"Sound of Praise": Reflexive Ethnopedagogy and Two Gospel Choirs in Tallahassee, Florida

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“SOUND OF PRAISE”: REFLEXIVE ETHNOPEDAGOGY AND TWO GOSPEL CHOIRS IN TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnomusicological study of gospel music as performed and experienced by the Florida State University Gospel Choir and the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Tallahassee, Florida.

Gospel music has become an increasingly important form of artistic expression for understanding the roots of American music. Unfortunately, it has been marginalized as an area of study in universities and colleges for decades. This thesis emphasizes gospel music as a musical genre worthy of study in educational institutions. Its rich history, cultural significance, and pedagogical value make it an important part of American music.

This thesis also explores how the ethnomusicological study of pedagogy in culture, or what I call ethnopedagogy, provides a deeper understanding of the gospel music tradition and culture. This thesis provides educators, choral directors, and ethnomusicologists with a resource for teaching African American gospel music traditions, and it will serve as a model for ethnopedagogy and its applicability to the social sciences.
“WE ARE ALL ONE”: INTRODUCTION

I mean, look at me, I’m white, I’m 52 years old...the feelings I get singing...of community, that we are all one. The feeling of people brought together for the same purpose, to access that higher power for help. It’s awe-inspiring.

Purpose

Gospel music has become an increasingly important form of artistic expression for understanding the roots of American music. Unfortunately, gospel music has been marginalized as an area of study in universities for decades. To create an understanding of this musical expression in the context of two gospel choirs, I analyze the pedagogical tools used in rehearsals and performances through the examination of teaching methodologies, musical transcriptions, and field notes from fieldwork experiences. I suggest that researchers will find both pedagogical intent and musical meaning via the ethnopedagogical process. This thesis is an ethnomusicological study of gospel pedagogy as expressed by the Florida State University Gospel Choir and the combined Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Tallahassee, Florida.

Gospel music proponents are constantly vying for recognition and acceptance of gospel music as a genre deserving of academic and musical study. They are struggling to have gospel music accepted in universities along side other, more established forms of music, primarily Western art music. In music schools, the following questions of validity may arise: Is gospel music worthy of study in academia? Is it “musical” enough? Does it offer room for musical development and growth? Will it provide comprehensive musicianship for the students? Will it allow the students to further develop their skills in theory, history, and pedagogy? Also, what are some of the ethical considerations for teaching religious music in academia?

In the broader context of the university, pedagogical concepts are overlooked and the focus becomes not on the choir as a musical facility, but rather, as an outlet for cultural diversity in higher education. While I agree that this is a very important reason to study gospel choir music at the university level, this thesis studies gospel music as a

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1 Marianne Lipsius, interview by author, 25 March 2003, minidisc recording, outside the choral rehearsal room, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
musical genre deserving of greater recognition in educational institutions. It will also establish an ethnopedagogical foundation for teaching African American gospel music traditions, as well as provide a musical resource for educators, choir directors, and ethnomusicologists alike. Finally, this thesis offers suggestions to choral directors and music educators for the diversification of their music programs by implementing gospel music.

Definitions

In order to discuss many of the issues surrounding African American gospel music, it is necessary to define some of the terms I use in this thesis.

I use theologian Joseph Murphy’s definition of the African American Church as “shared institutions among Protestant Christian denominations that have been developed and administrated by African Americans.” Historically, the term “Black Church” referred to the establishment where African Americans would congregate and worship; it later developed into a religious ideology for African American Churches. In the context of this thesis, I refer to the African American Church primarily as the foundation for the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

I use the term pedagogy as the study of teaching and learning, or the activity of imparting knowledge or skills. With reference to vocal music, I adapt Lynn Corbin’s definition that pedagogy is “the art, science, and/or profession of teaching vocal development,” which includes the principles and methods essential for quality, responsible, and effective vocal teaching. In this thesis, I refer to the process of learning and teaching music when discussing pedagogy in the context of gospel music.

I define ethnopedagogy as the ethnomusicological study of pedagogy in culture. Ethnopedagogy closely examines the musical behaviors, concepts, and sounds as they are taught and transmitted from one generation to the next, both within the culture, and across cultures. This concept will be discussed later in this chapter.

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3 Campbell, 26-27.
5 For further information on music pedagogy, see White (1989), Kohut (1992), and Appelman (1967).
Background and Significance

In Old English, the term “Gospel” refers to the “good news” of Christ. In this thesis I use gospel to indicate a genre of music in African American communities. While there are many different classifications for gospel music, I deal specifically with the music found in the Florida State University Gospel Choir and the African Methodist Episcopal Church and in Tallahassee, FL.

Gospel music (or just gospel, for short) reflects the devastating social conditions African Americans have experienced in their lives, from social and political oppression to cultural demoralization, to racial segregation. Gospel functions as a revolutionizing musical force for people around the world, but particularly African Americans. Derived from spirituals sung at southern camp meetings, gospel acquired a new face when it was combined with the blues and jazz music of the early twentieth century. Around the time of the Great Depression, Thomas A. Dorsey used his musical talents, devotion to the church, and cultural identity to produce a musical genre cultivated for struggling black communities in America. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, gospel provided a refuge from the oppressed and restrained world of a dominant society. These tumultuous times inspired a resurgence of freedom songs and traditional spirituals, as well as newly created gospel songs, which eventually made their way into the world of mainstream entertainment. Most notable was Edwin Hawkin’s “Oh Happy Day!” in 1969.

It was during the mid-twentieth century that gospel music made its way into “old-line” black universities, and later into predominantly white universities. Since its introduction into academic institutions, gospel music has proliferated in choral music programs at high school and middle high school levels throughout the United States.

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6 During the Civil Rights Movement, freedom and protest songs created a sense of camaraderie and a collective representation of power among African Americans. Singing was a sign of peaceful resistance to racial segregation and injustice. For further information on music and the Civil Rights Movement see Southern (1997), and Reagon (2001).
8 In this context, “old-line” refers to long-established and conservative black universities in the U.S., including Tuskegee University (AL), Howard University (DC), Florida A&M University, Morehouse College (GA), Wilberforce University (OH), and Fisk University (TN).
With the increasing popularity of gospel music in American music education, I propose new approaches to how we can further understand this vibrant African American musical culture. While I will investigate traditional gospel as the precursor of contemporary gospel ideologies, my primary focus will be on modern or contemporary gospel as the musical vehicle for social identity among the members of the Florida State University Gospel Choir and the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir at Bethel A.M.E. church in Tallahassee, FL.

**Survey of Literature**

The existing literature on gospel music offers various interpretations and research approaches. Unfortunately, there isn’t an abundance of literature on the pedagogy of gospel music historically. While there is ample literature on noteworthy performers and composers who helped define gospel music, there has been very little written on pedagogy in the gospel music tradition. However, I have listed some contemporary resources on gospel music and highlighted some of the pedagogical elements covered in them.

Don Cusic’s *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel Music* (1990) covers many historical aspects of gospel, including the roots of gospel, music in the Bible, famous gospel artists and composers, and the rise of gospel in popular culture. Cusic approaches gospel music from an entirely religious perspective and believes that gospel is meaningless if it is used for anything other than “converting souls.”\(^{10}\) Most interesting is his claim that because churches are predominantly segregated, gospel music has become associated purely with African American churches, even though white churches may incorporate ideas from gospel music into their own performances.

From a slightly different perspective, Bernice Johnson Reagon\(^{11}\) offers insight into African American oral traditions with her reflexive account of a gospel community. In her book *If You Don’t Go, Don’t Hinder Me: The African American sacred song tradition* (2001)\(^{12}\) she reflects principles championed by former president Abraham Lincoln: education, justice, tolerance, and union. Keeping these principles in mind,

\(^{10}\) Cusic, 86.

\(^{11}\) Bernice Johnson Reagon is also founder of the women’s music ensemble “Sweet Honey in the Rock.”

\(^{12}\) Published as a part of the Abraham Lincoln Lecture Series from the University of Nebraska.
Reagon interweaves the history of gospel music into her own experiences as an African American growing up in post-World War II Georgia. Reagon investigates the function of sacred music traditions as a source of spiritual and emotional support during the latter half of the twentieth century, and concludes that gospel music continues to expand not only in the southern part of the United States, but across the globe. Although Reagon writes in great detail about the song texts and their political significance, she does not discuss the music itself.

Ethnomusicologist Mellonee Burnim explores African American music through a personal and reflexive approach in her article “Culture Bearer and Tradition Bearer: An Ethnomusicologist’s Research on Gospel Music” (1985 [1992]). As an African American she is immediately viewed as an “insider,” which allows her to overcome obstacles or restrictions a cultural “outsider” might encounter. Burnim’s reflexive experience demonstrates the contradictory and complementary levels of the insider/outsider relationship and accounts for the advantages of researching an area of cultural and social familiarity. Despite her familiarity with African American gospel music, Burnim does not discuss the actual process of learning the music.

Samuel Floyd’s *The Power of Black Music: interpreting its history from Africa to the United States* (1995) traces the key elements of contemporary African American music to West Africa (e.g., call-and-response technique, syncopated rhythms, elaborate ornamentation). He focuses on various interpretations in traditional African American music history and the musical tendencies shared between African and African American cultures. Floyd’s book serves as a “vehicle of rapprochement between vernacular and classical, formal and folk, academic and popular ways of knowing, attending to and criticizing music.” An important link between these two cultures is what Floyd calls “cultural memory,” or actions and beliefs understood by members in a culture, including the African diaspora. Examining “cultural memory” is inherently important to understanding gospel communities and how they live their daily lives. While Floyd does not specifically discuss gospel music, he does talk about musical elements from the

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African tradition that are found in contemporary African musics such as gospel. Similar to most other gospel studies, Floyd does not say anything noteworthy about music and its transmission, or pedagogy and gospel music.

_Protest and Praise: Sacred music of black religion_ (1990) by Jon Spencer focuses specifically on sacred church music in African American traditions seen from a theomusicological position, or “musicology as a theologically informed discipline.” Particular to gospel music, his Chapter Nine is titled “Christ Against Culture: Anticulturalism in the Gospel of Gospel Music,” which discusses the meaning of gospel music, theologizing gospel music, transitional gospel, traditional gospel, and contemporary gospel music. The term “Anticulturalism” refers to the ideology that people develop independent of their prevailing culture, and even rebel against it, inferring that despite the culture a person is born or raised in, this does not necessarily mean that they are of that culture. This chapter offers a unique perspective on contemporary views on gospel music communities, and has broadened my own perception of the role of gospel music in constructing a particular African American identity.

In _The Golden Age of Gospel_ (2000), Horace Clarence Boyer traces the history of gospel music from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s. Boyer focuses primarily on the musicians that shaped the different eras in gospel music and how they had an impact on the gospel tradition as a developing musical genre. Although he does not discuss teaching methods or musical transmission historically used in gospel music, he does cover the origins of certain performance practices, such as the “swing lead” and “vamp,” which I use later in this thesis.

James Abbington’s _Readings in African American Church Music and Worship_ (2001) is a history of over three and a half centuries of African American musical culture and heritage. Abbington includes chapters, essays, articles, and unpublished papers written by scholars, theologians, historians, ethnomusicologists, pastors, organists, professors, and conductors. Divided into seven categories, his last section, titled “Contemporary Perspectives,” addresses many of the problems and controversies facing

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gospel music today. One of the contributors to this volume, Obery Hendricks, says that the social orientation of gospel music today is unmindful and uninvolved with the freedom struggle of African Americans.\(^{17}\) Hendricks claims that contemporary gospel music is absent of liberation, meaning, the freedom from oppression is no longer apparent in the music. I disagree with this statement because many contemporary gospel texts do in fact discuss seeking freedom from the current state of being.\(^{18}\) Hendricks’ focus is mainly on the song text, but in my research I examine the overall process involved in gospel pedagogy.

Glenn Hinson’s *Fire in My Bones*, an ethnography on transcendence in African American gospel music as it was performed during sequential anniversary celebrations, provides a model for ethnographic writing. Hinson’s ethnography focuses on gospel music as an agent for understanding an African American community in the Long Branch Disciple Church in North Carolina, and their community’s religious experience. Although he includes song texts, he neither includes musical transcriptions or performance notes, nor does he discuss the historical musical practices of this particular gospel community. However, Hinson’s book provides an excellent model for ethnographic writing in a church setting.

**Theoretical Approach**

In my study I claim that African American gospel music can be understood further through reflexive ethnography and ethnopedagogy. I have defined ethnopedagogy and designed a model outlining ethnopedagogy as it is applied to a music-culture.

**Ethnopedagogy**

In 1968 Henry Burger, a cultural anthropologist, wrote *Ethno-Pedagogy: A Manual in Cultural Sensitivity, with Techniques for Improving Cross-Cultural Teaching by Fitting Ethnic Patterns* during the height of the “ethno” focus in American sociological, anthropological, and musicological discourse of the 1960s. During the late


\(^{18}\) For more information on gospel song texts, see Chapters Four and Five.
1950s and 1960s, linguists and cultural anthropologists collaborated on a linguistically-based methodology called variously "ethnographic semantics," "the new ethnography," and most commonly "ethnoscience." The more enthusiastic of these researchers maintained that if an ethnographic researcher could understand the inner logic used by people under ethnographic study, it would be possible to understand the cognitive processes underlying their cultural behavior. The technique of describing the logic of categorization proved useful for the understanding of specific domains of cultural activity.

Burger organized a manual to apply cultural anthropology to education using the term “ethno-pedagogy” to alleviate ignorance of ethnic diversity and educational understanding of cultural differences. He defined ethno-pedagogy as a way to describe teaching techniques when applied cross-culturally and “the activity of cross-cultural teaching.”

Though I agree with Burgers’ pedagogical intention to coin a term that treats pedagogy from a broader cultural perspective, what was problematic in Burger’s definition was his use of “cross-culture,” which he limited to the act of teaching from a dominant culture to a minority culture. Since the early 1970s, however, a significant amount of research has been conducted on multiculturalism in education, where the concept “cross-cultural” is applied across cultures in a two-way information flow.

Since Burger’s introduction of the concept of “ethno-pedagogy,” minimal research has been conducted using this approach in the context of education, and none in the discipline of music. Therefore, I propose a new definition of ethnopedagogy, as the ethnomusicological study of pedagogy in culture. As mentioned earlier, ethnopedagogy closely examines the musical behaviors, concepts, and sounds as they are taught and transmitted from one generation to the next, both within the culture and across cultures. Ethnopedagogy has the potential to provide an insight into how a culture constructs, teaches, and transmits, its musical universe. In this thesis I apply an ethnopedagogical

20 For further information on multiculturalism in education, see Mahalingam (2000), Parekh (2000), and Hall (1997).
study to my fieldwork with the FSU Gospel Choir and the A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir, a single choir that consists of many different age levels. To further understand ethnopedagogy and its application to my research, I have designed a tripartite model which I will use and refer to throughout this thesis.

**The Model**

In “Toward the Remodeling of Ethnomusicology,” Timothy Rice reiterates the importance of disciplinary models and states, “They provide a kind of intellectual framework that helps us contextualize, interpret, classify, and evaluate our work, and they can provide some sense of direction or purpose.”

There are two main reasons I have chosen to use a model in this thesis: to further define ethnopedagogy as it is applied to gospel music, and to cogently demonstrate the relationships between behaviors, concepts, and sounds within the gospel tradition.

One of the most effective models in the history of ethnomusicology is by Alan Merriam, which is based on the concepts, behaviors, and sounds in relation to music. Merriam pointed out that concepts lead to behavior, which shapes the overall structure and sound of the music. He stated that concepts must be learned, “For culture as a whole is learned behavior, and each culture shapes the learning process to accord with its own ideals and values.” Essentially, concepts are how people think about the music and pass it on. According to Merriam, behavior and sound are embedded in concepts, and pedagogy is a concept that ultimately lies at the center of musical and cultural understanding.

Timothy Rice’s model is organized around three issues and concepts generated by ethnomusicologists: historical construction, social maintenance, and individual creation and experience. His model seeks to understand formative processes in asking how people make music, or “how do people historically/socially/individually, create or construct/maintain/experience music?”

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23 Merriam, 145.
24 Rice, 484.
“create or construct,” “maintain,” or “experience,” although perhaps they could be interpreted as running through them like a thread. For example, performance may be experience; teaching/learning could be construct; but as a unified process, they are not viewed as a part of Rice’s model. Therefore, I have designed a model based on both Merriam and Rice’s models, focusing on pedagogy as process that includes the role of the actor, analyst, reader, and applier in that process.

As mentioned before, ethnopedagogy is an ethnomusicological study of pedagogy in culture. In this thesis I find that when sounds, behaviors, and concepts surrounding the process of musical transmission are analyzed and examined, they provide insight on musical meaning and pedagogical intent that are otherwise difficult to discern. Beyond a simple analysis of pedagogical aspects observed and described from fieldwork study, ethnopedagogy involves the interpretation of the pedagogical process from different perspectives: the actor, the analyst, the reader, and the applier. In the context of this study, the actors are the gospel choir members and directors, the analyst is the researcher, the reader is whoever chooses to read this thesis, and the applier is whoever applies the pedagogical understanding (tools, methods) learned.

**The Parts of the Model**

At the first level of the model, in the center of the diagram (see Table 1) is the actor(s), who has the ability to understand the culture from within. In this thesis, actors refer to the choir members, directors, and musicians in the FSU Gospel Choir and the A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir. Actors may also include people not directly involved with the ensembles, but interviewees with experience in the gospel tradition, such as Jacqueline Henderson and Rosalie Hill. The actors understand gospel music by performing it, demonstrating it, teaching it, and learning various pedagogical practices.

At the second level in the model, in the first ring around the center, is the analyst(s), who has the ability to understand culture. Through observation, description, and analysis of the actors’ pedagogical practices, the analyst interprets and conveys his/her experience of culture. In this thesis I am the analyst/field researcher and ethnomusicologist. The analyst is also involved in learning about the pedagogy of that
culture and must therefore transmit the information to the third level, the reader, in the outer ring of the diagram.

The reader’s ability to understand culture is perhaps one of the most important attributes of this level of the model. As they are demonstrated and utilized by the actors, the reader views and understands the pedagogical tools and practices and the culture as they are observed and conveyed by the analyst. Therefore, readers develop their own interpretation of the gospel tradition.

At the fourth level, in the outer ring, are the appliers. It is my assumption (my hope) that the readers will be the appliers who will inspire their own students to perform gospel music based on the pedagogical tools they have read about. Eventually, they will create new actors in the gospel music tradition.

The following diagram shows my model and demonstrates the levels as they interrelate with one another through the process of pedagogy:

Table 1: The Ethnopedagogy Model
From this model it is apparent that each person involved in the pedagogical process is affected by the other. Like the rings (circular waves) formed by a stone dropped in a pool of water, one action gives birth to another. Each part of the model ultimately influences the interpretation of the pedagogical process and how the culture is musically constructed.

A second dimension of this model is to consider the actors and analysts as producers and the readers and appliers as receptors. The actors produce the music, as the analyst produces an interpretation of the music. The readers make sense of analysts’ interpretations, and the applier brings them to musical fruition. Perhaps yet another outer ring is the audience. The audience is the recipient of that which is produced by the actors, but in a sense they also become actors. As receptors, the audience demonstrates understanding through consumption and then acts upon what they have received. In sum, ethnopedagogy examines pedagogy as a cultural process. The model I propose allows flexibility in researching the different roles of participants involved in the pedagogical process.

Throughout this thesis I have identified sections within the chapters as the actor or the analyst, to convey the level at which gospel music is being discussed. Ultimately, this entire thesis is directed towards the reader/applier, who do not need to be independently addressed. Each chapter is to be interpreted at the level of the reader/applier. The pedagogical issues discussed in these chapters include: performance venues, the concert audience, achieving unity within the choir, guest conductors, message in song texts, conducting techniques, rehearsal strategies, learning styles, instructional suggestions, musical selection, and the gospel style. Through observation and interviews with the actors, the analyst explored each pedagogical issue raised during fieldwork. The analysis of these pedagogical tools (Chapters Four and Five) is directed towards the reader and is intended for them to interpret and employ as they deem appropriate.

It is my hope that this model will provide insight to the ethnopedagogical approach and allow a deeper understanding of the music-culture being discussed, in this case, gospel music. Moreover, building upon the model, this thesis discerns two pertinent issues in music-culture and pedagogy -- musical meaning and pedagogical intent, which are discussed further in the conclusion of this thesis.
Transmission

Before examining pedagogical processes in gospel music, it is important to recognize the current method of musical transmission in these two gospel choirs. The primary method of music teaching the FSU Gospel Choir and the Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir is through oral transmission. Bruno Nettl states, “Oral transmission is the norm, that music everywhere uses this form of self-propagation, that in live or recorded form it almost always accompanies the written, and that it dominates the musical life of a society and the life of a piece of music.”

Oral transmission is at the core of gospel music pedagogy. Because it plays such an integral role in the gospel music tradition, music educators should use oral transmission as a methodology in their curriculum. Through the analysis of singing techniques and song memorization, my thesis will be a resource that provides choral directors with an understanding of the role of oral transmission and the importance in maintaining oral transmission techniques when teaching African American gospel music.

