the 46 chapters of NCGCC.

As a result of bustling African-American musical activity, gospel choirs increased in large numbers after 1940. The Depression and Migration led to an explosion in growth of gospel choirs in the country. Specific factors included the organization of the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, musical programs, gospel recordings, disk jockeys, and church broadcasts. The factors

significantly helped the increase in church attendance and membership. These activities contributed to Chicago being the designated 'mecca' of gospel music.

Spread of Gospel Music Beyond Chicago

By the 1930s, during the Great Migration many churches in cities such as Memphis, St. Louis, Kansas City, Detroit, Philadelphia, Newark, and New York, presented radio worship services. Following a near-devastating economic depression, Black people in urban cities were receptive to these services. The effects of the Depression had been strongly felt in these locations.

The concentration of gospel music, prominent first in Chicago, began spreading throughout the United States. Its spread was influenced by music publications, radio and recording media, increased number of gospel artists, programs, broadcasting churches, cult leaders, more migration, and the relocation of preachers and singers. These factors led to gospel music's widespread popularity.

After 1950, U.S.A. cities that prominently embraced gospel choirs included Detroit, Memphis, Birmingham, Kansas City, Missouri, San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, Philadelphia, Newark, and Los Angeles. Many churches in these cities were experiencing gospel music for the first time and hosted radio services. Gospel music had become popular also in the communities of Nashville, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Brooklyn, St. Louis, Atlanta, and Oakland.

Interesting is the fact that the gospel sound is different in different geographic locations in the United States. When listening to various recordings of different geographical areas, a keen-ear gospel musician can detect differences in the gospel sounds in the Midwest, North, South, East, and West areas of the United States.

Gospel sounds abound in Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis, Kansas City, Philadelphia, Newark, New York, Atlanta, Birmingham, Nashville, Houston, Dallas, New Orleans, Detroit, Flint, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and Oakland. Depending on location,

differences occur in choral texture, harmony, accompanying style and sound.

Of particular note is the concentration of accomplished musicians in the eastern area of the country. These musicians are competent in all forms of Black music. They include Alfred Bolden, Nathan Carter, Lawrence Craig, Evelyn Simpson Curenton, Carol Cymbala, Robert Fryson, Gregory Hopkins, Anthony Leach, Patrick Lundy, Michael McElroy, Herbert Pickard, Richard Smallwood, Theodore Thorpe III, Clinton Utterbach, Pearl Williams-Jones, and Patrick Alston. Alston is widely considered to be the one of the greatest gospel pipe organists. These highly skilled artists significantly enhance the gospel music art form throughout America. In addition, other names are listed in the appendix.

Performance Practices

James B. Kinchen, Director of Choral Music at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside Campus, states, "Composers and arrangers of gospel music make unique use of musical ideas like interpretation, distinctive rhythms (bright cut times, broad triple rhythms, or very pliable rubato-like rhythm) and bold progressions." In addition, gospel tempo is sometimes smooth and tends towards 'soulful' religious ecstasy. The swaying motion of choirs usually accompanies this style, and the swaying often involves the entire congregation or audience, especially in gospel music of slow tempos.

Such slow tempos can also be sometimes subtle and elusive. It generally comprises duple and quadruple meters and dotted and non-dotted beats, with triplet patterns. Rhythm is most often reinforced by the presence of drums and other percussion, consistent with African musical practices.

Kinchen writes in the *Choral Journal,* "The best way to experience gospel music is aurally. It can be considered genre and style. It is a genre because it is an established and identifiable class of music in which people create. Gospel music can be a style because of improvisation, the strong use of harmonic progressions, based of I-IV-

V, and secondary chords, along with the use of accented and dotted rhythms." Rhythm is probably gospel's most distinguishing element.

An example of such style is a recorded rendition of *Hallelujah* by Ann McCray. In a minor key and accompanied by keyboards, bass, and percussion, the rendition displays polyphony, syncopation, improvisation, and call and response. These traits are typical in gospel music but are not usually found in one song in such an impressive combination.

Compositional Style and Ingredients

The ingredients of gospel music are melody, harmony, unique rhythms, improvisation, call and response, repetition, structure, and dance. Accompanying instruments are keyboards, piano, organ, guitars, bass, and drums, often with handclapping. However, synthesizers today are gradually replacing piano and organ. Ethnomusicologists see clear African influence in the vocal styles and complex polyrhythmic clapping of gospel music.