Bonnie C. Wade’s Thinking Globally and Patricia Shehan Campbell’s Teaching Music Globally provide useful models of presenting teaching methodologies, musical transcriptions, and performance notes used in African American gospel music. Wade’s and Campbell’s texts offer an informative “how-to” approach on cultural understanding through music. Using musical texts, transcriptions, photographs, listening charts, and learning activities, Wade informs the reader not just about the music from many different cultures, but also the processes of learning. In addition to historical and cultural information from the music regions, she encourages learning the actual performance styles and techniques in the music being discussed.

Methodology

For this research I have used my fieldwork with the Florida State University Gospel Choir as an introduction to my gospel music experience. Through observation,

participation, interviews, surveys, and archival research, I construct an ethnography on two gospel choirs and discuss several issues, to include ethnic identity and choir membership, gospel song in performance, and teaching methodologies and musical elements. My thesis is framed reflexively, as I discuss learning about gospel music from a narrative perspective.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity has been defined by David Scott (1996) as the inscription of self in social practices, language, and discourse which constitute the research process. Scott discusses ethnographic methods in educational research in his chapter “Ethnography and Education,” from *Understanding Educational Research*. He explores four main areas of traditional ethnography: the researcher as a participator, interaction under “natural” circumstances, reflexivity, and ethnography in relation to educational practices. In his last area, Scott claims that educational discourses are restrictive and prohibitive as far as what can be said about a subject matter and are understood only in reference to an ideal future state. He claims that the narrativity (i.e., understanding the present by constantly re-working the past) found in ethnographic research is one of the most important elements in educational practice. He also states that “reflexivity is not just expressed in texts, but in practices, and in particular, the practice of education.” Scott’s claim is that “ethnographers research themselves as they research their subject matter,” and in return, they “develop an understanding for education.”

As an ethnographic sketch of the FSU Gospel Choir, Chapter One is included because it emphasizes my initial learning experience with a gospel community. During this phase of the research process my own interests in pedagogy own. Progressively, my understanding of the FSU gospel choir transpired into a sincere and urgent desire to study alternate gospel choirs more in depth. Reflexivity is the frame in which I have designed this thesis, and the first step in reflexivity involved the six weeks spent with the FSU Gospel Choir in 2003.

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28 Scott, 155.
29 ibid.
Furthermore, in my research with the FSU Gospel Choir and Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir I observe the behaviors, concepts, and sounds that surround these two ensembles. This includes interviews, archival research, sound and video recordings, photographing, transcription, and musical analysis of events and activities that occur during the process of transmission. It is important to note that transmission does not occur solely during music rehearsals, but also in various performance settings and outside of the choral setting as well.

**Chapter Overview**

The opening chapter provides a first glance at the gospel music tradition with the FSU Gospel Choir and acts as a point of departure for further research with the Bethel A.M.E. Choir in Tallahassee. Chapter Two is an historical overview of music in the A.M.E. Church, with a specific focus on the music program at Bethel A.M.E. in Tallahassee. Chapter Three discusses ethnic identity and choir membership by focusing on the Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir as a very small community within the larger gospel culture as a whole. Chapter Four highlights performance and power in gospel singing, using three different performing mediums as examples: a community event, a worship service, and a church concert. Chapter Five analyzes some of the teaching methodologies and rehearsal techniques, used both in rehearsal and performance with the FSU Gospel Choir and the A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir, creating an ethnopedagogical study of these methods within their culture. Chapter Six concludes by making a number of final statements and observations about the ethnopedagogy model and its importance in the future of gospel music in academia.
CHAPTER ONE

“IT’S NOT FOR US, IT’S FOR THEM”: THE FSU GOSPEL CHOIR

Figure 1: The FSU Gospel Choir Concert

Until the spring of 2003 I had minimal familiarity with gospel music. I had seen it performed by the Black Chorus at the University of Illinois, but knew very little about its history or traditions. I knew that it moved me, that it pulled on my emotional strings, and provided affirmation in knowing that something greater was in control. I became enthusiastic about spending time with the FSU Gospel Choir at the Florida State University as a part of my project for Field and Lab Techniques in Ethnomusicology Seminar. My experience with the FSU Gospel Choir lasted for approximately three months and provided a foundation for my personal understanding and appreciation of gospel music and the musicians that perform it (Figure 1). This chapter highlights those initial experiences and acts as a point of departure for my work with the Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir.

In this chapter I discuss my primary reactions to gospel music and examine the process of teaching and learning gospel in an academic environment. I have divided this chapter into the following six sections: history, teaching methodologies, ethnic identity, and religion and the academic institution. I determined each section by issues that present themselves during the fieldwork experience and demand further examination. Subsequently, I expand on these topics with the A.M.E. Church throughout the thesis. In
addition to my experience with the A.M.E. Church, I will later discuss teaching elements from this chapter and refer to them in the pedagogical analysis. A large part toward understanding an unfamiliar music is immersion, and for my own process of learning about gospel pedagogy, this was the first step.

The History of the FSU Gospel Choir

Founded in 1973 by student Rommy George, the Florida State University Gospel Choir began with a small number of young African American students dedicated to singing songs of worship and praise. Generally taught by students at the university, many directors over the next few years, including Jeanette Thompson, Melvin Hogins, Ray Williams, Sharon Strong, and Henry Andrews, contributed to and experienced a tremendous amount of change in the ensemble. The fusion of contemporary songs into the repertoire, as well as the participation in the National Black College Workshop seminar in Atlanta, Georgia, marked some of these changes, leading to the growth of a successful choir.

In 1979 the choir was awarded a Certificate of Recognition by the University for its honors of excellence in concert competition, participation in the Gospel Extravaganza at the University of Florida in Gainesville, spring concert tours, and other tours throughout the United States. Traveling extensively throughout the state, their unofficial recruitment fostered the growth and recognition it receives today. In 1983 director Linda Morris helped induct the choir as an official registered student organization, and in 1984 the choir was placed under the FSU Center for Black Culture and its name was officially changed to the FSU Afro-American Choral Ensemble by the School of Music. In the spring of 1985 the choir was instituted as a course that could be taken for credit, which ushered the funding for doctoral student Vernon Smith to become its leader, and for every director thereafter.

Although Smith brought a wealth of experience and knowledge, performing everything from Negro spirituals to sacred and secular choir anthems with the choir, the student body was not satisfied with the ensemble’s name, and pursued a change. Following a protest by Christian students in 1986, the name was changed back to the
Florida State University Gospel Choir. In 1988, the preamble to the constitution of the gospel choir stated the following:

We the members of the Florida State University Gospel Choir, arm our organization with peace and harmony. Through our music we resolve to maintain songs of praise and adoration of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We further resolve to strive as an organization towards brotherly love bound together by our devotion to God and dedication to the uplifting of His name in song.30

Since 1988 the choir has continued to expand in size and recognition. In 2000 it teamed up with Florida A&M University (FAMU, also in Tallahassee) to showcase the First Annual FAMU/FSU Unity Jam. Since 2001, the choir has hosted the “Gospel Explosion” concert every fall to kickoff FSU’s Homecoming week. According to the current director Michael Figgers, the choir is given funds from the university to bring in nationally known recording artists to work with the choir for a few days, answer questions, talk with the students, and then perform a spectacular concert with the ensemble. This event alone has brought unique talent to the university and has been a powerful inspiration for the singers and their music.

In the spring of 2003 I interviewed Michael Figgers and numerous members of the Florida State University Gospel Choir. Figgers was especially delighted that I was interested in the choir, as he explained to me in an interview:

I am so thrilled you are doing this. And I will tell you why. When I first started doing my dissertation . . . well it’s expected that a black person who has been in gospel choir all of their lives would do . . . a study on gospel music, and sometimes it is perceived as those are the only people who will read it, black people who are into gospel. But when you approached me and said “I would like to do this,” it thrilled me so [and] I said, “okay. It’s happening.” That is, it’s being recognized as a real art form; it does have some qualities that people see as having weight; it’s not just that style of music that is loud or religious, and that “those black people” like to sing, and I was so thrilled and to see you come every day, and you came to the dress, and you came to the concert...you were serious... this has given us a chance to talk about it.31

I did “come every day,” as he expressed it, or nearly so. This thesis allows me to “talk” about gospel with more than just Michael Figgers and the people with whom I worked. In

31 Michael Figgers, interview by author, 9 April 2003, minidisc recording, KMU lounge, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
the following section I write about one of those days, putting my fieldnotes in the ethnographic present to personalize and intensify the experience.

![Figure 2: Choral Rehearsal Room, Kuersteiner Music Building, FSU School of Music](image)

**A Personal Case Study**

**Teaching methodologies and musical elements**

On a brisk March evening in 2003 I walk quickly into Kuersteiner Music Building and find my way to the front corner of the choral rehearsal room (Figure 2). Risers are constructed into the foundation of the floor, allowing the leveled wooden chairs to curve around the front podium, blackboard, and grand piano. My first impression: simple, functional, and rather dull, but I would soon be mistaken. Slowly, the students filter in. The director, Michael Figgers, appears around 7:35 p.m. and initiates the rehearsal with a few business items, comments on the tour, upcoming concerts, and expected work ethic over the next few weeks.

Sitting back in his chair, Michael passes out a photocopied handout and recites “The words on your lips, I’ll sing it in my voice...Oh How Wondrous...is the name, of the Lord...” I watch as he sings the melody to verses one and two and the students follow along on their sheet, mouthing the words delivered by the director. By this time there are two men behind electronic keyboards and one behind the piano, all without sheet music, but seemingly following the director in a very fluid accompaniment. It is at this point I notice there is no bass part, as Michael asks them to sing in their falsetto along with the
tenors. I later learn that this is common in gospel music, as it is usually written for three parts. After singing through the verses, chorus, and vamp a number of times, the harmony now added, Michael asks, “You got it?” They nod, and the movement begins. Michael points upwards, backwards, using all of his energy to indicate the pitch tessitura with the back of his hand. The choir members begin to sway, rock, and throw their hands in the air.

![Figure 3: Michael Figgers and the choir in rehearsal](image)

In a later interview I ask Michael about his hand movements, (pointing backwards and up, see Figure 3), and he explains that they indicate a key change or an inversion. Depending on what has been rehearsed with the choir, the members understand which one it is. In gospel music, concepts are learned and then implemented into rehearsals and music learning, as he continued to explain to me:

For example, if you are singing a vamp [a part of the music that is repeated, similar to an ostinato] and you point upward, particularly if you point upward and you give a cue to the instrumentalists, it indicates a key change. To the musicians it could mean either one,
so you need to tell them. Even though you have some liberties in concerts, it’s not all
guesswork because you rehearse.\textsuperscript{32}

During rehearsals the key changes were rehearsed with the choir and instrumentalists, but
often during rehearsal Michael Figgers would add an additional vamp or tag (a short
concluding section). This was shown by pointing upward or pointing into the air while
conducting.

Moved by “feeling” and divine inspiration, songs of spontaneously harmonized
singing transform themselves from the “old plantations of the South” to a classroom full
of eager singers. Figgers makes statements such as “I feel like taking it up” and “I may go
on...whatever I feel...,” indicating improvisation, but within limits. According to Figgers,
different sections can sing with others, a key change can occur, the parts can be inverted,
there can be an inversion and a key change, and a few other things are experimented with
during these moments, as he told me:

Sometimes on the spot you get an inspiration, but you don’t do an inspiration that’s not
clear. You wouldn’t do an inversion here because that’s going to put sopranos way across
the ceiling, but after you’ve sung gospel music enough, you know the things you can and
cannot do.\textsuperscript{33}

“Inspiration” can also be translated as spontaneous improvisation, as Figgers indicates, is
a technique that is used after the director is familiar with both the choir and the music.
Oftentimes, these modulations are seen as a movement closer to God, or more
specifically as the optimistic spirit of the “good news” in preparation for happiness in the
life hereafter.

Communication between the director and the choir is essential, particularly when
teaching without sheet music. Not only are the pitches and rhythms undefined, but also
the articulation, dynamics, tempo, chords, and nuances that Western notation provides are
vague. “The first couple of nights I was here, I kept asking, where’s the friggin music,
and they said ‘we don’t have music,’ and then it finally dawned on me that that’s the way

\textsuperscript{32} Michael Figgers, interview by author, 9 April 2003, minidisc recording, KMU lounge, FSU School of
Music, Tallahassee, FL.
\textsuperscript{33} id.
it has always been done,” says choir member Marianne Lipsius.\(^{34}\) Rather than getting too caught up in musical terminology, Figgers manages around this most of the time by modeling the sound he wants, whether that includes singing a straight tone and adding vibrato at the end, or modifying the vowel to replace the word “you’re” with “yer.” Both in theory and in method, it is easy to understand how oral tradition in gospel has remained an essential faculty for gospel music in history.

**Ethnic identity and choir membership**

Back in the rehearsal room, my eyes hesitate on a neon t-shirt that reads, “It’s All About Me.” This phrase made me think about the role of individual identity in the choir. The ability to transcend generations of political and racial oppression makes the history of gospel song in American culture very personal.

Distracted by thought, I slowly notice a young man with a bandana and baggy pants saunter in. He wanders over to one of the keyboards and motions for the other accompanying musician to follow. They take a small boom box from the corner and walk out. Fifteen minutes later they return, nod at Figgers, and take a seat behind the instruments. This clandestine operation confuses me, but I shortly learn that one of the gentlemen is Mitchell Lewis, the musical director (being different than the choral director, the music director is solely in charge of the instrumental musicians). Lewis has been with the choir for over five years, and is no longer a student at the university, although he attends rehearsals twice a week for a total of seven hours. His dedication to the music is admirable. Taught to play the piano by ear at an early age, his musical talents were utilized in the church, playing the organ, keyboard, and saxophone. His love for the choir and people has brought him back for so many years, and has given him just as much in return.

It is not until after interviewing a few members of the choir that I become aware of the unusually diverse musical and cultural experiences of the members. One of the most eye-catching members of the choir is Marianne Lipsius, a 52 year-old white woman sitting in the soprano section. Her eyes intent on the words on the page, she beams up

\(^{34}\) Marianne Lipsius, interview by author, 25 March 2003, minidisc recording, outside the choral rehearsal room, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
from her bifocals every once in a while to gauge the movement of the director, or ask a fastidious question. Her experience ranges from the Manhattan School of Music, to the Houston Grand Opera, and even Broadway, but nothing in gospel until now, she explained to me:

I mean I have always enjoyed it, but I couldn’t be further from the religious aspect of it, in terms of, I’m much more of a spiritual person. I just love the feeling. It’s people getting together, it’s like the kids say, you come in that room, you forget your cares for two hours and it’s just a wonderful feeling of community.35

Regardless of age, race, or ethnicity, the FSU Gospel Choir claims to provide an all-inclusive community in which Marianne feels a part of. On a different level, Antonio Cuyler (a graduate student in music who attended a performing arts high school, holds a BA in vocal performance, and was raised by a Pentecostal preacher) had this point to make in an interview with me:

Gospel music has been a part of my life as far back as I remember; the music is a very important part of the service, from beginning to end. It starts with a lot of congregational singing and within the service there sometimes seems to be no structure, but there is a structure, and there is a time when the choir sings. The singing is supposed to elevate the minds of the congregation to get them prepared to receive the word from the preacher.36

Outside the church, the role of gospel singing is somewhat different for the FSU Gospel Choir because they are not singing to accompany a preacher’s sermon or spiritually elevate a congregation. However the purpose behind the act of singing, worship through Christian music-making remains the same.

Several nights later I find myself making googly-eyes with the most beautiful baby I have ever seen (Figure 4). Tonight there are a number of children attending rehearsal, from a sprightly three-month-old infant to five- or six-year-old children; they accompany an adult who is a member, a musician, or simply a spectator (this happened on occasion, but never seemed to draw attention from either Michael or anyone else.)

35 Marianne Lipsius, interview by author, 25 March 2003, minidisc recording, outside the choral rehearsal room, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
36 Antonio Cuyler, interview by author, 9 April 2003, minidisc recording, outside the Allen Music Library, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
The children sit patiently, rock and sway with the choir, or beat out the percussion rhythms on their chairs with imaginary sticks. They are incredibly well-behaved and it is not long before I associate their situation with those of their guardians. Gospel music is so much a part of who they are, of where they are coming from, and who they are going to be. And although this does not hold true for everyone in the choir, even when not raised in this culture, the clapping, the movements, the vocal styles, the unity and closeness of the choir, both physically and emotionally, are electrifying.

In my interview with Michael Figgers, I asked him about issue of inclusion among various religions, and this was his response:

I do understand that everybody won’t look at the music as purely an art form and they may have a problem with some of the lyrics or the meanings of some of the music. There was a young lady who was Jewish. She had a lot of problems with some of the songs that alluded to Christ, to Jesus being the actual Son of God. And I explained to her that there are times in other ensembles I am part of that I have to sing music, that not necessarily support what I believe, but because of the ensemble I am a part of, because it’s a part of the genre we are studying, I do it as an art form. I participate because it is a part of what I am studying. It doesn’t affect my faith. If you can look at it like that rather than “we are trying to convince everybody else and you that this is the right way to go,” then I think you’ll enjoy it a little better. She said, “okay, I’ll do that.” But personally, it didn’t work for her. So she said, “nothing against you, I think you have been very, very fair to me, but it rubs against my faith too hard,” and it’s one of those things. You know, you can join vocal jazz and you would never have that problem unless you just hated jazz, you know? But this is an art form that sits right down in the middle of faith. And I see that as being an ongoing problem. The more popular the choir gets, the more people you are going to see coming in from different backgrounds, and you are going to have to deal with the fact that it is going to be different for people of different beliefs. But if you love
the art form enough, and can see it as just an art form, that would be great. Personally, I believe that is hard to do, but I encourage it.37

Michael Figgers was open to allowing a woman from a very different religious background join the ensemble and left the decision to remain in the ensemble up to her. Figgers did not try to accommodate her beliefs by altering the song texts, which would historically and contextually change the music.

**Spring Concert**

On March 29, 2003 the Gospel Choir hosted their spring concert at Christian Heritage Church in Tallahassee. I arrive around 5:30 p.m. and the energy level is high, but no one seems overly nervous. The pentagonal sanctuary is nearly empty upon arrival, which is rather unusual for a 6:00 performance, but I imagine the guests will arrive shortly. Having been to the dress rehearsal the night before, I am not surprised at the colossal pulpit or extremely high tech equipment already being put to use. Behind the choir loft is a wide screen canvas advertising events and support groups held at the church. Booming on the surround-sound speakers, a contemporary Christian rock band is singing praise in four part harmony juxtaposed over an electric guitar and drum backbeat and I follow the choir around a maze of hallways into a warm choral rehearsal room.

![Figure 5: Michael Figgers leads in the choir in prayer before the spring concert](image)

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37 Michael Figgers, interview by author, 9 April 2003, minidisc recording, KMU lounge, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.

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Figgers leads the group in prayer and thanks the choir for all of their hard work, as this will be his last year with the choir (Figure 5). “There are two things I ask for in this concert: that you sing with your heart and that you enjoy the songs and enjoy the music. Leaders, it is your job to usher us into praise. There are times when we get on each others’ nerves, or when we have spent a little too much time together, but tonight we come as one.”38 Prayer was also a common part of rehearsals, as was the feeling of community that developed among choir members. This was also a part of Michael Figgers’ pedagogy. In fact, he often gave instructions to “hug three people before you leave” after a prayer (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Choir members embrace before dress rehearsal

Back in the sanctuary I take my seat and await the arrival of what feels like a much anticipated reward. Reverend Calvin MacFadden, Master of Ceremony, begins, “Turn and touch your neighbor and say ‘you’d better get ready...cause somethin’s gonna happen tonight’.” “Uh-huh” and “Amen” are shouted from the audience. “Touch your neighbor and tell them ‘I am glad you are here tonight’.” The crowd is ready; they are standing, hollering, whooping, and shaking their bodies from side to side. I am ready for

38 Michael Figgers, interview by author, 9 April 2003, minidisc recording, KMU lounge, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
smoke and fire to come shooting from the stage, when the drums begin and the singers enter from the side entrances.

![Figure 7: FSU Liturgical Dancers](image)

The concert continues in this fashion, alternating between fast and slow pieces; the crowd responds accordingly. Whether it is clapping and swaying from side to side, or a simple hand in the air, I watch the crowd consuming the music of glory and praise. At one point Figgers asks the tenors in the audience to stand and sing with the tenor section, the altos following, and finally the sopranos. The audience is infused with spirit and energy, waving their hands in the air and sing along to the melody. During one song the FSU Liturgical Dancers perform, moving their bodies in accordance with the meaning of the text (Figure 7).

Later in my interviews I address the issue of religion and its role, not only in the choir, but also in the institution. Choir member, Antonio Cuyler, for example, states:

I’m ecstatic about it, and I think it is one of those things that has kept people intimidated by the idea of studying gospel music because there are those religious elements. Both those religious elements can mean so many different things to so many different people. I think having gospel music in an environment like Florida State University, because the words mean so many different things to so many different people, that there is not one religion [being] preached and forced upon anybody. You go, you participate in the rehearsals and you listen to the songs, and it gives you your own individual way of praising or worshipping, whether you are Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, whatever. And I think it’s a wonderful thing. Also, in our institution it brings together people of different cultures. You have a lot of cultural barriers and stereotypes broken down, so much so that we have a multicultural gospel choir. And it’s funny to think that this music that is religious and
so close to a certain group of people’s heritage, can bring together so many people from
different backgrounds and different ethnicities, it’s wonderful. If jazz can do it, then why
not gospel music?39

Antonio Cuyler continued:

Unfortunately, it is one of the black music idioms that have been marginalized. Jazz
music has received much of the attention and fame; perhaps because it is secular. I
anticipate in the future there will be opportunities for gospel classes like there are with
jazz, jazz ensembles and jazz history; because I think without gospel music there would
be no jazz. Actually without the Negro spirituals there would be no gospel or jazz. It
would be amazing to implement that in the academic institutions in course work.40

While jazz is an integral part of American music education today, this was not always the
case. Between the 1930s and the 1950s jazz came under attack because it was thought to
have a degenerative effect on music students. It was not until the 1960s and 70s when
jazz was gradually accepted into music programs, mainly because it was no longer
regarded as entertainment, but also because extracurricular jazz programs were highly
successful.41 Antonio Cuyler is just one of the many musicians who would like to see
gospel music take a greater place in academics in general. Similarly, Brian Wingate is a
gentleman who volunteers to play the piano at intermission; “I wish there was a class
offered on gospel music because there is so much to it; there is so much to learn.”42

Another choir member, Marianne Lipsius, adds the following: “A higher power is at the
universal concept, and I think that people understand that it’s okay that you can sing
about any higher power, it doesn’t matter, it just makes you feel good inside.”43 While it
seems certain that gospel music will continue to grow in academia, it is clear that diverse
cultural backgrounds will influence this development.

39 Antonio Cuyler, interview by author, 9 April 2003, minidisc recording, outside the Allen Music Library,
FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
40 id.
41 L. Porter and Michael Ullman. Jazz: From its Origins to the Present. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:
42 Brian Wingate, interview by author, 28 March 2003, minidisc recording, Christian Heritage Church,
Tallahassee, FL.
43 Marianne Lipsius, interview by author, 25 March 2003, minidisc recording, outside the choral rehearsal
room, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
Summary

The history of gospel is a clear indication that the minimal requirement is simply a few devoted people with a passion for singing. Infused with music from a plethora of genres, including R&B, country, hip-hop, jazz, rap, and pop, contemporary gospel is making its way into the lives of musicians from all over the world. The rapid growth in the recording industry makes the music more accessible and available for people from many different backgrounds. Gospel music can exist and be successful without notation in sheet music or instrument accompaniment; therefore, one never has to study a score in order to understand the music.

Although both Michael Figgers and musical director Mitchell Lewis have musically and spiritually evolved from the gospel community, they emphasize their belief that gospel music is for everybody:

This year supports that a whole lot because this is the first year that we have had as many Caucasians, we’ve had Koreans in the choir, we’ve had a blast just seeing...and we’ve almost got it half-and-half now, and that’s the way I’ve always envisioned it because it’s not “that black music.” And we know the whole story, the history behind it; it started in the slave fields, song writers took hymns that were brought over and mixed it with the songs that were being made up in the cotton fields and, of course, evolved and evolved and, of course, with their religious experiences we came out with this thing called gospel. But gospel music is for everybody and that’s the way I feel. And I also feel that gospel music is not only for everybody, whether it’s your faith, or whether you just see it as an art form, or like the musical genre. I have a problem when it’s thought of as being less standard than any other genre, and the reason why, and that’s partly our fault (those of us being in the gospel industry) because it needs to be done right. It needs to be polished and done in a perfected kind of way, rather than “okay, throw some singers over there, put a drum and piano over here, and just do whatever you want to do.” As long as it is being perceived the right way, I don’t have a problem with it being “world music.”

In the field of Ethnomusicology, African American gospel music is considered under the rubric of “world music,” and efforts are being made to teach it the “right” way.

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44 Michael Figgers, interview by author, 9 April 2003, minidisc recording, KMU lounge, FSU School of Music, Tallahassee, FL.
Before the final song of the concert, Michael Figgers told the following story behind his song, as I wrote in my field notes:

While attending FAMU as an undergraduate, Michael was in the choir with a very talented man who always looked very down on himself. Regardless of how many times Michael told him that he would get through it, tragically, the young man shot himself, inspiring the composition of this song. “You may not have tomorrow...why not today?” Michael sings with his eyes closed, arms extended towards the sky, as sweat and tears pour down his face (Figure 8). Though it is not the first time during the concert, goose bumps form on my skin, and my throat becomes tight with emotion. It is then I remember Michael’s words during an earlier rehearsal, “It ain’t hard to touch somebody with your song, when your song is real to you.”

A woman behind me waved her arms in the air, tears streaming down her face, rocking back and forth. I did not know who she was, or what her story may have told, but I know that the music was just as real to her as it was to me.

Through Michael Figgers and the choir, my understanding of gospel music has been enriched tenfold. In the coming pages of this thesis, I use these initial experiences

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Figure 8: Michael Figgers sings “Why Not Today?”

45 Michael Figgers, spoken during concert, 29 March 2003, minidisc recording, Christian Heritage Church, Tallahassee, FL.
with the FSU Gospel Choir as a point of reference for my work at Bethel with the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir. Once a general familiarity set in with the gospel community, I examined some of the pedagogical tools involved in gospel music transmission.

In this chapter I have discussed my primary reactions to the gospel community. Divided into six fundamental categories essential to cultural understanding: history, teaching methodologies, ethnic identity, religion and the academic institution, and building a gospel choir, this chapter provided a first look at pedagogy expressed ethnographically and assessed the value in an ethno-pedagogical approach to fieldwork research. Additionally, this chapter was designed as an introduction to a gospel experience from a narrative perspective and will serve as a point of departure for the remainder of the thesis.
CHAPTER TWO

“OH, HAPPY DAY”: THE HISTORY OF MUSIC IN THE A.M.E. CHURCH

Before examining the Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir, it is important to provide a historical background of the A.M.E. Church in United States and Tallahassee, Florida. This chapter will present such an overview, focusing on the role of music in worship and tracing the roots of the first African American hymnal, from its inception to the present. Moreover, it will provide a closer look at the history of the music program at Bethel A.M.E. Church in Tallahassee, with special attention to the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir.

Richard Allen and the African Methodist Episcopal Church

Stripped of their clothes, bound in chains, and separated from their families, Africans were brought as slaves to the “New World” by the millions. Despite tribal differences, linguistic barriers, and clashing histories, many slaves developed a comradeship and retained memories of the rich cultural traditions left behind and passed them down to their children. Music and dance traditions functioned as a communal activity which eventually led to the development of slave-song repertories, “shout songs,” and spirituals that provided a release from the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual brutality of slavery. Regardless of the interaction taking place between African and colonizing communities, black musicians maintained a predilection for certain performance practices, musical instruments, and cultural habits rooted in African experiences and aesthetics.

Concerned for the souls of the slaves, white missionaries began to convert black slaves to Christianity and instruct them in psalm singing and hymnody. The white land owners did not encourage this conversion, fearing that it would lead to freedom, but the slaves continued to pursue Christian beliefs and practices. Many of the slaves joined the Methodist and Baptist churches of their masters, and as black membership increased, they

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46 It is important to consider the implications of referring to Africans of the New World as “slaves.” This is one example of a term used historically to conceptualize a fixed definition. For more information on race and ethnicity, see Blum (2002).
began to form separate churches. Though still under white dominion, Baptist and Methodist services provided a more emotional and ecstatic form of worship akin to their African ancestry. However, it was not until the late nineteenth century and after the separatist movement at St. George Methodist in Pennsylvania, that a foundation was placed for the African American Church in America.

One early Sunday morning in 1787, three young black men kneeled to pray at the altar of St. George Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

It was not long before they were summoned and pulled to their feet, “You must get up – you must not kneel here,” said one of the white men. Reverend Absalom Jones replied, “Wait until prayer is over.” Pulling him off his knees the white man said, “No, you must get up now or I will call for aid and force you away.” Rev. Jones answered, “Wait until prayer is over and I will get up and trouble you no more,” and by the time the prayer was over, the three men and the remainder of the black congregation had left the church and were no longer “plagued with the church.”

This movement instigated the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and allowed black Americans the opportunity to worship without the constraints and restrictions of the white church.

The emergence of the African American Church has been identified as one of the first acts of protest against racial discrimination and segregation in America. The movement away from white authority paved the way for further acts of resistance in the church later on. The organization and worship practices of the Methodist church became a model for the African American church. In the African Methodist Episcopal Church, worship services retained many elements extracted from the Methodist and Episcopal churches, but infused their services with black style and presentation. So why did black leaders choose to remain associated with Methodist and Episcopal institutions when

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47 Toward the end of the eighteenth century, many Methodist and Baptist churches were some of the first to establish self-governing congregations. However, they still remained under white authority and created frustration among its African American members. It was not until the creation of the Free African Society that an independent African American religious society was created. (Southern, 71-73).
49 Recent sources claim Richard Allen was incorrect in his citation of the incident at St. George’s Methodist Cathedral and state the year 1792 was a more likely date for this occurrence. See Eileen Southern, (1997).
racial injustices within the church had been the primary cause of separation in the first place?

Richard Allen (Figure 9), founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.), withdrew from St. George’s Methodist Church as a matter of protest against the insulting practice of racial discrimination and segregation, which in turn led to the liberation of Blacks from many other Christian faiths. Despite social separation, Black Methodists harbored no feelings of dissension towards the Methodist church and in fact, were highly influenced by Jon Wesley’s (founder of the Methodist church) philosophy of universal salvation and brotherhood of all men through Jesus Christ and therefore remained associated with the Methodist Church.  

Similarly, the decision to adhere to Episcopal doctrines, though rejected by American Methodists, was extremely appealing to early black pioneers. Unaccustomed to governing themselves (many people were still slaves at this time), the selection of an effective form of government was of paramount importance for the founders of the A.M.E. church. In order to build a strong and viable religious institution, the church needed intelligent and innovative leaders to codify the foundation of the African American church.

It was through the teachings of Jon Wesley and the use of governmental forms modeled from the Episcopal Church that Richard Allen and other blacks began to establish a sense of personal dignity and spiritual independence. Allen modified the worship style to accommodate the needs of the black congregation, which in turn reshaped the musical tradition of African Methodists. In addressing his congregation on the issue of hymnbooks, Allen said, “Having become a distinct and separate body of people, there is no collection of hymns we could with propriety adopt.” Allen’s solution was to publish his own hymnal specific to the worshipping needs of Black Methodists.

53 Whitlock, 9.
Richard Allen’s Hymnals

In 1801 Allen published *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors*, the first hymnal published exclusively for use in the African American church. While Allen could have easily adopted the Methodist hymnal, he instead “consciously set about to collect hymns that would have a special appeal to the members of his congregation, hymns that undoubtedly were long-time favorites of black Americans.” As opposed to hymns selected by white missionaries and ministers in earlier Methodist worship services, the hymns selected for the 1801 hymnal reflected black ideologies and were chosen based on their social and spiritual significance among blacks. (See Appendix B).

The first edition of Allen’s 1801 hymnal contained fifty-four hymn texts, without musical notation, drawn mainly from the collections of Isaac Watts, Charles and John

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Wesley, and other popular hymnodists from Methodist and Baptist Churches. Like many other hymnals of the time, Allen’s collection was in the form of a “pocket hymnal,” without any guidelines to the tunes or melodies of the text, though it has been said that many of the hymns were sung to familiar tunes used in other churches and, in some cases, even originally composed or adapted from popular tunes.  

A second edition of the hymnal was released later in 1818, titled *A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs, from Various Authors*, which included ten more texts, some composed by Richard Allen himself.

In 1816 Allen became the first bishop of the A.M.E. Church and traveled the country extensively, establishing African Methodism in various locations. While on his travels he set up congregations, established rules and procedures, and most importantly, reached thousands through his preaching and singing of hymns from his 1801, 1808, and later, 1818 hymnals.

In 1818 Allen published the first official hymnbook of the A.M.E. church, which was also the first published document produced by the oldest black-owned publishing company in the country, the A.M.E. Book Concern. Following the publication of the 1818 hymnal, other hymnals were periodically published without significant changes. It was not until the 1889 hymnal publication that musical notation was included.

The music itself, as performed in the worship service, was described by eighteenth and nineteenth century Euro-Americans as “wild,” “strange,” “nonsensical,” and even “barbaric.” Musical elements such as call-and-response, improvisation, ornamentation, and rhythmic complexity, grounded in West African performance practices, were separated from the singing of European hymns until the separatist movement in the late-eighteenth century. It was only after the development of the African

59 Eileen Southern, 2001. See Abbington, James, ed. 143.
60 Portia Maultsby, 2001. See Abbington, James, ed. 88.
American Church that these elements could be articulated to the degree and in the capacity desired by the black community. Dating back to Christian conversion by white missionaries, blacks were emotionally, physically, and spiritually confined to the conservative worship practices of the white population. Allen encouraged freedom of expression through song, which gave European hymns by composers such as Wesley and Watts, the aesthetic quality that later informed black religious genres, including spirituals.

Around 1841 Bishop Daniel Payne was the first to replace the hymn lining out technique with choirs and choral sacred music singing in the church. Because of this, the A.M.E. Church placed more emphasis on preaching, prayer, and fellowship, and incorporated more diverse musical styles.

At the turn of the century was the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, a meeting for church leaders who “received the gift of the Holy Spirit” and encouraged their congregations to become a part of the Pentecostal movement. The influence of African traditions was much more evident in Pentecostal Churches than any of the other churches (spirit possession, holy dancing, improvisatory singing, the use of drums, hand-clapping, and foot-stomping.) It was also from this period that minister and hymn writer Charles Albert Tindley began to develop a new religious genre known as gospel.

Figure 10: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Orange St., Tallahassee, FL
The History of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Tallahassee, FL

Founded by Reverends Robert Meacham, William Stewart, and Charles Pearce between 1865 and 1867, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Figure 10 and Figure 11) was originally located in convenient downtown Tallahassee. It has since moved from the education building next to the original location in the late 1970s, to the Florida A&M University Campus, and finally to its current location on South Orange Street. Over the past 50 years Bethel has undergone severe changes in response to a number of political and social events, particularly the Civil Rights Movement, which has been reflected in the music program. In an interview with Dr. Rosalie Hill, I asked her about the structural changes in the music program that have occurred since she began attending Bethel in 1953. She responded with the following:

Worship changes as people change, or as the environment changes [meaning the social environment that we all live.] So as that changed, the music changed, the taste of people changed, and that sort of thing. Because we are the largest in terms of black churches in town, you attract all kinds of people coming to our church...you learn to try to make the music in the worship service go along with the changes that people are experiencing in order to keep them here. When I first started we were a very, very, conservative church, with everything, because most of our members were people who taught on the university campus or who were teachers because in that day, for the black population, that’s what you were. During the Civil Rights Movement we were very busy and involved and many of our members were leaders in the movement and helping to make things happen and get things done and being spokespeople for whatever the issues were and all of that. When you are dealing with the college students, who I don’t care what era we are talking about, they are always “rebellious” or whatever and I don’t see it as being rebellious now, I guess I did when I was younger, but its not, it’s just that they’re on top of the issue because they’re impacted by it in a different way...After we got out of the Civil Rights Movement, and we’re not really out of it because the NAACP and Urban League and all of those groups still use this [Bethel] as the hub for those activities and if you watch the newspaper when there are issues that impact the community, they come to Bethel to meet. So we still play a strong role in what you would call community change. That’s something we live with and we don’t have a problem with accepting. Given that kind of backdrop, of course your music is going to change.61

From Virginia Street in Tallahassee to the predominantly African American neighborhoods on the south side of town, Bethel’s community expanded rapidly between

1979 and 1984 during relocation. Because of the unexpected growth in the church community, Bethel created five choirs, each catering towards a specific demographic in the congregation, including the following: Heritage Choir, Male Choir, Anthem Choir (also later known as the Sanctuary Choir), Children’s Choir, and the Youth Choir, which also later became the Gospel Choir. It was not until recently the Gospel Choir became known as the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir that allowed a more inclusive membership as well as offered the musicians the opportunity to sing the more contemporary and popular gospel pieces that are heard today on the radio, in concert halls, and recognized in national and international music award ceremonies.

The rich and engaging history of the music program continues unfold with each and every change within the Bethel community. Under the ministry of Reverend A.F. Little in the 1950’s, the music at Bethel took on the solemnity of the music as outlined in the A.M.E. doctrines. Two choirs sang mostly hymns, chants, and introits, but it was also during this time that spirituals were introduced and accepted at Bethel. In 1958 the
children’s choir was started, the male chorus introduced, and Youth Choirs were developed under the direction of Dr. Rosalie Hill in 1961. Unfortunately, in 1964, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, the Youth Choir was reprimanded for singing “What Is This,” a popular gospel song with controversial texts, and therefore it was dispelled. It was not until 1982 that the choir was reestablished and began to significantly grow in number.

Led by director Marty Lamar and later Dexter Harris, a student at Florida A&M University, the choir developed a unique vibrant spirit and powerful volume that created a draw for participants and frequent invitations to participate in programs at other churches. A few years later the Collegiate Choir was formed, but because of the eventual lack of membership, it was then combined with the Youth Choir in 1993. Subsequently, more choirs were added to the music program in the 1990s, as well as a music studio, percussion instruments in worship services, and the hiring of a Minister of Music in 1995. Toward the end of the twentieth century and in early 2000 the music program was reorganized to incorporate the musical changes in mainstream gospel and worship music. Service music took on a more contemporary flavor; the number of praise and worship songs sung increased as the number of hymns used decreased.62

In recent years, the Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult choir has participated in citywide festivals and community events, provided background music for the Tallahassee Museum documentary on slavery, traveled throughout the southeast performing at various churches, and entered the twenty-first century blessed with extraordinary talent and the determination to break new grounds for musical worship in the A.M.E. Church. Historically, Bethel A.M.E. Church in Tallahassee has undergone significant changes in its music program. It is important to note, however, that while gospel music is fairly new to mainstream and contemporary worship services in many other churches, it has been a long standing tradition in the Bethel community for decades.

**Summary**

While Methodist and Episcopal doctrines permeated much of early African Methodist Episcopal Church practices, the music was defined primarily by the African

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American experience. The creation of hymn texts specific to the African American church community, as seen in Richard Allen’s hymnals of the nineteenth century, allowed blacks to worship and celebrate according to their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs.

This chapter examined the history of the A.M.E. church and highlighted the importance of music in the worship service in response to social, political, and economic influences over time. The following chapters will examine ethnic identity, choir membership, performance, and instructional techniques that I researched during fieldwork and convey their significance in approaching a gospel choir through an ethnopedagogical lens.
CHAPTER THREE

“IT’S ALL ABOUT ME”: ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CHOIR MEMBERSHIP

The Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir

Through narrative ethnography, this chapter introduces some of the personal idiosyncrasies that comprise the Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir. The primary purpose of this chapter is to act as an introduction to both the members of the choir and the choir directors. By narrowing the scope of this study to a very specific culture, the personal identities within the Bethel choir allow pedagogical elements to be discussed from a more personal perspective.

Meeting the choir

It was a rainy night in October 2003 when I first met Dr. Rosalie Hill. The Faith Presbyterian Choir I was a member of was singing at the Myron Munday Concert, a concert honoring the memory of an organist, and sponsored by many of the local church choirs. Afterwards I approached Dr. Hill and inquired about the possibility of conducting
my thesis research at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Tallahassee. She smiled, shook my hand, squinted her dark eyes and said, “Why don’t you call me beforehand and we can discuss it.” I didn’t call her until January of 2004. It wasn’t that I was afraid of rejection; rather, I was unsure of how I was going to approach my research. 

A woman slight in stature, but large in presence, I had been told that Dr. Rosalie Hill ran the show at Bethel A.M.E. Church. Having been there for over fifty years, her roots in the Bethel community ran deep, which was apparent in observing her interact with the other members of the church. Whether she was talking to the choir, the other music directors, or the pastor, no one else spoke when she was speaking. When she walked into a rehearsal, people sat upright in their seats, focused and intent on the music, as she would glance over at them approvingly. From a distance she could seem intimidating, almost stoic and distant, but up close she was warm, personable, and more than willing to share her experiences at Bethel with me.

Prior to my arrival at Bethel A.M.E. Church I was prepared to encounter a certain amount of conflict during the fieldwork process. What I did not anticipate, however, was the incredible amount of internal conflict that I would come to deal with. The most difficult obstacle was to overcome my own apprehension about people’s willingness to share their own culture and not to view myself as an imposition. The initial request to work with the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir was incredibly challenging because it required me to question my own position as an ethnomusicologist. What did I want to know about gospel music and why? Other than an honest love for the music, at that time, I had little more to offer. Gradually, through my own pedagogical process and in getting to know the choir, I began to figure that out.