Melody

Gospel vocalists radically embellish simple melodies, and, in full and falsetto voice, they shout, hum, growl, moan, whisper, scream, and cry. Vocalists freely extend or repeat a fragment of the text by adding florid passages of melismas, ornaments, and tricky syncopations, altering given pitches with blue notes and glissandos. Melodic lines use intervals of flatted 3rds and 7ths. During performances, vocalists may walk down aisles while singing, using falsetto range, and utilizing vocal virtuosity.

Harmony and Rhythm

Harmonies range from simple triads to more complex harmonic formations found in jazz repertory and other 20th century art music. Included is the strong use of harmonic progressions based on I-IV-V, and secondary chords. Typical are dotted notes, triplet patterns, accents, syncopation, duple meters, and a variety of tempo. The

rhythmic style should be most emphasized. Tempo may be upbeat and involve the 'stride-piano' styles of George Gershwin and Scott Joplin.

Improvisation

Improvisation plays a key role in all forms of Black music. Ruth Osborne states "That is due to the improvisation of the slaves with their music during work for they had no notated music. Subsequently, all of the music was improvised, with some passed on from ear to ear."

While gospel music today is notated; performers often deviate from a score in an unrehearsed manner. What is seen in a score is often different in sound. African performance is by ear rather than notation. This is common in Black music. Perhaps, this is why bodily swinging and unrehearsed bodily swaying have become common in gospel music.

Call and Response

Call and response is inherent in all African American audiences, sacred and secular. Whether spoken or sung, it is usually participatory. Speakers and singers are encouraged by listener responses. Inspired by African roots, the head slave would sing one line or verse and the other slaves would respond with a phrase that answers the first phrase by the head slave. Call and response occurs between 1) a vocalist and choir, 2) a speaker and listeners and 3) preaching and congregation.

With roots in Africa, call and response has been prominent since the early African American church, where it was further developed in America. It has been nurtured in preaching and gospel singing. The earliest recall of Call and Response is in African folk songs, field songs, hollering songs, plantation songs, and spirituals.

In the West, the call and response feature is inherent in the sea shanty, Black work songs, pop songs, songs of the Black tradition, and dance songs of various European countries. In classical European music, it is known as antiphony. The feature is pervasive in modern Western music because Western music has been so heavily shaped by

African contributions. Call and Response is also exhibited in the styles of rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, and rock music.

Repetition

Some improvisation involves repetition. This may involve a phrase, section, or chord progression. This is common in gospel music and can lead to a person 'getting happy' or to an altered state of consciousness, sometimes referred to as a 'trance.'

Structure

Structure (form) comprises two contrasting sections: A and B or verse and refrain, each usually eight measures. Two contrasting sections mean Binary form, which is basic for gospel music. A short section, called codetta, often appears after A and B. It may recall part of the A or B section. It is unlike the Coda, a completely new section that appears only at the end of a composition. The most common gospel structure is AAB. Other full sections may appear that may be labeled CDE, etc. Common also in gospel music are vamps, which are repetitive sections usually at the end of a major section.

Dance

Dancing, reminiscent of the early 'ring shout,' is common in gospel singing. It evolved from Holiness churches and is a typical improvisational feature during the singing of quartets, groups or cpnregations.

Soloists, Quartets Groups, Choirs

Performance practices are the same for gospel soloists, quartets, groups, and choirs. Rooted in music of the slaves, such practices still prevail today. They began with the plantation or work songs, spirituals, meter hymns, and evangelistic hymns. Today, a modern repertory of hybrid songs is common in many churches. Such music is based on sacred and secular styles and utilizes a broad harmonic vocabulary.

Summary

If you were of age during 1955-1995, you may recall the tremendous anointing and blessing of gospel music that stirred the soul. People were often heard on albums shouting, screaming, and rejoicing.

As African Americans who grew up in the church, many of us feel the loss of this traditional sound. Though the traditional era is past, we today hear little that compares with the substance of gospel songs that made us lift our hands and join in with the music. Some feel that there is little comparison to the musical offerings of previous decades.

Factors causing the change include a bombardment of secular styles appealing to youth, the emphasis of Black identity that may prevent inclusivity of diverse styles, and youth who are not exposed to early music education. Amid such changes, megachurches, secular-based orchestras, and emerging hip hop styles, quality should not be sacrificed. Churches and gospel music deserve high standards.