### Limits of Study

On a large lot on the south end of town, Bethel is situated at the heart of a predominantly African American neighborhood a few blocks from Florida A&M University. I pull into the parking lot and am immediately surprised by the luxury automobiles aligning the building: Lexus, Mercedes, and Cadillac, suddenly and thankfully aware that subconsciously, my own personal stereotyping was being challenged. Before coming to Bethel I had unknowingly created an image of what
fieldwork would comprise of in a southern black church: a modest building, middle-class families, and a humble approach to Sunday services. I later found out in an interview that my own ignorance was the reason for the misconception.

The daughter of a minister, Jacqueline Henderson was raised in the A.M.E. Church, but had recently joined the church with which I was employed. Because my relationship with Jacqueline was of a much more personal nature, I was able to share with her some preliminary reactions to the fieldwork experience. I explained that my initial perceptions were inaccurate, because what I had found was a congregation of wealthy, and very well educated people, generally speaking of course. Jacqueline responded with the following:

Well, there are A.M.E. churches that are “southern,” they aren’t as educated, but Bethel is considered the “First Church.” In most cities the churches by the name of “Bethel” are considered upper middle class and that is something you should know. Many people wouldn’t have given you the benefit of the doubt.63

Jacqueline’s honestly provided a bit of realism to my own ethnomusicological work. Without even realizing it, I had inaccurately perceived the Bethel community as the extraordinary “other,” “imposing on them this value of exoticism...in a reversal of ordinary ethnocentrism.”64 I began to wonder if my own personal stereotyping was going to be a struggle throughout my research, and if so, how was I going to deal with my position as an “outsider” in relation to the Bethel community? Would this inhibit their ability to share their culture and music with me? How would it change my perceptions of the learning processes involved in teaching gospel music? Fortunately, these were questions that became somewhat irrelevant once I was introduced to the choir and its members. I write in the ethnographic present to share that experience.

Entering the doors at Bethel, a woman shows me around the corner and I walk into the expansive sanctuary to find a seat in the third pew. The Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir sit in a raised loft on the left-hand side of the pulpit and directly in front of where I am located. I am late, which causes even more attention directed toward me, but they are going through a selection for Sunday’s service and barely pay notice.

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63 Jacqueline Henderson, interview by author, 31 March 2004, minidisc recording, Faith Presbyterian Church, Tallahassee, FL.
Figure 43: The Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir in rehearsal

“I’m BLE-SSED, God knows I’m blessed. As I look all around me, I realize...I am blessed,” they sing in unison (Figure 13). The women in the choir look at each other, shake their heads, and sing. Marty Lamar, the choir’s director, speaks the words as the choir repeats after him, “I can’t explain it; it’s amazing the Lord keeps on blessing me.” Given the constant rocking and occasional shout from the choir, the overall energy is high and enjoyment seemed to be a key element in making the rehearsal a success.

Marty Lamar is one of the most talented musicians I have ever met. He is able to conduct the choir and sing various vocal parts, while simultaneously improvising on the piano and stomping out the beat with his right foot. Extremely tall, with a voice that could carry from one end of the sanctuary to the other, he resembles a star football player rather than a choral director. I am even more surprised to learn that he is a full-time music teacher at a nearby elementary school, simply because his presence is so powerful and would seem almost intimidating to someone three feet tall. On the contrary, Marty is anything but. His boisterous laugh and energy for life permeates rehearsals, which are interjected with stories about his family or friends. Extremely comfortable directing the
choir, the Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir seem more of a close family than a church organization.

After about an hour of rehearsal, Marty makes a few announcements and asks me to introduce myself to the choir. I do so and the choir then invites me to join their circle for a closing prayer. I am delighted and although I had a similar experience with the FSU gospel choir, the opening and closing prayers at Bethel are incomparable. We close our eyes, hold hands, and stand in a circle while Marty accompanied the meditative prayers on the piano. At random, members of the choir make personal, professional, or spiritual requests of support for their current quandary. After everyone makes their individual requests, the choir sings the end of a common hymn or gospel song learned previously in rehearsal.

This type of structural organization carried on for nearly all of the rehearsals I attended: a shorter prayer to commence the rehearsal and an extended prayer at the end, accompanied by improvised playing on the piano. It was during these moments of prayer that I finally began to realize that while the choir was there to worship and praise God, I was also carrying out my own service to God. One and the same, my own personal stereotypes had been broken by this shared belief. Once this realization occurred, I was then able to see the choir open up. On one occasion the opening prayer invited a much more transcendental worship experience than anything I had previously witnessed.

Transcendence in Rehearsal

On a sunny day in March, I walk into rehearsal to see the choir members already clapping and stomping their feet to a familiar song. Once their voices are warmed up, Marty begins to play a slower piece on the piano and the members join hands in a circle. For the majority of rehearsals I would join them at this point, but today I decide not to. “We shall leave this place...” Marty sings repeatedly with his eyes closed and head dropped over the piano. The lyrics admit imperfection and express the need to surrender to a higher authority; to remove tangibility and create a deeper level of spiritual connectivity.
Welcome to this place, welcome into this broken vessel, you desire to abide in the praises of your people, so we lift our hands, and we lift our hearts, as we offer up, this praise unto your name.

On the third repetition of the verse, the piano crescendos to a climax and hands are raised in unison. The repetitions continue and Marty leads the choir into another piece entitled “Oh, How I Love Jesus.” A dominant male voice improvises the melody and choral melodies interject with shouting prayers (Figure 14). Some members of the choir are silent, while others mumble praises. A female voice takes the lead and few minutes later the choir begins to sing a familiar hymn in four part harmony.

Figure 14: Dexter Harris in rehearsal

This form of worship continues for over twenty-five minutes, the singers and even the director seem almost removed from their current state of being and into a higher place. The music transcends the here and now and carries them into a state of relaxation, free of burden. The repetition in the chorus is sedative, soothing, and gives an impression of calmness and peace. Near thirty minutes into the praising, Marty vamps the chords on
the piano and the choir sings in harmony, “We need you,” “We love you,” “We adore you,” and “We lift you” (Figure 15). On the final phrase, the intensity builds on the piano, accelerating in tempo, and everyone starts clapping, swaying, rocking back and forth and eventually, leading the song to a close.

![Figure 15: Kim Stevenson sings praise in rehearsal](image)

Afterwards Marty says his original plan was to go through a new song, but it could wait until Saturday. The feeling in the sanctuary is one of resolution and contemplation. The singers appear more subdued, smiling gratefully, and some even hold each other afterwards. Marty says, “I needed that,” and seems very satisfied with the outcome of the rehearsal. Even though it is not one of musical productivity, per se, it provides a different level of camaraderie and understanding among the choir members. Without the particular personalities that comprise the choir, an experience like this is difficult to imitate. The individual persons in the choir, the ethnic identities that create the choir as a whole, allow an experience like this to take place. Later in an interview with Dr. Hill, I talked to her about my experience with the choir and asked if she had had a similar experience in any of her rehearsals. She responded with the following:
That is part of the reason why I ask people what worship is. And there is a healing; there is a balm in Gilead. There is a healing, but it has to do with your ability, your willingness, and your openness to really communicate with God. I mean that puts everything else outside of your realm. You don’t know that Jay Jones was sittin’ over there, because that’s not what you’re there for. If you’re really worshipping, you’re trying in your own way, whatever that might be, to tune in with the presence of a Magnificent Creator, that’s a different peace. That’s not an intellectual here again. That’s deeper.

I then asked her if she thought music might have some influence, and this was her response:

Oh yeah, I think so. It’s like yoga. Yeah. And I know even for me, when I have had all of the struggling that I have to do up here everyday, I go home and 12:00 at night I am at my piano. And I may be just as sleepy as I wanna be, but once I get there I’ll sit there a couple of hours and I can deal with it. And I can calm down and I can be at peace with myself. But that’s an inward thing and I try to help my choir understand that we all have our own way of tuning in. You know? But you learn that as you go, that’s not something that happens overnight. You learn that as you move along and it’s a maturation kind of peace. Some people can go within and some people can’t. That what’s yoga is about, they teach you how to focus inwardly and into your spiritual self.55

As Dr. Hill stated, the inner spirituality and inward focus created during a praise session is not one that can be taught, but it is certainly something to strive for and encouraged in the Bethel community. Dr. Hill’s analogy between music and yoga suggests that they act as facilitators to achieving something greater. Historically, African American musics have been manifesting spiritual (as well as political and social) freedoms for centuries. Joseph Murphy states that music becomes a “fluid vehicle for the inchoate, winged power of the Holy Spirit to allow the body to experience its true freedom in the Promised Land. The Holy Spirit is located in the body of the congregants and revealed when the actions of the community show the joyful speech and behavior of shouting.”66 The actions and identities that comprise the Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir allowed this particular experience to happen. Because I was further along in the pedagogical process, my own issues of conflict had been identified and stereotypes challenged, I was fortunate enough to be a witness to this transcendental experience.

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55 Rosalie Hill, interview by author, 1 April 2004, minidisc recording, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church library, Tallahassee, FL.
Summary

Considered by Daniel Payne to be the “essence of religion,” music and dance functioned historically as a result of “shared consciousness born of their common trauma and troubles and communicated through the several rhythms of the song.” Whether it is common cultural thread, or is specific to this particular African American community, the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir at Bethel could evoke the most powerful spirit and jubilation through their singing.

After attending a few rehearsals, my intimidation and apprehension as an ethnographer had dissipated. Although I still remained in the pews as an observer, I felt a certain level of comfort with the members of the choir, and eventually, the staff at Bethel. The first few weeks at Bethel became a truly educational experience for me, both academically and personally – and I hoped that this experience would continue for me and be meaningful to the reader/applier. In this chapter I have discussed conflict in ethnographic fieldwork, limits of study, and linking identity in the gospel community through worship. This chapter focused on my personal and professional growth during the fieldwork experience and expressed my own understanding in the role of the ethnographer as cultural interpreter. I highlighted some of the personal idiosyncrasies that contribute to the Bethel A.M.E. gospel identity and emphasized the importance of edification in gospel singing, a unifying element among the members of the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir.

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67 Murphy, 174.
CHAPTER FOUR

“THE SOUND OF PRAISE”: PERFORMANCE AND POWER IN GOSPEL SINGING

“If your ministry to the Lord is just a concert, then this isn’t the ministry for you. If the communion stops, the communication stops.”

Marty Lamar addresses the choir with that statement during an evening rehearsal in preparation for their upcoming 2004 annual concert (Figure 16). One of the most common misconceptions about worship music is that the choir is present to entertain the congregation. Most churches take precautionary measures to prevent this from happening, but when the choir is far superior to the average church choir, it is often hard not to notice. While the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir is one of exceptional talent, Dr. Hill and Marty Lamar work hard to maintain a certain level of balance within the Sunday service. The choir in a performance setting, however, is a different story. In this chapter I examine the Bethel

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68 Marty Lamar, statement in rehearsal, 16 April 2004, minidisc recording, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Tallahassee, FL.
rehearsals as expressed through performance practices in three different settings: a community event, the worship service, and a church concert. In addition, I discuss pedagogical issues such as performance venues, the concert audience, achieving unity within the choir, guest conductors, and message in song texts. Moreover, this chapter expresses the powerful ability of gospel music to elicit an awesome spiritual and emotional atmosphere for all participators and observers alike. Again, I use the ethnographic present to convey this experience.

**Gospel Extravaganza**

On a Tuesday evening in late February, I am invited to attend a concert at TCC in honor of Black History Month. TCC, also known as Tallahassee Community College, lies on the outskirts of town, just off the road west (US20) towards Panama City. The parking lot is full when I arrive and the Student Union Building buzzing with activity before the concert. The small room has low ceilings and heavy curtains, making it a musician’s acoustical nightmare. The audience is comprised of mostly college students and choir members from neighboring churches. People mill about the room casually and remain close to the complimentary fried chicken and sweets.

**Performance venues**

It is important to establish rapport between the audience and performers as early as possible before the concert. Prior to the beginning of a choral concert the audience is generally unsettled, which is evident at TCC with people walking around, eating, and talking. Without a physical stage in front on the lined folding chairs in the Student Union at TCC, the audience is less likely to behave as they would during a church service. The director of a choir must be aware of the effects of setting on a performance and adapt his/her performance to accommodate these changes. Although the Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir are used to performing in the church, their experience in performing venues outside of Bethel has provided flexibility in their performance styles. Therefore, when they are faced with a new environment with which to perform, they are able to make adjustments to the physical space and audience. In this case, the
Bethel choir accepts the low ceilings, the lack of a platform or stage, and noisy concertgoers.

When the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir arrive, they mingle with the audience, sample some of the food, and seem to enjoy the overall relaxed atmosphere. I follow Marty Lamar and the rest of the choir members to rehearse in a nearby lounge, going over articulations and pronunciations, while interjecting keywords of support and power, such as “Amen!,” “Go on!,” “You know it,” between segments of each piece. The singers chat nervously and we say a final prayer before returning to the crowded room.

Amongst the eager concert goers, I take my seat and watch as the emcee checks the mike and begins: “Let it speak to you, let it open up your mind, open up your heart, open up your soul, and let us all agree to do that? Can we all agree to do that?” She was met with clapping and a round of “Amen” before the first choir arranges itself at the front of the room.

Following the very enthusiastic performance of the first choir, which is about 40 people strong, it is Bethel’s turn to take the stage. Marty says a few words before he begins, thanking the sponsors, pardoning the choir for an early dismissal, and finally asking the audience not to be “spectators but participators in our praise this evening.” Although they seemed slight in comparison to the first choir, without robes and nearly a quarter of the size, their sound proves otherwise. “Joy an’ sah-row, hope fo’ tomah-row, that’s what Jeh-sus is, that’s what Jeh-sus is...” Their sound bursts through the room as the choir rocks and sways to the steady beat on the drum set. The vowels are bright and articulate; the mood energetic and uplifting. Marty pounds the keys on the upright piano and towards the end of the song, segues nicely into the second piece, bringing the tempo, volume, and energy down to a more relaxed level. “Melodies from heaven, rain down on me, rain down on me...,” the men and women excitedly sing, restricting their voices to a softer volume and anticipating the powerful response it ignites in the crowd. About two minutes into the piece they can no longer hold back and are seemingly overwhelmed with emotion as their voices lead into a second song, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” and a third song, “Goin’ Up Yonder.” People begin to stand. Marty and the choir start to vamp the melody, modulate, and start singing the ever-famous “Oh, Happy Day.” The song induces an invigorating response from the crowd, who begin madly jumping up out of
their seats, clapping, stomping, waving their arms, and shouting high words of praise. The dynamics in the room shift from a casual evening of music, to a spiritual revival and Pentecostal-like offering to the Lord.

**The concert audience**

Gospel music has a variety of moods and must be selected based on its appropriateness for a particular occasion. Aside from individual tastes, the nature of the concert determines the receptivity of the audience. “Gospel Extravaganza” alludes to the notion that the audience is familiar with the gospel tradition. Given the joint efforts among the other church choirs to host the concert, the audience probably consists of a number of trained gospel musicians. Therefore, Marty chose a selection that is culturally or historically significant, but also slightly unique in its interpretation. Interspersed with traditional hymns, the “Oh, Happy Day” medley consisted of some of gospel’s most popular songs. Not only was the audience familiar with these songs, they were also aware of their historical significance in the gospel tradition and could appreciate the value in hearing these songs being performed at a Black History Month celebration. Marty Lamar left the audience wanting to hear more, which is one of the most effective ways to increase interest in both the music and the meaning behind the music.

**Founder’s Day**

While performances outside of the church take a more secular approach to praising the word of God, inside the sanctuary at Bethel, music is ministered in a somewhat different fashion. The first Sunday service I attend is Founder’s Day on February 8, 2004. The Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir spent their Saturday morning in rehearsal with the Bethel Liturgical Dance Company, Bethel Voices (the adult gospel choir) and the Bethel Orchestra. The service, titled “From Whence We Came,” is a celebration of both African American History Month and the A.M.E. Church’s Founder’s Day. The sermon and liturgy speak of the difficulties the church has faced, from its inception to the present, and to every point in between. The Reverend John F. Green tells of the connection between the strength of the African American people and their Almighty Creator during these times of tribulation, attributing their success to the
scripture “Greater is He that is in me, than that which is in the world.” 69 The music selected by Dr. Hill is historically reflective; old spirituals and standard hymns such as “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” “Come By Here,” “Woke up this Morning,” “Lily in the Valley,” and “We’ve Come This Far By Faith.”

When I asked Dr. Hill about the organizational structure of the music within the worship service, she provided this very informative response:

We start with the processional, then the “Praise God” is always our doxology, and then our opening hymn is what we call a hymn of praise. That’s always focus on God, or Christ, the creator...whatever you want to call it. The opening hymn is always of that nature. And then, of course, after the opening hymn there’s prayer, and then after the prayer there is the selection by the choir. What we try to do with that is encourage the choir to come up with selections that support and enhance whatever the message is for that Sunday. The hymns and the selection, and then there’s the scriptures, based on the liturgical calendar, and then we do “Gloria Patri” and there’s another selection. After that selection, what we do is to deal with the membership so to speak, cause you have welcome, have announcements and all of that kind of thing. The first thing was to recognize and acknowledge God, and acknowledge why we are here, so that’s the first part of it, and then you’re going to the congregation and the fellowship part of it. And after that and the offering, you’re back to worshipping of God. We then go to a sermonic hymn (sermonic hymn meaning that it is a hymn that too will speak to the message that the pastor is going to give) and then of course the sermon. After that we have the invitation, or what we call the opening of doors, because after you’ve heard the message, you’ve heard the prayer, you’ve heard the scripture and that kind of thing, and now we’re saying “all who would like to be a part of this body, whether you are people who are coming from somewhere else, or people who have never been a part of any religious body and who now see or have a belief in what we believe in, and that’s to travel in God, you know you can come join the church, come join the membership, so to speak. 70

While the structure of the church service remains much the same each week, there remains a bit of flexibility for musical selection and innovation. The Founder’s Day service provides an excellent example of how Dr. Hill’s creativity was just as integral as the liturgy and sermon.

Achieving unity

It is important to maintain both unity and variety for an effective choral program. Unity in the choir is often achieved by selecting songs that possess a definite literary or stylistic relationship. One way to do this is to select songs based on a central theme.

70 Rosalie Hill, interview by author, 1 April 2004, minidisc recording, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church library, Tallahassee, FL.
Dr. Hill selected hymns that highlighted the sermon and complimented the meaning behind the Founder’s Day service. I have extracted the first verse of each hymn as they occurred in the worship service below:

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim though this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more,
feed me till I want no more.

Come by here, my Lord, come by here.
Come by here, my Lord, come by here.
Come by here, my Lord, come by here.
Oh Lord, come by Here.

I woke up this mornin’ with my mind, it was stayed on freedom
I woke up this mornin’ with my mind, it was stayed on freedom
I woke up this mornin’ with my mind, it was stayed on freedom
Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia

There's a lily in the valley,
Bright as the morning star,
Lily in the valley,
Bright as the morning star,
Lily in the valley,
Bright as the morning star,
Amen, Amen, Amen

We've come this far by faith,
Leaning on the Lord;
Trusting in His holy word,
He's never failed me yet

Keeping in mind that the theme for the Founder’s Day service was titled “From Whence We Came,” Dr. Hill carefully sequenced the songs in the service according to their historical significance. Appropriately placed at the beginning of the service, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” a Methodist hymn included in Richard Allen’s early hymnals, reflects music that was used during the formation of the A.M.E. Church. The second, third, and fourth hymns are early spirituals, an African American musical tradition derived from camp meetings around the turn of the nineteenth century. Although spirituals were practiced before the establishment of the A.M.E. Church, they were not officially used in church services until much later. These hymns speak of faith and
devotion to God during the trials and tribulations endured by the African American Church. The final hymn, “We’ve Come This Far By Faith,” tells of the endurance and strength the A.M.E. Church will need to continue its spiritual development.

Careful analyses of the song texts chosen by Dr. Hill reveal her intentions to reflect upon the history of the church and the African American community. The songs selected inspire the congregation and the choir through song and prayer. Not only was she able to unify the Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir, she was also able to unify the choir with the congregation and use the music to convey a very emotional message. Whether it is the Gospel Extravaganza or the church service itself, performing (singing, playing, and dancing) is an essential element to understanding the culture of the Bethel community. In order to learn how musical performance is affected by various surroundings, it is necessary to view the choir as both an entertainment ensemble and a medium for attaining a spiritual connection with God during the worship service.

Figure 17: Musicians listen to director Marty Lamar during the dress rehearsal

“Worthy” Concert

A few months after the Founder’s Day service the choir was preparing for their upcoming spring concert to be held at the church (Figure 17). As early as a month before,
weekly rehearsals had been doubled, fund raising commenced, posters were being printed and distributed among the choir members, and Marty was determined to rehearse each song to perfection by the performance on April 17, titled “Worthy.” I write in the ethnographic present.

Around 6:00 on April 17, 2004 I arrive at Bethel A.M.E. Church anxious to see the months of hard work finally pay off for the Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Young Adult, and Collegiate Choir. At 6:30 the drummer, bass player, organist, and pianist are seated and ready to begin. People mill into the sanctuary until around 6:45 and the doors close as the spotlights illuminate the altar. As Marty Lamar enters the sanctuary, he grabs a microphone and orchestrates the entire congregation to join him in singing “This is the Day,” which immediately brings the audience to their feet, clapping and singing, shouting and swaying. “Take off a shoe, a jacket, a shirt, or something,” Marty advises the audience. “Tradition says that A.M.E. was not founded on praise, but you’ve gotta help us out in the spirit of praise,” he tells the audience. Pastor Jacqueline Kinnerly then takes the microphone and in a similar fashion to the FSU gospel choir concert, she directs the audience to turn to greet and compliment each other. She introduces the choir: “We
acknowledge your presence in this vessel, we acknowledge you among these young to bring glory and honor to your name.” As she speaks, her voice begins to rise both in pitch and in volume, building excitement for the introduction of the choir, as the audience claps, louder and louder until the choir finally walks onto the altar.

Marty Lamar had divided the concert into four sections; the first two sections are titled: “The Anthem,” a formal offering from the choir, and “The Praise,” which usually expresses worship and adoration for God, the source of all life. The first selection, “Worthy is the Lamb,” is directed by Dexter Harris, a member of the choir (CD Track 1). The opening chorus sounds similar to a Western choral piece and Dexter’s conducting style very closely resembles that of a professional orchestra director: metrically accurate, clear, and expressive. The choir members wear neutral colored outfits and each section stands erect in a circle around a designated microphone.

**Guest Conductors**

Using guest conductors for both rehearsals and concerts can be a valuable experience for a choir, as well as the choir director. Musicians are exposed to different conducting patterns, in turn developing an awareness of varying types of musical interpretation. A guest conductor elicits a different behavioral response from the choir, forcing them to be more attentive, and therefore more alert of the conducting movements and rehearsal techniques. Dexter Harris’ approach is much different than Marty Lamar’s approach. First of all, Dexter’s posture is erect and stable, as opposed to Marty, who walks back and forth in front of the choir while conducting. Dexter’s long arms and hands do most of the leading, while his body remains planted on the podium. Marty leads with his entire body: he jumps up and down, paces back and forth, and even turns in circles. While Dexter Harris and Marty Lamar have very different styles, their ability to elicit a particular musical response from the choir is equally successful. However, the overall response from the choir is very different. The way one choir reacts to one director may be very different than another, which also affects the reflection of the music and the performance. I return to the “Worthy” Concert in the ethnographic present.

Following the first song, the instrumentalists lead straight into the second song without breaking. Of a much quicker and livelier tempo, the audience is brought to their
feet and joins in clapping with the choir. Marty Lamar moves to the front of the altar and claps the beat, while the choir was led by a male soloist, who is seemingly disappointed with the microphone quality. The instrumentalists vamp toward the end of the song so that Marty can switch microphones and in the third selection, Marty is the featured soloist. This makes conducting the choir fairly difficult, but Marty manages by facing both the choir and audience, viewing each with his peripheral vision, and walking back and forth throughout the song. He bends backwards, jumping up and down, to motivate the choir and elevate the mood of the audience. When he does this, particular phrases are accented and at one point he stops moving completely, throws his hand straight into the air, and the choir modulates up a half a step (Figure 19).

Dexter takes a hold of the microphone and tells the audience, “How many of you have found out that you’ve tried everything in life, and everything else has failed you. But the one thing that has remained constant is Jesus, and so what I can deduce from that is He is my everything. When friends won’t save me, I’ve still got Jesus.” A member of the audience stands, placing her hands behind her back and shaking her head. Dexter continues, “When there is no money in the bank, I’ve still got Jesus. All I can say is He is
my everything (CD Track 3). Come on and put your hands together....” The audience claps and the choir begins. Before the final song of the praise section, a group of “Praise Dancers” (Figure 18) enters from the back of the sanctuary, waving scarves and performing elaborately choreographed moves to text of the message, “We Acknowledge Your Presence” (CD Track 4). The song pulls the audience up from their seats, a young boy dances in the aisles (Figure 20), and the final praise song proves to be one of exuberant joy and energy. Marty rolls his hands, indicating to the choir to repeat the last phrase and finally they come to a close.

![Figure 60: A young audience member shows his appreciation for the music](image)

Before the third section of the concert, the choir exits the sanctuary and returns, assuming the same positions, but with a different presence, as it is less celebratory and much more reserved. The third section is called “The Message” and for “Even in the Rain” Marty Lamar brings in guest soloist DeAngela Roberson to sing a solo with instrumental accompaniment (CD Track 7). With each selection in this section, the soloist speaks of the word of God, emphasizing the significance of the texts. The importance in these texts is reiterated by the simple melody, unison singing and text repetition in the next selection.
The Message in Song Texts

“God Will Take Care of You” (CD Track 8) and “You Can’t Hurry God” (CD Track 9) are two contemporary gospel songs that Marty Lamar rehearsed nearly every rehearsal with his choir. The purpose was not so much because they are difficult songs to sing, as they are both sung in unison. Rather, the textual message was something both Marty and the choir seemed to benefit from. I have included the texts below:

There’s no need to worry
Whatever it is
God will take care of you
Whatever the problem
There’s nothing to hard for you
He will see you through
God will
Yes! I know He will
God will take care of you

You can't hurry God, you just have to wait
He may not come when you want Him,
But He'll be there, right on time.
You can depend on God to come through
Just have to wait.
Gotta wait, Gotta wait, Gotta wait on Jesus

“God Will Take Care of You” and “You Can’t Hurry God,” were very up tempo. Both of these songs were sung at the beginning of most rehearsals, after the prayer, but usually before rehearsing other songs for the concert. Marty would conduct from behind the piano and the choir would clap and sway back and forth when he began to play the introduction. There were many instances where the songs were requested, even by one of the singer’s young daughter Imani (Figure 12). The texts seemed to provide an element of excitement and jubilation, and almost gave the singers the impression that regardless of what was taking place in his or her life, it was all going to work out in the end. The texts are comforting and encourage the singers to focus on the music and worship, the primary purpose for being at rehearsal.

When conducting during the “Worthy” performance, Marty stands in front for “God Will Take Care of You” and “You Can’t Hurry God,” clapping to add a strong percussive element and creating audience interaction and involvement. By the time the
set comes to an end, the audience is on its feet, the Praise Dancers are back in front of the congregation, and the choir walks from the front of the church and out the side doors. During the last portion of the concert, “The Worship,” proves to be one of the most memorable musical experiences I have ever witnessed.

After a brief intermission, the choir returns wearing formal, black dresses and suits, the lights dim, and immediately the mood is of a more somber state. “Sound of Praise” (CD Track 10) begins in unison, a lower tessitura for the female voices, which is also accompanied by three female dancers at the front of the sanctuary. As their hands clasp in front, heads turn upward, and eyes close, the song reflects inner peace and surrender to a higher place. “There is a sound that is pleasing to His ear, the sound of praises, lifting into the atmosphere. Every time you lift your voice, you need to know, Jesus loves to hear the sound of praise. A sweet symphony, a heart melody, a song of praise to hear, is music to His ear. Jesus loves to hear the sound of praise.”

“Worship the King” is the next song, featuring guest soloist Travaulya Wallace (CD Track 11). Her interpretation of the song is demonstrated in her body language and facial expressions, moving from side to side, closing her eyes through nearly the whole piece, continuing on a long and extended improvisation midway through the song. The audience responds by standing with their hands in the air, clapping, and shouting phrases such as “Amen” and “come on.”

Figure 21: Minister Omega Forbes
She hands the microphone to the next guest soloist, Minister Omega Forbes (Figure 21), and the choir begins to repeat “There is a Name” (CD Track 12) while he adds interludes between the phrases. The minister sings the solo over the organ, elaborately decorating the melody with virtuosic ornamentation and articulation. The choir offers harmonic support in their repetitions of the chorus while the minister improvises a melody over them. Marty Lamar frequently jumps in front of the choir, rapidly moving his arms in circles and jumping up and down. The song continues to build in intensity and eventually the minister breaks into praise, shouting “Help me call Jesus...something begins to happen when you call on Jesus,” over the choir repeating the same two notes on the word “Jesus.” Members of the choir throw their arms up in the air, bow their heads, and some even stop singing, holding themselves, bending over, and wiping their eyes. Marty shakes his head. A man in one of the back pews stands erect, holding his hand straight in the air, as the minister continues to shout “He’s my shelter, He’s my leader, He’s my everything...Jesus.” The choir is still repeating “Jesus” over and over, now only accompanied by the steady, slow, beating of the bass drum on the set. The audience shouts out, randomly clapping, throwing their arms up, shaking their bodies, and holding one another. I have goose bumps all over my body and tears in my eyes at the sight of these performers, being so physically and spiritually moved, to a place somewhere other than here. For the choir, it was the act of sharing this music, with each other and the audience that allowed them to reach this place.

The final song of the concert, one of reflection, acknowledges that “God Is Here” (CD Track 13). The choir calls, “Speak Lord, speak Lord,” repeating over and over, in a similar fashion to the previous piece, while the soloist sings praises over the choir. Emotions are high and members continue to alternate between singing and sobbing, shouting praises and jumping up and down. The audience appears entranced, eyes closed, swaying back and forth in place, shaking their heads and waving their arms. The experience leads me back in thought to Marty’s opening comments about the A.M.E. church not being founded upon praise. Regardless of the Bethel doctrines, in the sanctuary that night the choir took on the appearance of a Pentecostal\textsuperscript{71} church. The style

\textsuperscript{71} Pentecostalism was founded by a former Methodist Episcopal Reverend, Charles F. Parham and William J. Seymour during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century in the United States. It is the doctrine of "speaking in tongues," or
of preaching, praying, singing, shouting, and testimony are characteristics rooted in the black worship experience founded centuries before. Whether in the church service or a concert setting, gospel music continues to forge a new and expanding identity for the Bethel community, one of incredible resistance to societal homogenization of minority cultures.  

**Summary**

In this chapter I have examined the culmination of the Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir rehearsals as expressed through performance practices in three different settings: a community event, the worship service, and a church concert. Moreover, this chapter expressed the power of gospel music and its ability to elicit an awesome spiritual and emotional atmosphere from all participators and observers alike. This chapter displayed the evocative nature of gospel music and reiterated the growing popularity of gospel music outside the church and its acceptance in various performing venues.

Obery M. Hendricks claims that because gospel music has moved away from the church and can be found in venues everywhere, “seldom is proclaimed the God of liberation – just the God of escape.” Through the examination of gospel texts, Hendricks claims that gospel has lost the sense of freedom found in traditional spirituals. He also states that because gospel music has become a common performance medium outside of the church, it has lost its value as a religious music. While escapism may be seen as a compromise to liberty, no matter what the venue or how one views the choir, the increasing popularity of gospel in music publication and performance, has only made it that much more accessible. From the perspective of the Bethel A.M.E. Choir, performing gospel songs is merely a tool for reaching something higher and to create a deeper spiritual connection, regardless of where the music is being sung or heard. In my what is called “glossolalia,” that separates Pentecostals from the groups it splintered off from, as well as from other mainline Christian denominations. Pentecostalism is also known for worship practices such as speaking/praying in tongues aloud, prophesying, healings, the "casting out of devils"(exorcism), hand-clapping, shouting and being "slain in the Spirit," which are all observed with great zeal and fervency.  

72 Here I am referring to the individual expression and personality that form the Bethel choir, rather than a homogenous gospel choir.  

experience with the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir I noticed their extraordinary ability to supercede transient inhibitors, such as performance space and audience, and to create a powerful, almost direct, coalesced spiritual atmosphere. I asked Dr. Hill if this type of performance was due to the music or the style of music that was being sung. She responded with the following:

I think it’s all in our perception of how you worship God. Some of it is intellectual and some of it is strictly feeling. Now that’s all that I have been able to come up with. In our head we accept God, in our head we know that when we go to church that we are there to worship, and in our head we say, okay if we’re here praying, and singing and reading the scripture, that’s worshipping God. When you’re looking at a Marty’s group, or some of these other groups, they come to church, but they come to make that connection. They come to commune.74

By examining the pedagogy involved in gospel music, and truly trying to find meaning behind the processes involved in the learning of gospel, it is nearly impossible to deduce that gospel is anything but a symbol of African American culture. It is in the communion, in the community, where gospel reveals its true identity.

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74 Rosalie Hill, interview by author, 1 April 2004, minidisc recording, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Library, Tallahassee, FL.
CHAPTER FIVE
“THERE’S NO MUSIC?”: TEACHING METHODOLOGIES
AND MUSICAL ELEMENTS

In this chapter I will examine the pedagogical tools used in teaching gospel music to the FSU Gospel Choir and the A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir and provide suggestions for implementing some of these devices into contemporary teaching curricula. I have broken down these learning tools into five different sections: Conducting Techniques, Rehearsal Strategies, Learning Styles, Instructional Suggestions, and Musical Selection and the Gospel Style, including an analysis on the effectiveness of verbal expressions used in a gospel choir rehearsal. The critical examination of these teaching processes provides a prescriptive method to pedagogical analysis using the ethnopedagogical approach. Furthermore, the chapter will show how particular cultural phrases used in rehearsal and performance used by the directors elicit a certain musical response. While this chapter is intended to introduce gospel music pedagogy to a general audience, specific concerns and issues for choral directors and music teachers have been addressed towards the end of the chapter.

Conducting Techniques

When conducting a choir many elements of the music must be taken into consideration. It is the responsibility of the conductor to instill life and vitality into the music by means of specific rehearsal techniques, in body language, such as poise, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, and through vocal demonstrations and verbal explanations, to elicit the proper interpretation from the choir. The conductor must display his or her own interpretive wishes through their conducting style.

Body Language

While many conductors educated in Western music institutions use the fundamental two, three, and four beat patterns, gospel music uses a more expressive and creative approach to conducting. On average, Michael Figgers, Dr. Hill, and Marty
Lamar did not use the standard two, three, and four beat conducting patterns in rehearsals or performance. Instead, the choir directors conducted the inflections, dynamics, and key changes rather than the beat or meter. Inflections or articulations were acknowledged with a punch in the air (Figure 22), a flick of the wrist, or depending on whether or not they were playing the piano, by moving their shoulders or heads. If Marty Lamar was playing the piano, he would mark out the chords in the left hand and push his right fist into the air on the desired accented beats (Figure 23). Key changes and dynamics were often indicated with a movement of the hand upward or downward in accordance with the direction of the pitch or volume.

In rehearsals I observed Dr. Hill, Marty Lamar, and Michael Figgers conduct in the direction of the sound, meaning if the pitches ascended, they moved their hands upward (Figure 24), and vice versa. Much of their conducting was reflective of the melody in the song, which helped the singers to visualize and remember the melody during rehearsals and performance.
Because the directors did not adhere to conventional Western conducting styles, their actions promoted flexibility in the tempo and expression within the gospel selections. This style of conducting encouraged emotionally charged interpretations of the music without being confined to a particular form of musical expression. By allowing the choir to learn and interpret the music as it was taught and conducted in years past, it
Vocal Demonstrations and Verbal Explanations

In “Thinking Musically” Bonnie Wade insists, “Where music is taught primarily by oral transmission, the teacher plays a significant role, as a repository of knowledge and technique, the individual responsible for musical quality, and often a guide in life.”

Similarly, Bruno Nettl suggests that one way to truly understand the oral traditions within a culture is to examine the way in which the music is distributed within its repertory, how the content and styles are interrelated within that repertory, and what changes and what remains the same. While gospel is making headway in the production and dissemination of music publications, oral transmission remains an invaluable method for music learning among the Bethel choir. Oral transmission is a vital distinction between teaching and learning gospel music and most other Western choral literature. To understand the gospel tradition, it is necessary to integrate the learning technique of oral transmission into the choral classroom.

Although the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir did not use musical scores, Marty would often demonstrate the vocal parts with his own voice, and then have the choir repeat a phrase back to him. An entire song was learned piecemeal this way, alternating between the parts and then putting them together. For the most part, all of the songs were taught via vocal demonstrations and examples, leading to an incredible efficiency in aural dictation and memorization among the choir members.

When teaching articulations and pronunciation, Marty Lamar had a slightly different approach. Playing through the first few measures of “God Is Here,” a piece with obvious roots in jazz given the chromatics of the piano accompaniment, Marty spoke rhythmically, heavily accenting the articulations and diction of the text, while playing the melody on the piano (Figure 25).

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He told the choir not to pronounce words such as “bring,” but as “brang,” “presence” pronounced “prehzunce,” “come ohwn” in place of “come on,” “Gahd” instead of “God,” and “Lawd” rather than “Lord,” elongating the vowels and adding a diphthong to particular words. Marty stresses the importance in pronunciation because it provides a different feeling to the overall sound; the pronunciation acts as a movement away from standard choral diction and imitates a dialect in which the choir and congregation are familiar. For declamation on certain phrases, Marty Lamar demonstrated the desired sound from the choir by emphasizing accents either verbally or with visual cues, such as punching into the air on each accent of the phrase.

In order to convey musical ideas without using music terminology, Marty also often came up with incredible metaphors for creating a specific musical sound. For example, during a rehearsal he addressed the choir with open arms and excited eyes, saying, “Ya’ll just waiting, you’re the angels and you’re hungry.” He paused, “and then the doors open,” and he swung his arms wide and jumped in the air: “Amen!” This metaphor was used to explain a sustained chord and the building of excitement during the bridge of a song. Similarly, both Michael Figgers and Marty Lamar used phrases, both in rehearsal and performances, that seemingly only the choir members could relate to and
understand culturally. Table 1 includes a number of these metaphors and identifies the elicited musical response received from Marty Lamar, Michael Figgers, and Dr. Hill.

**Table 2: Metaphors and their elicited musical responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbal Explanation or Metaphor</th>
<th>Actual musical response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Ya’ll just waiting, you’re the angels and you’re hungry, and then the doors open...Amen!”</td>
<td>Sustained chord, crescendo and accelerando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You will need some blubber for this song”</td>
<td>Larger physical space in order to create a fuller, more rounded sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It needs to sound like there is wind going through this”</td>
<td>Breathy tone quality and stop the sound, staccato and quick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This is a gospel song! We’ve gotta have praise, we’ve gotta have a message, and we’ve got to have soul!”</td>
<td>A deeper, more visceral tone quality with expression behind it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What happens after you realize? You get excited!”</td>
<td>Immediate crescendo or Sforzando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This part reminds me of a conversation with my Grandma. She knew she was going 'up there', there was no doubt. This song has to be like a conversation”</td>
<td>Of moderate volume with deliberation and confidence behind the sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You are all one voice”</td>
<td>Unison singing; focus the tone and concentrate on hearing the other parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The words on your lips, I’ll sing it in my voice”</td>
<td>Speak the text rhythmically and silently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Take it home”</td>
<td>Vamp or modulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We are a gospel choir!”</td>
<td>Power behind the sound, open and bright vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Do you have it in you?”</td>
<td>Upward modulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sing as if you had resistance, like Play-doh or water”</td>
<td>Elongate the vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am heartbroken; sing peace to me”</td>
<td>Emphasize every vowel, every syllable; pianissimo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 delineates patterns of speech that are spontaneously created to elicit very specific musical responses. What the directors have done is broken down the “linguocentric predicament”\(^\text{77}\) in talking about music and created a means of communication that

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supercedes everyday musical jargon. These phrases contain elements of personal connectivity between the director, the singers, and ultimately, the music. The use of metaphors in choral rehearsals is not specific to these two particular gospel choirs; however, the delivery and presentation is almost a common vernacular-speak within the gospel community.

Rehearsal Strategies

Many choir directors are faced with the issue of inadequate rehearsal time to develop their groups to a performance level, and have to find ways to create an energetic learning environment, while concurrently expanding repertory, teaching music fundamentals, and building the skills necessary to achieve a desirable level of musical standard. Effective musical results depend on a well-defined concept of musical objectives and on an ability to transmit them to the members of the choral group. In order to make the most effective use of time and clearly communicate musical objectives in rehearsal, implementing proper rehearsal techniques is absolutely necessary. Marty Lamar’s techniques proved to be exemplary. In this section I have used Marty’s approach to his rehearsals as a model for organizing a gospel choir or song rehearsal, which has been divided into four sections: rehearsal structure, vocal warm-ups, learning song texts, and learning the notes.