Some youth today do not know of the spiritual values of their parents and grandparents when these parents and grandparents were growing up. Many sang freely in Gospel choirs in unity, excitement, and dignity. The music brought many persons together. Those of us who still live and hear the recorded songs by these choirs can witness to the power of this music.

As with many current artists, older legends had a profound respect of God. Their expression of ultimate love for Him can be heard in their songs. The songs, played on albums, with hand clapping, tambourines, drums, piano and Hammond organ, became known as part of the traditional gospel style.

Decades later, many of us are pained as we sense the absence of this authentic gospel music. All too well, we realize this silence exists across the country. No longer do we hear music of church services going forth in the Spirit.

Sadly, a number of traditional black choirs died with the gospel legends. While this may imply the death of the traditional gospel style, such change happens in every art form. Yet, memories still

linger of the times of rushing to record stores to buy albums that touched and stirred our souls.

Today's gospel composers are not the root of the issue. They exhibit amazing creative skills. But, choir directors should avoid gimmicks and 'dumbing down' to singers. Vocal technique is essential and results in quality, yet soulful performances. Gospel music does not infer poor quality, but music development must remain at the core.

To understand gospel music is to begin to understand the history and lives of African Americans. One must get inside the music for first-hand experience of the art form. Gospel music, more than notes on a page, represents a feeling that cannot be notated. Such feeling is apparent when one observes an African American church audience and singers and sees the behavior and unrehearsed synchronized movement. Such movement relates to rhythm and improvisation.

The hypnotic effect of gospel music is reflected in James Baldwin's account upon visiting a Black church. Born in New York and raised in Harlem, Baldwin was the son of a clergyman. As a teenager, he became a storefront preacher, but later forsook preaching. A renowned poet, he produced outstanding works about the Black American experience. His writing style, based on Gospel language, is apparent in his novels: *Go, Tell It on the Mountain, The Amen Corner,* and *The Fire Next Time.*

The following excerpt from *The Fire Next Time* was written in 1963 after Baldwin heard gospel music at a New York church: "There is no music like that music, no drama like the drama of the saints rejoicing, the sinners moaning, the tambourines racing, and all those voices coming together and crying holy unto the Lord. I have never seen anything to equal the fire and excitement that sometimes, without warning, fill a church, causing the church, as Leadbelly and others have testified, to rock…"

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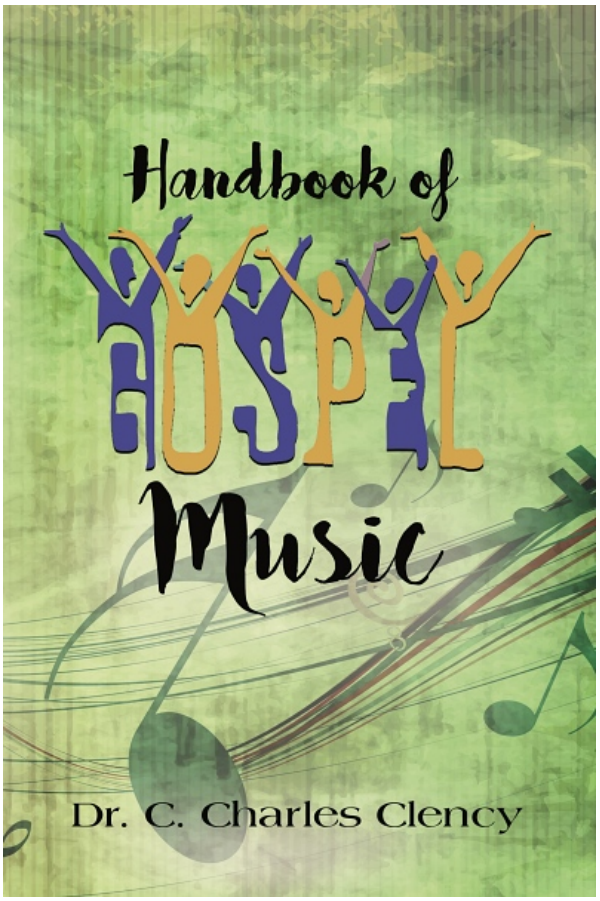

This Handbook traces the evolution of gospel music and related economic factors. Included are persons with notable contributions to the art form. Strategies are given that may help the success of aspiring directors and instrumentalists.

Handbook of Gospel Music

By Dr. C. Charles Clency

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