Rehearsal Structure

Marty Lamar divided the choir into three sections: altos on one side, sopranos on the other, and basses and tenors (if split) in the center. Although the women outweighed the men in number, the few male voices exceeded the volume and power of the average male singer. Marty, as both the director and the accompanist, used head and shoulder movements, alternating hands, and mainly his voice to give cues from the piano in front of the choir loft. Generally lasting around an hour and a half, rehearsals occasionally continued for longer. In one instance, Marty said to the choir midway through the rehearsal, “If anyone needs to leave, they may; otherwise, I’m going to keep going.” Rather than getting up to leave, more members of the choir arrived and the rehearsal

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78 The term “Linguocentric predicament,” defined as the inability to describe music effectively with language, was coined by Charles Seeger in the 1950s and instigated different ways of looking at things in the discipline. Seeger’s interests in a universally applicable theory spanned wide interdisciplinary fields making his ideologies very advanced for this time period.
lasted nearly four hours. This degree of enthusiasm toward rehearsal is something every choir director strives for. How does Marty create and maintain an invigorating rehearsal atmosphere?

There are many reasons why Marty’s rehearsals are both spiritually and musically successful. The main reason is that his approach comes from a very casual level. Aside from being an employee of the Bethel A.M.E. Church, Marty was also raised in the Bethel community and spent many years participating and leading the choir prior to his appointment as the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir director. He would not reprimand the singers for talking, walking in late, leaving early, or even interrupting rehearsals. There was a common understanding of respect and recognition when Marty needed to get the work done, and the choir complied willingly. On occasion, when the choir was not singing at the desired energy or volume level, Marty either asked them to stand, or he interspersed each slow or new piece with a more familiar and upbeat song, motivating the choir instead of arduously plugging through the notes.

**Vocal warm-ups**

The rehearsals began with an announcement and a few words of praise for a previous service or performance. Closing in on the date of the spring concert, Marty often reiterated the need to work together as a team and expressed the amount of dedication it takes to perform to their best ability. The choir then stood for vocal warm-ups, which consisted of a few vocalise patterns on the five vowel sounds (a-e-i-o-u), ascending in half-steps and carefully concentrating on tone color and quality. Marty shouted, “You will need some blubber for this song,” constructing a mental image of a larger physical space in order to create a fuller, more rounded sound from the choir. He worked on increasing the vocal range, or tessitura, of the choir by telling them they needed it for a particular song, “Worthy is the Lamb,” the opening song of the concert. He asked them to do “Soul Train,” a unique adaptation of “Sirens,” where the choir starts on the highest note of their register, descends through each pitch on “soul,” until they reach the bottom of their register and sing the word “train.” Marty repeated this exercise, reiterating the need to stretch as far as possible on “soul” and to bottom out as low as possible. After a series of other vocalises, Marty had them sing a familiar hymn or song. The choir then moved into a circle for their opening prayer.
Learning song texts

From the front pews it was often difficult to discern what people were saying over the improvisation on the piano. As mentioned in Chapter Four, prayer in the rehearsal of a gospel choir is not uncommon. The opening prayer was usually brief, requesting the support and guidance of God over the next few hours: “Clean our hearts, mind, and souls so that we can praise Your ministry,” Marty spoke in closing, before leading the singers into a more energetic and upbeat selection to energize them. Occasionally Marty had them take out a packet of typed words that he had passed out earlier. The lyrics were typed so that the choir would have a point of reference where the dynamics and accents were. The text was also grouped in sections to indicate musical phrases, as seen in Figure 26:

![Figure 26: Handout of the song text for “God Is Here”](image)

**Figure 26: Handout of the song text for “God Is Here”**

75
For the chorus, beginning at “He is here,” each line of text on the handout has its own musical phrase. However, for the verses, this is not the case. Each line of text alternates in an ascending and descending melodic pattern. For example, the first line, “There is a sweet anointing,” ascends, while the second line “In this sanctuary,” descends, as I have transcribed below in Figure 27:

![Figure 27: Opening melody of “God Is Here”](image)

The remainder of the handout follows the same ascending and descending melodic pattern. This pattern is established through oral transmission and shows one standard way to teach the lyrics and musical phrasing without a score.

**Learning the notes**

When teaching the pitches, Marty often sang the solo interludes or melodies, and only used his falsetto voice when helping the sopranos learn their parts. He then did the same for the altos and tenors, alternating between speaking and singing the various parts, while the choir repeated the sections back to him. “Call and response,” originating in African traditions, later resulted in antiphonal and responsorial style musical structures (i.e., alternating solo vs. solo, solo and ensemble, or solo and group) that are often found in contemporary gospel music today.\(^{79}\) Also known as “lining out”\(^{80}\) in the Black church, this method of teaching has been used for centuries in teaching musics to congregations who were unable to read, or afford, musical notation.

Marty Lamar’s technique of cycling through the melodic phrases in each section (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass), reinforced the parts and encouraged memorization. After each rehearsal, the choir usually had learned a new song and would be ready to clean it

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80 During the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the term “lining out” developed in response to music illiteracy in the Anglo-European Protestant churches and has remained a part of the African-American church today.
up during the following rehearsal. While oral transmission has proved to be a quick method of learning for the FSU Gospel Choir and Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir, a choir that is heavily dependent on sheet music might take longer to train to learn by rote initially. Therefore, it is important to consider the various learning styles of the choir members when deciding which method of music learning is most suitable. In the following section I offer suggestions for accommodating the various needs of an elementary, middle, and high school choir.

**Learning Styles and Instructional Suggestions**

Many students have different learning styles, meaning they take in and process information differently. Likewise, teachers have different teaching styles. Some students tend to be visual learners, others are aural/oral learners, and still others are kinesthetic learners. Visual learners learn by reading, watching, and observing. Aural or oral learners learn by hearing and speaking. Kinesthetic learners learn by doing, acting or performing an activity. Therefore, teachers and choir directors must take these different styles into consideration when choosing appropriate materials for their students. Moreover, they must also consider the performance ability of the students. The Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir consisted of a diverse group of students in 2004, ranging from early high school to post-graduate students. While many of the choir members came into the choir with varying musical experiences, Marty was able to adapt to their learning styles and select music that was both challenging and manageable for the choir’s spring performance. To accommodate various learning styles, I offer suggestions for creating a more productive and effective rehearsal environment, which includes learning aids and setting a mood.

**Aids for learning**

As mentioned earlier, Marty’s rehearsals tended to be very productive, with a new song learned and nearly perfected after each rehearsal. Similar to the FSU Gospel Choir, the Bethel Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir did not use printed scores to learn the music. At the beginning of the semester Marty distributed personally-created CDs with a playlist containing the musical selections chosen for the upcoming concert.
Members of the choir were expected to learn their designated parts and song texts by listening to the CDs prior to weekly rehearsals, Marty explained in rehearsal: “The purpose of the CD is to learn the notes, not to learn the song completely, but simply to familiarize yourselves with the melody.” Every so often Marty provided the choir with a photocopy of the printed lyrics, but nothing with musical notation. While the pews and choir loft were adorned with multicolored African American Heritage Hymnals, they were rarely used in rehearsal. One Thursday before the Founder’s Day service they were instructed by Marty to take out the hymnals and open up to “We Are the Children of the Church” on page 583 (Figure 28). Sitting in the front pew, I did the same, only to discover that while they were singing the written text, they were not singing the indicated rhythm or melody.

![Figure 28: “We Are the Children of the Church,” African American Heritage Hymnal](image)

81 Marty Lamar, in rehearsal, 22 January 2004, minidisc recording, Bethel A.M.E. Church in Tallahassee, FL.
Because I was not equipped with my recording materials on the Founder’s Day rehearsal, I was unable to dictate the pitches they were actually singing, but am certain that the pitches and rhythms printed in the hymnal were not what were being sung. I felt truly confused as to why they would not sing the written notation, so when given the opportunity, I inquired about this in an interview with Dr. Hill.

We use what we call metered music for some of the hymns. It can be a common meter, short meter, or long meter, and depending on which one of those tunes, if I see it’s a common meter and it may be written in the book on the page that you see it in one tune, knowing the congregation, I might select another tune that they are more familiar with.

Dr. Hill uses the term “meter” not to indicate the time signature of the piece. Rather, meter in this context refers to the number of syllables per line of the verse. For example, the first verse of “Amazing Grace” is as follows:

Amazing Grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see

To determine the meter of this song, it is necessary to count the number of syllables per line. The first and third lines in “Amazing Grace” contain eight syllables, while the second and fourth lines contain six. Therefore, the meter is 8,6,8,6, which is also known as common meter. Other meters that frequently occur are short meter (6,6,8,6), and long meter (8,8,8,8). However, during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when African Americans were first learning European hymns, the term long meter was used not necessarily in reference to the metrical pattern, but because of the slow tempo of the song.83

Dr. Hill then went on to discuss the origination of oral transmission in the church:

That’s how we got these spirituals. For which you won’t find music. If somebody doesn’t still have it in their head, you can hang it up. Music was a way of life. And it’s for the soul and in the black community it really was for the soul. Some writers say that the black church is an emotional church. It’s an emotional experience and so they bring that with them, to the church experience so I think that’s part of what we are dealing with.

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83 Southern, 454.
The minister who started the AME church put out the first hymnbook that was used in black churches. But there was no music to it, it was just words. So naturally they brought the words with them, but they did what they wanted with the melody and they sing it from the soul. So it comes out as a different kind of piece from the way it was taught to them; it’s soulful music. I (chuckles) work with the choir at my daughter’s church, she’s in California, and it’s a white church, she’s Presbyterian, and they always want me to come and teach them something ‘cause they say “You make us have soul” and I’ll say “but you’ve got soul” and there’s a misconception that quality and soul don’t go together, but it does. You know, there’s soulfulness in anybody’s music, even the white European, if you hear the right person singin’ it, you’ll say, “wow” you know it just sets your hair on your head. There is soul, but the soul comes from within and you have to get people to understand that that’s what it is, that’s there and what expression of whatever those words were saying. And so you just accept that. And that’s the only real difference between the so-called European way the hymn is sung and the way it’s sung when you hear it in an African Methodist Church or a Baptist church. You’ll even hear it in a Baptist church different than you would in our church. But it’s all about the emotion, the soul, the expression, the feeling.

The “feeling” Dr. Hill is referring to is one of familiar expression in the African American Church. Samuel Floyd attributes African American vocal style to their source, “African intonations, inflections, and rhythmic conventions applied to a new language and linguistic style in the context of a new religion.” Through the pedagogical techniques used by Dr. Hill, Michael Figgers, and Marty Lamar, they aim to convey musical meaning, intent, and form of gospel music expression.

Setting a mood

During the Founder’s Day rehearsal with the Bethel choir, I closely observed Dr. Hill to determine her personal approach to choral instruction. Marty warmed the choir up on neutral syllable arpeggios and a hymn familiar to both the adult and youth choirs. Following the prayer Dr. Hill arrived and instantly her presence changed the dynamics of the musicians. The choir suddenly became quiet and all attention was directed towards her. Immediately she yelled at the basses to stand and decided to make notational corrections on the piano. Marty played the piano while Dr. Hill conducted the choir, but not in traditional conducting patterns, as learned in advanced conducting courses. Although Marty was not familiar with the second piece, he quickly learned by watching Dr. Hill play the chords on the piano; he was eventually able to play it accurately. They

practiced the familiar hymn “Guide My Feet” while clapping and swaying to a moderate tempo, giving the piece almost a swing feel.

Despite the need to have the music ready to perform by the following morning, the rehearsal did not have an air of intensity or pressure that one might experience in a musical rehearsal the day before a performance. Instead, the overall mood was one of excitement and eagerness to deliver the word of God in a spiritual and selfless fashion. Dr. Hill’s rehearsal techniques were focused on dynamics and expression, and she shouted at the choir during the second piece, “This is a gospel song! We’ve gotta have praise, we’ve gotta have a message, and we’ve got to have soul!”

Although “soul” cannot be taught, the expectation is that it will be achieved during a performance or rehearsal of the song. However, it is important not to rely too heavily on the performance as a way of understanding the gospel music tradition. The focus should be not only the content of the material, but how these musics are taught during the learning process.

**Instructional Suggestions**

I include the following musical transcription to show how gospel music can be modified to fit the various levels of learning and learning styles (Figure 29). The excerpt in Figure 29 is simply the melody and marked hand clapping within the score. The text is written both in the score and below it to facilitate meaning and interpretation. The example in Figure 30 is a modified version of the actual song that was performed by the A.M.E. choir at their annual spring concert (see Chapter Six). The final song in Figure 31 is a complete transcription of the vocal parts sung during the concert.

![Figure 29: “We Acknowledge Your Presence” opening melody](image)

81
The first verse of “We Acknowledge Your Presence” is sung in unison by the choir. The chorus, however, is usually sung in two or more parts.

![Figure 30: “We Acknowledge Your Presence” chorus]

The third setting includes a soloist singing repetitions of the verses, as well as improvised interludes between the breaks in the chorus. Located on the staff above the chorus, I have transcribed the solo passage, but the notes and style are dependent upon the soloist. Therefore, this prescriptive transcription acts merely as a guide. For the spring concert, the Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir sang the first verse in unison; during the second verse the soloist was introduced by singing improvised ornaments over the melody. The third verse was sung by the soloist only, until the choir joined in on the chorus.
Figure 31: “We Acknowledge Your Presence” melody and chorus in parts

While the first setting (Figure 29) of “We Acknowledge Your Presence” consisted of a simple melody and rhythmic patterns, the second setting (Figure 30) included an
additional harmony in the verse. The third setting (Figure 31) proved to be slightly more challenging, with three-part harmony in the chorus, slight ornamentation on the melody, and a vocal soloist or lead singer to improvise between repetitions of the chorus. It is important to recognize that it is the learning of music (i.e. music as a process and not necessarily a product) that changes the way we understand and perceive a culture. It is the responsibility of the instructor to instill an accurate portrayal of a culture through the music that is being taught, and it is in the process of teaching that these values are implemented. Whether it is taught at the elementary, middle, high school, or even collegiate level, the interpretation of the music will be solidified by utilizing the pedagogical tools found within the culture from which it originated.

In an interview with Dr. Hill, I asked about her role as a choir director in the Bethel A.M.E. community:

I’ve also learned is that you can help them. What I try to do is to help to build an understanding for how you do it [sing], but I can’t do it for them. And some people kind of get misled and I hear directors talking all of the time because you know, you can really burn out with this because people expect that it is something that you do to them. It is not anything that we do to them, it is what we do for you and you have to do the rest.

Musical Selection and the Gospel Style

When selecting music for a choir, it is often the responsibility of the director to choose selections that are both appropriate and challenging to their choir or students. With the recent introduction of world music to choral departments, many directors and conductors have encountered difficulty in the preparation and presentation of a choral program. Along with the development of world music inclusion in schools, directors, composers, and arrangers are in search of musical diversity and creating the “wow” effect in their programs.

For a number of reasons, the gospel style has become one of the more popular genres to be included in this new wave of choral multiculturalism. First and foremost, it is inexpensive. Because there are no scores to purchase, teaching gospel to the choir is affordable. Second, to directors in the U.S., it is accessible. Many colleges, universities, and local churches offer a gospel choir elective. A director without gospel training, but
with the right social and professional networking, can easily obtain a recording or transcription of a gospel song. Third, directors often recruit students to join or take part in choral activities to keep their programs thriving. One way of doing this is by accommodating musical selections to reflect the ethnicity of the overall student body.

Derived from my experiences with the FSU Gospel Choir and Bethel’s Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir, I have found that there are some underlying issues that must be addressed before teaching a gospel song to a choir. To integrate gospel music into a choral music program, there are a number of concerns choir directors and music teachers must take into consideration. The following questions provide a strong foundation when facing administrative constraints, disagreeable parents, or other unforeseeable conflicts.

**Audience Communication**

As I have mentioned throughout this thesis, it is imperative that gospel choir directors take into consideration many different factors before delivering their own interpretation of a song. In order to achieve an artistic and culturally accurate representation of a particular gospel style, directors must consider the following: historical significance, musical nuances, expression, and most importantly, audience communication. Some questions to consider include: What do you want the song to communicate to the audience? What textual meaning does this song convey? How is the meaning representative of the director and the choir as an ensemble? When selecting a gospel song it is important to consider audience recognition and awareness prior to the musical performance, as not to subvert or offend the audience or administration.

**Historical Significance**

The following questions address the historical significance of the musical selection: Is the piece a spiritual or a gospel song? What are the stylistic differences between the two? Around what time did this piece emerge on the gospel scene historically? Is this a contemporary gospel setting? If so, how should it be treated differently than a traditional gospel song? Who was the composer or the arranger of the song? Are there any underlying themes in the music that should be addressed to the
choir? Depending on the song, these questions will have various answers and will need to be considered when making a selection.

While gospel and spirituals are rooted in the same African American music traditions, they are very different in many other ways. First of all, gospel texts tend to be subjective and centered on wide-ranging, central themes, while spiritual texts are group oriented and tell stories about Biblical events and figures. Gospel songs have instrumental accompaniment, giving it an intense rhythmic feel, and spirituals are generally sung a cappella. The melody found in gospel songs is related to the blues, with its flatted third and sevenths and spirituals only use bent notes occasionally. Also, traditional gospel songs must be treated differently than contemporary gospel. Traditional gospel reflects the early- to mid-twentieth century African American musical idioms: melodic and harmonic blues patterns, sharp tempo changes, and rhythmic jazz percussion. Not surprisingly, contemporary gospel music has blended with many other genres, such as R&B, hip-hop, and even country, having a severe impact on the sounds of modern gospel. Ample time and research in the history of a particular gospel song must take place to effectively communicate the musical and cultural significance of the genre to a choir.

Musical Nuances

Second is the treatment of meter and stress, tempo, dynamics, texture, and timbre. Typically, gospel music contains a wide vocal range for any singer. The melodies usually undulate from extremely high to extremely low tessitura in a narrow span of time. More often than not, when the “spirit descends,” the extreme emotional intensity has an effect on the use of range, and vocal timbres will become shrill and full-throated, or heavy and strained. Questions to be considered here include: Is the choir large or small enough to support the sound required of this song? Are there members of the choir that have the ability to reach the high and low ranges in the melody? If not, are there any students that demonstrate the potential to do so? Also, many gospel songs incorporate soloists to lead the choir in a call and response style. Is there a soloist who has the vocal power and skills to lead the choir as a caller?

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85 Southern, 459-460.
In rehearsals, Dr. Hill, Marty Lamar, and Michael Figgers often shout sayings such as “This is a gospel song!” or “This is a gospel choir.” This often indicated to the choir they needed to sing louder and with determination. To create a “gospel” sound, it is important to know the limits and abilities of the choir beforehand. With even just a few very strong voices, the loudness or power that is desired in a gospel song can be reached.

**Expression**

The third important consideration for the director is musical expression. What does the selected song require of the singers emotionally, physically, and/or spiritually? As previously stated in an interview with Michael Figgers, when I inquired about the inclusion of members outside the Christian faith, he responded by saying that anyone was welcome to join, but it would be difficult to participate in something they did not believe in (see Appendix A or Chapter Two). The student might feel uncomfortable in performing or even rehearsing a gospel song, and would therefore not be able to completely understand and/or evoke the proper meaning of the song. In the case of gospel music, it is essential to discuss the implications of the text with the singers, establish an agreed upon mood for the selection, and make an effort to improve the projection with each subsequent rehearsal.

**Summary**

During the learning process the music educator must enable his or her students to reach beyond active participation and perceive the music not as a performance product, but rather, appreciate the pedagogical value in the performance process. Regardless of how well an instructor is able to implement the pedagogical tools into rehearsal and performance practices, it is essentially the responsibility of the choir member to take an invested interest in gospel music. However, it is important for educators and music directors to recognize the cultural and musical value in teaching gospel music to their students. How it will affect their lives, musical or otherwise, is something that cannot be assessed through performance alone. However, the performance venue does provide an excellent opportunity to assess the overall outcome of the learning process. Whether it is
in the church or in a concert hall, a choral performance allows the audience to gain an appreciation for a musically and culturally rich genre such as gospel.

In this chapter I have examined the pedagogical tools used in rehearsal by three different choral directors and have provided suggestions for implementing these teaching techniques into programs otherwise unfamiliar with the gospel tradition. I have offered considerations while selecting the materials to be presented to a classroom, such as audience communication, historical significance, musical nuances, and expression. I discussed conducting techniques used by the directors observed in the fieldwork experience, and provided an analysis of pedagogical phrases used in instruction that elicit very specific musical responses. Furthermore, I have examined rehearsal strategies used by Marty Lamar, Dr. Hill, and Michael Figgers, such as vocal warm-ups, structuring a rehearsal, teaching song texts and notes, and have determined that using these strategies will lead to a more successful rehearsal. I also covered the various learning styles encountered in a classroom setting (or choir) and offered teaching aides, as well as advice for setting a mood conducive to learning gospel music. And finally, I transcribed one of the many songs used by the Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir in their spring concert, and offered suggestions for teaching a gospel selection such as this to beginning, intermediate, and advanced choirs.

This chapter has described the pedagogy of gospel music as used in two very different settings, but concludes that there are many shared teaching elements between the FSU Gospel Choir and the Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir at Bethel. By carefully examining and evaluating the aforementioned aspects as observed in rehearsals and performances, an overall understanding of these particular gospel ensembles can be significantly increased. Although each gospel choir director will conduct his/her rehearsals according to his/her own personal style, a careful approach to each of these individual pedagogical elements allows for a deeper understanding of gospel music as a whole.
CHAPTER SIX

“IT AIN’T HARD TO TOUCH SOMEBODY WITH YOUR SONG, WHEN YOUR SONG IS REAL TO YOU”: CONCLUSION

Musicologist Lawrence Kramer states, “Musical meaning is understood as communicative action and therefore as embedded in a continuous texture of psychological, social, and cultural relations.” Ethnopedagogy highlights the various levels of communicative action through understanding and interpretation in the pedagogical process. To add to Kramer’s statement, “musical meaning is understood as communicative action and therefore as embedded in a continuous texture of psychological, social, cultural, and [pedagogical] relations.” By examining the behaviors, concepts, and sounds in the gospel tradition, as well as the relationships between the people involved in the pedagogical process, the thesis aims to encourage ethnopedagogy as a research approach and teaching method.

The actors in the ethnopedagogy model determine a very specific meaning of the music as it is being performed and produced. This meaning is then communicated to the analyst who then develops his or her own interpretation of the musical meaning. The

reader then perceives the musical meaning as it is understood by the analyst. If the reader then uses the music for his/her own purposes, the reader becomes the applier, who develops and conveys his/her own meaning of the music. Once the reader/applier constructs and transmits his/her own interpretation of musical meaning, a new dimension of actors is generated; the new actors continue to change and modify the meaning of the music. It is then correct to assume that ethnopedagogy finds musical meaning to be dependent upon its level of interpretation.

In addition to musical meaning, pedagogical intent may also be discerned through ethnopedagogy. During rehearsals, it was clear that the pedagogical intent of the director was to impart his or her knowledge of gospel music to the members of the choir. They achieved this through various pedagogical tools that I have analyzed in Chapters Four and Five. The pedagogical intent of the directors became very apparent during my analysis of vocal demonstration effectiveness in gospel choir rehearsals. The metaphors used by the directors conveyed a particular image or idea, but the pedagogical intent was to elicit a very specific musical response. Their purpose was not to invoke feelings of extreme obesity when using phrases such as “You will need some blubber for this song,” but to mentally construct a larger physical space to encourage deeper breathing and a fuller sound from the choir. Through the ethnopedagogical lens, the behaviors and actions from the director during the rehearsal provided insight to the pedagogical process that otherwise might have difficult to discern.

Similarly, ethnopedagogy forces the analyst to consider his or her pedagogical intent as a researcher. I was months into my fieldwork when a colleague came to visit and told me of her newly acquired job. With this new position she was faced with the task of developing a preexisting high school gospel choir. Having minimal familiarity in the gospel music tradition, I listened to her talk about the issues that she was encountering and her concerns approaching a rather intimidating responsibility. I began to wonder if there were some way I could link my own experience to hers, and help her feel more confident about her teaching objective. As a friend and fellow teacher, my initial pedagogical intent was to provide her with the tools to make her teaching experience easier. However, as I came to know the A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir and spent time recording, interviewing, and observing rehearsals, I began to
question my own position as the analyst: What was I learning about the music and how did I want to teach others about the gospel tradition? What did I learn about these people and how were fieldwork conflicts and stereotypes overcome during this process? While my original intent was to research the pedagogical tools used in the gospel tradition for another educator, I also became aware of my role in transmitting those tools to a greater audience. I have identified this audience in the model as the reader or receptors.

Ethnopedagogy recognizes the reader as a multi-dimensional participant in the process of musical transmission. The pedagogical intent of the reader may vary, from academic or professional interest, to personal gain. It is my hope that the reader’s and applier’s pedagogical intent reach a second dimension of actors. During the learning process it is the responsibility of the music educator to become actors and thus enable his or her students to perceive and understand their role in the pedagogical process. Regardless of how well an instructor is able to implement pedagogical tools into rehearsal and performance practices, it is also the responsibility of the choir member to take an invested interest in the cultural and musical tradition.

Because minimal research has been conducted using ethnopedagogy in the discipline of music, there is still much work to be done in exploring and developing this approach. This thesis provides a preliminary glance at the potential for ethnopedagogy and its position in social science research. In an interview with gospel music scholar Horace Clarence Boyer, he was asked about his teaching style when giving lecture/demonstrations on gospel music. Boyer responded by saying:

I’m very cultural - instead of saying I’m very black in my interpretation of this [teaching gospel music to musicians otherwise unfamiliar with the genre]. Meaning that, I want an Afro-American slant to when they sing. I don’t want to hear white people singing black music. I want to hear black music sung. I don’t care what color they are; I want that sound.87

The ethnopedagogical approach provides a way to communicate “culture” in order to achieve the gospel music “sound” as understood by Boyer, by allowing the analyst, the reader/applier, and eventually the “new actors” and the public understand that sound. Gospel music is a richly diverse and expanding musical genre that contributes immensely to contemporary America and its music. Its role in music education is potentially

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profound, and its recognition in academia holds great promise for cultural, musical, and personal enrichment.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

March 25, 2003
7:10 p.m.
Choral Rehearsal Room- KMU- Florida State University

Sarah: First of all, can you tell me your name?
Claudia: Claudia Morris-Barclay

Are you music major?
Choral music ed.

What year are you?
Sophomore

How long have you been in the gospel choir?
This is my second semester

And are you in any other ensembles?
I am in University Singers and I used to be in Women’s Glee

What is your musical background?
I started singing in middle school, I was in the choir because it was required, and I discovered it was something I liked because in elementary school I tried out for the choir and my teacher told me I was tone deaf. So I came back in middle school, and I was like ha ha...and then in high school I did chorus because I loved it, at that point I was hooked. I was in every possible ensemble that our school offered. I had no vocal training as far as private lessons before I came here, so this is my second year of voice lessons. I have never played an instrument or anything else, until I got here. All I had down was the music reading part

How do you feel about choral singing versus private?
I like both, they both have their ups and downs. I think choral singing prepares you really well for private singing, except that you have to get out of the whole choral breathing idea, that you can breathe in the middle of a sentence, whether it makes sense or not. And you learn to discover yourself as an individual. I am learning now to listen to myself sing; before I was trying to blend so much and now you are trying to be an individual. Different, I like it.

What is your previous experience with gospel music?
Most of the people in this choir grew up listening to gospel, like their whole life, like they sang it in church and all that. I am not one of those people. I went to churches were there was gospel, but I jumped around a lot. I listened to a lot on the radio and I’ve sung a little bit in church here and there, but not to the extent that most people in the choir have, so it’s relatively new to me this singing style, at least.

And how has the transition been? Have you had a tough time?
No, I get more freedom. It’s a lot easier and you learn a lot more to enjoy the singing, more so than thinking about the technical aspects. You learn how to be a musician, but you’re not as restricted as you are in classical music. So, you feel more like you are singing along with the radio than you are performing, and what I like most about gospel choir is that it is a lot more fun than any other ensemble. In University Singers you have to stand very proper, in certain positions, and you can’t really move. In Gospel choir you do what you feel. If you feel like raising your arm, you feel like swaying, you feel like doing this, that and the other thing, you have that freedom. You won’t be chastised for it.

Has your role as a music major affected your perspective with the choir?
It makes the director have to do a lot less work, as far as teaching choral techniques. Because if there are choral majors littered through, he’ll get more of the sound he wants without saying as much. He’ll tell you to listen to the person next to you, but it’s a lot different also because we don’t use sheet music. We learn
by rote. And that’s not new to me, but I haven’t had to do that since I was younger. So it’s actually a challenge; some of these girls are helping me to remember, because it’s not there. But when we break out the sheet music, on occasion, I get to help them in return, so it works out well.

What is your impression of the choir?
I like it

Do you feel that a gospel choir would be needed in a school music program?
It is a lot more free, and not as boring as other ensembles. It helps keep the students interested. They also learn about the black music traditions, and become active in this process. The learning is much faster. For example, I have done observations over at RAA and the steel band kids over there come in early and leave late to participate in the ensemble. It gives the at-risk children a chance to shine in activities they might not have the opportunity to otherwise. One more thing I want to add is that gospel choir is not just for black people- it’s for everybody; blacks and whites included. I have white friends who want to join and they are afraid of being the only white person in the choir, but I tell them there are plenty of other white people in here.

March 25, 2003
9:03 p.m.
Outside the Choral Rehearsal Room on the stairs- KMU- Florida State University

Can you tell me your name?
Marianne: Marianne Tatum Lipsius

How long have you been in gospel choir?
This semester, so I joined in January

Tell me a little bit about your musical background:
Three and a half years at the Manhattan School of Music, I made my debut with Houston grand Opera when I was 21 as Carubino in the Marriage of Figaro, sang with Houston grand opera for three years then moved over to Broadway, starred in three Broadway shows, did a lot of television, and that’s about it.

When did you become interested in singing music?
My father taught me to sing when I was three or four years old, on his knee.

So is it in your family?
I think so; I think we just love music

What is your experience with gospel music?
None until now; I mean I have always enjoyed it, but I couldn’t be further from the religious aspect of it, in terms of, I’m much more of a spiritual person, I’m not like a born again. I just love the feeling. It’s people getting together, it’s like the kids say, you come in that room, you forget your cares for two hours and it’s just a wonderful feeling of community. I just love it. I will do it again next semester too.

Do you think Gospel choir is something that would be beneficial or not to any sort of community?
I think it is something that everybody, especially down here in Tallahassee, understands. It completely crosses racial lines because this area is very religious, Christian, but we have Jewish members in there, it doesn’t matter. A higher power is at the universal concept, and I think that people understand that it’s okay that you can sing about any higher power, it doesn’t matter, it just makes you feel good inside.

With your musical training, has that helped you with this group or has that been a hindrance? Learning the music?
The first couple of nights I was here, I kept asking, where’s the friggin music, and they said “we don’t have music,” and then it finally dawned on me that that’s the way it has always been done. Because I am so used to everything being regimented, very rigid, and each note being very precise because that is the way we are taught. I mean in opera theatre and in opera schools and music schools, but this has been a
wonderful, wonderful experience for me. Just loosening me up for one thing, just going with the flow, trusting in it, because that’s what the African communities used to do, they used to just trust in the spirit, and that’s basically what it is.

Is this something that could apply to people with no musical background?
Absolutely. Half of these people in here, or maybe 10-20% don’t even go to FSU, they just come because it feels so good.

How would you describe your gospel music experience to somebody who didn’t know what gospel music was?
It’s awe-inspiring. The feelings that I get singing, “Safe in His Arms,” singing “For Every Mountain,” the feelings I get of community, of the oneness of the universe, the oneness, that we are all one, I’ve never, I’ve only felt that sense of community in one other place, and that’s in a twelve-step room. The feeling of people brought together for the same purpose, to access that higher power for help.

You talk about higher power, if somebody were Muslim or Hindu and wanted to be a part of this ensemble, do you think they would feel welcome?
Oh yeah. I mean look at me, I’m white, I’m 52 years old. These kids are great- they are just the sweetest group of kids, they’re just as good as gold. I feel like they are all my children.

As far as world music is concerned, do you think that it is something we need to be learning in our education?
Absolutely, and I would not have said that six months ago, but they require it. I am taking world music cultures with Mark Hertica, and as much as I thought I’d hate it, I am really glad I took it because I have learned so much about different cultures, not just musically, but it’s all caught up in the culture, and it’s been a wonderful class.

As far as the gospel choir is concerned, do you feel that it does establish a sort of new appreciation for differences in culture?
It sure did for me. I may be unusual because I am a lot older so I really appreciate it. I don’t know if somebody 19 or 20 might understand the depth of the profundity of what we are singing. I think that may come with age, but I have been enriched, tremendously.

March 27, 2003
9:20 p.m.
Outside the Choral Rehearsal Room- KMU- Florida State University

Sarah: First of all, can you tell me your name?
Mitchell: My name is Mitchell Duane Lewis

Are you a student here?
Not currently, I’ve completed four semesters here, so I am currently trying to get back. So I should get back in the fall to finish up. I am employed full time.

How long have you been in the gospel choir?
I have been in the gospel choir for five years.

Can you tell about your musical background?
My musical background started with my family. My dad was a jazz musician, through high school, and college. My mom was a singer, she sang in the church. My brother plays, and I have lots of uncles who sing and play instruments, so it’s kind of like it just fell on me. It’s like one of those family generation type things. Background in the church, definitely in the church.
Where did you learn to play keyboard?
My dad. He taught me the basics: basic chord structures and all that, and he taught us to play by ear. So pretty much what we heard, we just picked it up. And that’s like it is in church; whenever we hear something, whenever someone gives us a tape or a CD, we sit down, listen to it, and play it.

About how long does it take you to get something perfected?
That depends on the song, but normally it doesn’t take long. It all depends on how difficult the song is. So most of the time your simple church songs, morning hymns, it doesn’t take long to get, but if you have a couple of songs that are a little bit more complicated like what we do at FSU, it’s going to take a little bit of time, and a little bit more work because they are a lot of breaks, and different chords that we have to play, so that takes a little bit longer.

How did your father teach you to learn by ear?
Wow...um, very strict. I guess he taught me firstly to develop an ear, and he taught me what to listen for. As far as music was involved. He taught me how to listen to the bass, and listen where the bass goes, and the bass will determine what chord I want to play on top of that. So he forced me to start listening to intricate details as far as what the music was doing, so that was very hard at first, because you have all the singing, and all the other instruments that were playing, so you kind of have to focus on one thing and then go to the next. Over time it got easier and easier. It’s kind of like second nature now.

Can you read music as well?
I do read music because saxophone was my principal instrument when I came to the music school, but then I switched over to choral. But as far as reading piano, that takes a little while, but I do read, but not fluently enough to say 'here' (indicating someone handing him music), 'play this' and go at it

Do you play other instruments?
Other than piano, keyboard, and organ, and saxophone.

Do you play organ at church?
Yeah, you’ve gotta have that organ at church.

And who taught you how to play that?
Actually a friend of mine who was there, I actually took over his spot, he kind of showed me the ropes and I picked it up from there, and I practiced on my own.

What is your official title here for the gospel choir?
My title for the past three years has been musical director, which basically means overseeing the band, making sure the band is tight, on point, knows all the music, and basically assist the musical director in any way I can.

Do you rehearse outside of rehearsal here?
Yes we do, musicians rehearse normally Tues/Thurs nights after the choir done. Stick around, wait for the choir to clear out, and then we go at it, for about an hour and a half.

What is your impression of gospel choir?
Gospel choir, for one, because I have been here for a long time. I have seen a lot of changes, a lot of directors have come in, and come and go. Normally, in case you don’t know this, gospel choir normally has a graduate assistant or a graduate student who may be getting their master’s or doctoral degree, so they are only here one year or two years, and then they are gone. So from that I have learned so much because I was under after three years and three different directors, every director had a different style, different teaching method, so I learned quite a bit from them, so I kind of put it all together and use it for my ability. The gospel choir, spiritually, has taken me to another level, because you know gospel is telling the good news of Jesus Christ and that is one thing. Meeting a lot of wonderful people, connections, going on tour, having the wonderful experience of working with artists because every year during our gospel explosion (exposure??) we invite in a famous, well known gospel artist to work with us, and that is fabulous, so I’ve got a lot to take with me.
Would you classify gospel music as world music and what is your experience with world music ensembles?
Funny, I never thought about it. I would say world music, because I love jazz, I love R&B, I love country, I love all forms of music, and what I have noticed from being is gospel music for so many years is that you can combine all of the elements of other music to gospel music and it will still work. R&B, it works, Jazz, it works, country, if you can believe it or not, works, rock, it works, so I guess a world music, I would classify it as world music. Gospel music is for the world.

Would you feel that ensembles like this are necessary for communities or school programs?
It is definitely essential, especially for the communities, and even I think for this university, because it is such a diverse organization that it is different from all the rest, and not saying that the others aren’t different, because they are, and gospel music, is...whenever you hear it tells you “that’s gospel,” so that much alone tells you...we did a spring concert out in the student union and so many people came up and gathered around and just it’s pleasing, so everybody came and it was like wow look at all these people, so it’s very important to the community. It brings people together, especially at the time of war there are lots of stuff people are going through now, there are lots of people coming to the church and that seems to be an outlet for people who are going through stuff. Not only going through stuff, but it’s lifting, gospel music is lifting, it can encourage you, it can make you think about things, it can do so much.

April 9, 2003
11:09 a.m.
Outside Allen Music Library- Florida State University

Name: Antonio Cuyler

What is your major?
Arts Administration, and I am a graduate student

What is your musical background?
I started studying voice in fourth grade, then I went to a performing arts high school where I continued to study voice and piano, and then I went on to undergraduate school were I went on to study voice performance with an elective study in foreign languages, and then I came to Florida State to get an Arts Administration degree to kind of tie everything together.

Where did you do your undergrad?
Stetson University

Did you have music in the home, at church, in school- where was it mainly concentrated?
Balance between having it at home, and in church, and in school, but then most of my gospel experience was in church.

Can you tell me about your experience with gospel music?
Gospel music has been a part of my life as far back as I remember. My father, in fact, is a Pentecostal preacher and the music is a very important part of the service, from beginning to end. It starts with a lot of congregational singing and within the service there sometimes seems to be no structure, but there is a structure, and there is a time when the choir sings and the singing is supposed to elevate the minds of the congregation to get them prepared to receive the word from the preacher. I sang in the choir and I also sang a lot of solo stuff as a singer. Gospel music, in recent years, has become more important to me. As I’ve gotten older and I have had several opportunities to study other music- negro spirituals and the jazz- I think Gospel music is just different and it’s special. And I’m really excited about the opportunity to study it in the academic institution. I anticipate in the future there will be opportunities for gospel classes like there are with jazz, jazz ensembles and jazz history, because I think without gospel music there would be no jazz. Actually without the negro spirituals there would be no gospel or jazz. It would be amazing to implement that in the academic institutions in course work.
How do you feel about gospel choir being a part of the institution, considering the institution is state run and obviously gospel choir is very religiously founded?

I think, I’m ecstatic about it, and I think it is one of those things that has kept people intimidated by the idea of studying gospel music because there are those religious elements. Both those religious elements can mean so many different things to so many different people and I think having gospel music in an environment like Florida state University because the words mean so many things to so many different people that there is not one religion preached and forced upon anybody. You go, you participate in the rehearsals and you listen to the songs and it gives you your own individual way of praising or worshipping, whether you are Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, whatever. And I think it’s a wonderful thing. Also, in our institution it brings together people of different cultures. You have a lot of cultural barriers and stereotypes broken down, so much so that we have a multicultural gospel choir. And it’s funny to think that this music that is religious and so close to a certain group of people’s heritage, can bring together so many people from different backgrounds and different ethnicities, it’s wonderful. If jazz can do it, then why not gospel music?

If somebody were Muslim or Hindu and wanted to be a part of the gospel choir, do you think they would feel welcome here?

Absolutely, especially here. I can’t speak for other institutions, but knowing the choir director and knowing members of the choir, they would be welcome with open arms.

As far as musical elements go, and teaching methodologies, with you having a trained musical background, how has gospel music been different than that?

It’s funny because some people would probably say that it doesn’t take any type of technique or any type of stylistic elements, but I think when you listen to singers like The Three Mo’ Tenors and you see that in a concert, in a span of a concert, they sing everything from Puccini, Donizetti, Scarlatti, to all the way to the gospel music, and very contemporary gospel music, people like Kirk Franklin and that sort. So there is a technique behind it, there is a style. I think being a trained singer, and having the tools to be able to sing intelligently, so that I know I don’t sacrifice my technique to sing the style, I just change the style. I still sing with the same technique, I still sing with the breath support, I sing with the right placement, I still sing with pitch acuity, all of those things don’t change, and I think our gospel choir, having being trained by Mr. Figgers, he makes sure that we implement a lot of those things. Where as a lot of the gospel choirs who haven’t had the same academic vocal training, when I listen to them, I think to myself, the tenors are pushing, because the tessitura for a gospel choir is very high for male singers, there is hardly ever a bass part, and since I am a bass, I tend to have to sing in an upper, more heady voice, which isn’t a problem because I have been equipped with the technique to do that, so I think listening to our tenor section, and tenor sections of other choirs, because we implement the technique we get in classical training, it makes it a lot easier for us because we don’t push and we don’t hurt our instruments. I think also the vibrato is different, it’s used to color differently. If you notice, when you listen to long phrases the phrases are started with more of a strait tone, and at the end of that tone there’s a vibrato added to color a little bit. Gospel choirs also have to be careful with that because if there is too much vibrato then the pitch goes out and gospel music cannot be sang out of tune. It can’t be because the chords are so complex, it needs to lock in, the chords needs to be sang in tune. If I was going to coach a gospel choir I would definitely talk about breathing, about posture, placement, all of those things I have learned in my operatic singing I would most definitely apply and teach to a gospel choir because it helps and it makes it so much easier, because when it’s easier, you enjoy it so much more.

How would you foresee gospel choir in a community that may not have the resources?

I think because gospel music has become so much more accessible, there is the opportunity to pick up a recording and have it all laid out there. I’ve noticed at Wal-Mart there’s a huge gospel section now, and I think that’s because the gospel industry is growing, and it’s growing so much so that you’re having not only the traditional gospel song, there’s contemporary gospel, there’s inspirational gospel, there’s all these different styles that are influenced by different music genres like rock, classical music, R&B, the country music, so I think it’s all important. I do think that those recordings are going to make it more accessible and more enjoyable for people of those different backgrounds.

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April 9, 2003
1:25 p.m.
KMU lounge- Florida State University

Name:
Michael Figgers

Official title:
I am the director of the FSU Gospel Choir

Are you also a student here?
Yes, I am a doctoral student in choral music education, graduating this summer

I am doing my dissertation on the inclusion of “world music” in the public school program, which includes gospel music. Initially my thought was to do the effect of gospel music on kids in the public school setting, but it didn’t go that way, so we just kind of tailored it, and called it world music.

How long have you been here?
I have been at Florida State since 2000, actually I did my master’s here and I graduated in 89 and I came back in 2000 to start the PhD program.

So how long have you been with the gospel choir?
This gospel choir I have only been with them for two years, my second year I started with the gospel choir

Can you tell me about your musical background?
Ever since I can remember, I loved music. I started playing piano when I was seven years old, since I was able to tell the difference between a C chord and a G chord, I can remember practicing all the time, I was inspired by my aunt to play and sing. She was the musician from my church. I just loved the way she looked when she sat at the piano, so I started whenever she would go to practice I would sit with her and play up on the treble end. That got me started and I always loved gospel music. I started playing for the church when I was 12 years old and I played until I went to college. I always had an ensemble or a choir, or community choir on the side, other than the actual church choir, and that was the group I would go from church to church doing little concerts or to participate on musical programs.

As far as education goes...
I started in band in seventh grade, and I had a wonderful, wonderful band director who also studied choral music as well, so he taught chorus, and someway I managed to be able to do both. I played in band throughout 12th grade and I sang in the chorus from 10th grade through 12th grade as well. Went on to undergraduate school to study choral music, actually I was set for choral music but I studied both curriculums, the instrumental and the choral, during that time as musicians got out of school, jobs were being offered for one person to do both, and I didn’t want to be limited, so that’s why I studied both. The choir I was in at Florida A&M University, we did a lot of Western Art music, we did a lot of world music, we did a lot of gospel music, and I was fortunate enough to write a few songs for the choir, and actually conduct a few songs in undergraduate school. It was fun.

So did you do your Master’s here in choral conducting?
Actually, I did my Master’s here in instrumental music. So when I left undergrad I did a masters in instrumental music, but saxophone was my major instrument. But when I came back I decided to switch it to voice, and that was good because it opened up the opportunity to be able to teach the gospel choir, so that was a good thing.

When you say you started playing the piano at church, did you read music?
At the time, no. Believe it or not I didn’t start reading music until I was in seventh grade in the band; I didn’t start reading piano music until college, until I went to undergraduate school.

Did you aunt teach you to play by ear, or was it something you picked up?
And that's because my first experience period, with music, begins with gospel. I loved R&B as well, you know, back in my high school days I actually played saxophone with a band called Black Wine, but you know, that was my R&B side. Gospel music has really been a thrust in my musical interest ever since, and I wasn't exposed a whole lot before seventh grade to classical and western art music, and that opened up a whole "hey, I like this and I can do this too" so seventh grade in band in chorus when I could, and definitely had already decided that I was going to actually study this art when I get into college.

You know, she helped me from time to time, but basically, I'd just watch her. If I could remember a certain movement she made, or a particular chord, then after she leaves, I remember that one little thing. Then after that I did start associating with other kids that were around who were also playing, and I'd say show me that man, or will you show me what you did there. I started taking lessons, I had a real bad experience the first time I started taking piano lessons. My piano teacher, I went for three times, on the third time he said listen I don't have time to do this, don't come back no more. It devastated me, I mean I was just crushed. From that time until I got older, I was really afraid to take lessons. And of course that was personal things that he had going on, but anyway, but I got out of it.

Your experience with gospel music seems so intertwined in your musical experiences...

And that's because my first experience period, with music, begins with gospel. I loved R&B as well, you know, back in my high school days I actually played saxophone with a band called Black Wine, but you know, that was my R&B side. Gospel music has really been a thrust in my musical interest ever since, and I wasn't exposed a whole lot before seventh grade to classical and western art music, and that opened up a whole "hey, I like this and I can do this too" so seventh grade in band in chorus when I could, and definitely had already decided that I was going to actually study this art when I get into college.

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I understand you are a minister. Can you tell me a bit about that?

I’ve always been a church boy. I am the son of a preacher. We’ve always been in church and I had one of those experiences where Thursday nights it was prayer meeting at my church and all the other kids were out playing baseball and I was in prayer meeting with all the adults and I was the only kid there. And although I didn’t like it then, it grew on me and it followed me, so I’ve always kind of been the different kid and I’ve always been very, very strong as far as my religious beliefs, believing in church believing in God and what the bible says, and as much as I could tried to live by that. I felt very inspired to enter the ministry. My last year of college, senior year, I studied more, I participated more in church, I assisted and sat with ministers a lot more, traveled with them, played for them, talked with them a lot. In 1987 I was actually ordained and delivered my first sermon. Since that time I have become an associate pastor at the church where I belong here in Tallahassee- the Family Worship and Praise Center in Tallahassee.

Can you tell a little bit about the history that you know about the FSU Gospel Choir?

Can you tell a little bit about the history that you know about the FSU Gospel Choir?

Exactly who started it, I don’t remember, I do have the history written down and I can give you a copy of that. But the choir started out with a very small number and pretty much at that time it was all black. Basically student fostered and as much as there were students that were interested in it. As far back as I can remember there was a young man by the name of William Powell, who is a good friend of mine, who was put on the choir at that time and he did pretty much what I did: taught the choir, actually played for the choir, it was a little different then as they didn’t have a band that played for the choir. He was one of the directors. There’s a student here now, when he came to do his masters, and I am getting this out of order, his name is Jeffery Ames, who was at one time the director. The choir, every two years, had a different director, and usually it is a grad student. Two years when there was a professor here by the name of Sharon Young and Dr. Young was given the assignment of gospel choir. It wasn’t her cup of tea or forte, and she didn’t really like that, and at that time the choir went down to very few students, and there was a gentleman by the name of Tony MacNeal, who was here before Dr. Young, and actually Tony built the choir to almost 100 voices. The unfortunate part is that there wasn’t a whole lot of white participation, basically predominantly African American, but it was a start, and then Dr. Young came in that number kind of…After she left, my musical director, Mitchell Lewis, kept things going and Dr. Thomas assigned the choir to Reggie Jackson and Reggie was actually the pianist, and he graduated in 2000. He took the choir, although he was an instrumentalist, he also played piano, and he took over from Dr. Young and he began to build the choir back up again, because he knew gospel. After Reggie left Dr. Thomas asked me to take the choir when Reggie leaves, and with a great big grin and smile I said “Why of course I have no doubt about it” so he made a very smooth transition. The choir has performed with a whole lot of nationally known recording artists, and that’s because every year in the fall we do what we call an “Explosion Concert.” It’s in conjunction with the Homecoming festivities, and it’s usually the Saturday night, or the Sunday night before Homecoming. That is the concert when we are actually given funds from the University to have a big concert for the students. What we do every year, and has been for several years now, is bring in a nationally known recording artist, and that person comes to Florida State, works with the choir for 2 or 3 days, we actually learn that artist’s songs before they get here, and the artist comes in and
polishes it up, you know tweaks it up, and then we do a concert. We give them a reception, we give them a question and answer period, and then we do this great big fabulous concert with the artist. It’s been tradition that the choir would do the first half without the artist, and the artist would come in on the second half. It’s been great. The two years that I have been here we have had two fabulous artists Joyce Mead, who is out of Jacksonville, right here in Florida, and then this year we had Lamar Campbell who is out of Illinois. And that is such an inspiration for the singers. The students love it “hey this is the guy we hear on the record, this is the guy we go to their concerts” and all and they are spending two or three days with us, and they get to know them personally, just seeing them in their downtime all relaxed. It’s a blast, they look forward to that.

Is the gospel choir officially a part of the choral department or is it part of musicology?
You know, I think it’s a choral ensemble that’s registered under the world music division. It’s actually run by the choral department, but if you look at registration, it’s under world music. Exactly how that happened, other than Dr. Thomas is the advisor, and he is the director of choral activities, that’s how it became...how they do it. And I don’t know if that’s always how they’ve done it, but now definitely it is.

How do you feel about Gospel choir being a part of world music?
You know, that’s fine with me, inasmuch it actually is world music. It’s one of the genres that originated here in the United States, it’s an American art form, and I like it that it is considered world music, but in the sense that it is world music to those outside of America. In other words, it’s not world music to us, but to the Japanese, the Chinese, to others other than Americans, it is world music. So it gives it a little dignity, it gives it a little credence because it is recognized that way. Now, I see jazz music as world music. I am doing my dissertation on the inclusion of world music and in my review of lit, and not that I am surprised but there were several scholars that said actually all music is world music, because it is world music to somebody outside of somebody’s culture. One scholar said that it is all human music, all music that exists. But I don’t have a problem with that. The only time that I do have a problem with it being considered world music is if it is perceived as “that black music.” That’s when I have a problem with it, because it’s not. This year supports that a whole lot because this is the first year that we have had as many Caucasians, we’ve had Koreans in the choir, we’ve had a blast just seeing...and we’ve almost got it half and half now, and that’s the way I’ve always envisioned it because it’s not quote on quote that black music. And we know the whole story, the history behind it, it started in the slave fields, song writers took hymns that were brought over and mixed it with the songs that were being made up in the cotton fields and of course evolved and evolved and of course with their religious experiences we came out with this thing called gospel. But gospel music is for everybody and that’s the way I feel. And I also feel that gospel music is not only for everybody, whether it’s your faith, or whether you just see it as an art form, or like the musical genre. I have a problem when it’s thought of as being less standard than any other genre, and the reason why, and that’s partly our fault those of us being in the gospel industry because it needs to be done right. It needs to be polished and done in a perfected kind of way, rather than “okay, throw some singers over there, put a drum and piano over here, and just do whatever you want to do.” I have a real problem with that, I think that you should be able to take this, as it has been done several times, to the White House and perform it for the president, with no problems. I don’t have a problem with it being world music as long as world music is being perceived the right way.

You have probably observed many changes over the years, with so many people coming in, has that changed the dynamics in the group at all?
Oh yeah, every Caucasian that came in, especially my first year, would come to me privately and say “is it okay if I join the gospel choir?” and I snickered a little bit because it’s a university chorus, you know, anybody can join. But what they’re really asking, is will I be really uncomfortable in the choir, will I looked upon as being an outsider? And my first response is, “Look, gospel music is for everybody. You come, you’ll enjoy it, you’ll love it, and everybody is treated the same. We don’t have a monopoly on this. Come and watch this and see that you’ll enjoy.

Do you think Gospel choir would be beneficial for a community that doesn’t have resources?
Oh yeah, because a lot of gospel music is done a cappella, and not only that but when it started, I mean pianos came along later. It started out with guitars, scrub boards and footboards in the older churches, and then it evolved into the organ and the piano, and that of course made a big difference. But
professional groups that have been around for years sang with nothing but a pianist. I mean that was the entire rhythm section, that was the entire instrumental section all together, just piano. Now as of the late 60's/70's we actually have full bands that accompany the choir, and that's because things have gotten a lot more contemporary. But definitely if you have almost nothing. And almost every group, you're going to find somebody who can play by ear, even if it's just a few chords or just one key, somebody can just follow the chords along. And that's enough to get things started, but it's definitely worth it if you don't have other things. And it's one of those kind of things, musical styles, that people just gravitate towards. In other words, they just catch on to it quickly. Nothing against reading music, but they learn it quickly, their attention span is great, the downside of that is that it takes a little longer to learn because you've got to give each part, but the attention span is longer, and they get into it, because they directly identify with it.

Do you struggle because you have had formal musical training, and here you are conducting this ensemble where you don't use music?
No, if I struggle with anything it's the scores. No, this is natural for me, this is where I came from, and like I said this is where I learned music first. I've always loved it, I've always listened, and not as the normal listener. My thing is, in high school I would listen to a gospel ensemble or choir, and literally analyze what they are doing. How did this choir get this sound? And I'd go back and forth in trying to figure out the differences, so this is pretty easy to me.

In rehearsals you do a lot of hand movements, you'll point backwards, or point up, and that's obviously a key change...
Or an inversion, it can be one of the two, and you just tell them which one it is, and usually in gospel music, the things that you do are things you learn, okay this is a concept, and if you are singing a vamp, a vamp is the part you repeat over and over, it's like an ostinato, if you are doing that and you point upward, particularly if you point upward and you give a cue to the instrumentalists, that says we are going to change the key. To the musicians it could mean either one, so you need to tell them. It's not all guesswork, you rehearse. You have some liberties in concerts, but most of it you rehearse.

Sometimes I will notice in rehearsal you say “I feel like taking it up” is that improvised?
Yeah, exactly, it's improvisation. But it's one of those things where there are a couple of things I can do with this little section here. I can split it off where I can have each section sing along, I can also take it where I can change the key, or I can take it where I can invert the parts, and then I can change the key, you know I can do all that. So what you do is you play around with it in rehearsal to see what you can do, what you like, you incorporate in your concerts. Sometimes on the spot you get an inspiration, but you don't do an inspiration that's not clear. You wouldn't do an inversion here because that's going to put sopranos way across the ceiling, but after you've done gospel music enough, after you've sung it enough, you know the things you can and cannot do. Believe that half of whatever you put into the music, or whatever you do with it, is from the director, is from the communication. They are knowing you, and you are knowing them. There are times when I've been on tour because you are singing every night, you do something one night, and then the next night you feel it a little differently. And sometimes you may forget a cue, because the choir has worked with you long enough they know what to do, and they go ahead and do what they are supposed to do, and that's happened a couple of times. Our tour was fabulous. We had a lot of fun, there were no problems, but we always did really well, people received us quite well. We toured just here in Florida. Last year we went out west, we went as far as Texas. Reggie I think did a larger region. And if I were not in the middle of my dissertation then I would have gone some other places. We had invitations to go, but I know I needed the time, and I didn't want to stay on the road the entire spring break. I needed to get home and do some work.

Gospel choir is religiously based, and as a part of the institution, are there ever any problems with that?
I try to be as diplomatic and definitely as discreet as possible. On the first night of every semester I would always explain that this is gospel as a music form. I said this is not a time that we are coming with the intent to change your beliefs to convince you that this is true. If the music speaks to you in that way, we hope that you express that and it is one of those genres that is so closely related to the faith that it talks about. Most of the songs are about God, or about Christ, or your belief in Him, or whatever other things in the scripture that inspire you to love mankind, be nice, be kind, you know, all that. The songs they are powerful in that they relay that heavily. So if you are convinced or persuaded that way, I'll be glad about
it, but that’s not our intent. What I always try and do is if there is any problem with anything that I say or a part of the rehearsal, like we pray at the beginning of rehearsal, I explain that we pray as a tradition, I hope it’s not a problem. If it is you are very much welcome not to participate in that part, in that it won’t count off your grade, we won’t see you any different. If it still perturbs you, if you’d like to just for that part, step outside and come back in when we start the music that’s perfectly fine, but we don’t want to turn anyone away because they feel as if that’s not the way they believe, then they can’t be a part. And that’s one of the reasons why gospel choirs on university campuses, it’s sort of like walking on egg shells because it is so closely related. I’ve seen gospel choirs on campuses where “if this is not what you believe, you probably in the wrong place, you don’t need to be here” and I think that’s wrong. My take on that is if in the process, I just happen to be a believer myself, the music itself, what we do with it and how we sing it, persuades you, then inside I am happy. Matter of fact the night after our concert, two of the members of my choir came to me, I happen to take my kids to a restaurant where there were some members of the choir, and when we got there, before they left, they left before we did, two of the members of the choir came over and said can we just say something to you, and I said sure. So I got up and went over there, and they said “we just want to say how much we loved and enjoyed the choir this semester, but not only that, but also how much closer it has brought me to my faith. Because you seem to very genuine, and when you teach the music, you teach it in a way that it feels like it means something to you, and thus it began to mean something to us. It’s really brought us closer to our creator, and we want to thank you for that. And that meant a whole lot. It’s the kind of thing that you can’t get up in the choir and say “this is what I want to happen at the end of the semester.” If for no other reason we might lose all our funding.

If a Muslim or Hindu came up to you and said we would like to be a part of your ensemble, what would your reaction be?
My first response would be come on. I do understand that everybody won’t look at the music as purely as an art form and they may have a problem with some of the lyrics or the meanings of some of the music. There was a young lady who was Jewish. She had a lot of problems with some of the songs that alluded to Christ, to Jesus being the actual Son of God. And I explained to her that there are times in other ensembles that I am part of that I have to sing music, that not necessarily support what I believe, but because of ensemble I am a part of, because it’s a part of the genre we are studying, I do it as an art form. I participate because it is a part of what I am studying. It doesn’t affect my faith. If you can look at it like that rather than we are trying to convince everybody else and you that this is the right way to go, then I think you’ll enjoy it a little better. She said, okay, I’ll do that. But personally, it didn’t work for her. So she said, “Nothing against you, I think you have been very fair to me, but it rubs against my faith to hard,” and it’s one of those things. You know you can join vocal jazz and you would never have that problem unless you just hated jazz, you know? But this is an art form that sits right down in the middle of faith. And I see that as being an ongoing problem. The more popular the choir gets, the more people you are going to see coming in from different backgrounds, and you are going to have to deal with the fact that it is going to be different for people of different beliefs. But if you love the art form enough and can see it as just an art form that would be great. Personally, I believe that is hard to do, but I encourage it.

I am so thrilled you are doing this. And I will tell you why. When I first started doing my dissertation, well it’s expected that a black person who has been in gospel choir all of their lives would do that, a study on gospel music, and sometimes it is perceived as those are the only people who will read it, black people who are into gospel. But when you approached me and said I would like to do this it thrilled me so because I said, “okay. It’s happening.” That is, it’s being recognized as a real art form, it does have some qualities that people see as having weight, it’s not just that style of music that is loud, or religious and that “those black people” like to sing and I was so thrilled and to see you come every, and you came to the dress, and you came to the concert...you were serious....a chance to talk about it.

One of my preliminary projects was designing a gospel music workshop for choral directors. Students in choral programs love gospel music, whether it’s what they believe or not. Whether it’s rocking, clapping, they love it. The only time they get a chance to do that are spirituals, you have to calm them back down because they love it. But there is a conflict because teachers a lot of times are not trained and they don’t have the expertise to teach gospel and do it authentically, and it makes students feel as if “you just don’t like it” and it’s not always that, it’s just that “this is not in my experience, I don’t want to embarrass myself by trying to teach this” they just don’t know how to do it, so there’s that little gap there. So, what I did was
use one of my choral projects to design a gospel music workshop for choral directors. State ACDA, national ACDA. Keith Hampton. It needs to be perpetuated annually. Once the director has some knowledge of how to teach it, it’s really like a reward piece. Because it’s going to get the kids excited.

Jacqueline Henderson
Faith Presbyterian Church
March 31, 2004
7:00 p.m.

Jacqueline: Okay, when I came to know myself, of course my father was what they call an itinerant elder, meaning, he got to travel, he got appointed from church to church which we have bishops and presiding elders in the AME church and the bishops appoint ministers to what other church is available on their district. So, when I came to know myself, I woke up and I was this little baby in the AME minister’s family, that’s all I knew, all of my life, basically. So I don’t know what type of questions you have or what you have.

M: Let’s start with basics, why don’t you just tell me name and general background – what do you do, where are you from...you mentioned a little bit about your family...

J: You’re not going to use this in your thesis are you...?

M: No, no...I do this for my benefit so I don’t miss what’s going on, or anything you say.

J: Oh, okay. Well of course I’m from Tallahassee, Jacqueline Henderson, my father’s name is Elijah Henderson. He was an AME minister for about 45 years or more and he pastored from Tallahassee, maybe one or two churches in Tallahassee, and the surrounding counties, that’s where he was sent as an AME minister.

M: Was it at Bethel or no?

J: No, there was a church on Centerville Rd., Centerville AME. Now the other churches were before my time. When we first started out, I can’t even remember the name of that church, but I used to hear him talk about what it was like when he started out.

M: My knowledge of the actual history of the AME church is sort of developing; it’s growing at this time. Could you possibly maybe elaborate or just tell me...

J: I’m not a very good student. Well, of course in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Richard Allen and there were two other men, two or three others, but I can’t remember their names, 1787 and the AME church is, and this is totally my opinion, it was created in protest because at that time the Methodist church did not allows blacks, if they were allowed they were up in the balconies and from what I know from the history of the AME church is that Richard Allen and two of his friends kneeled down to pray one Sunday and they decided “we’re not going to take it any more” and kneeled down with everybody else. And kneeled down in the sanctuary and of course the white elders got upset and they pulled them while they were praying from the alter and they said “we’re not going to take this any more, we’re going to pull out and get our own church” and that’s basically it in a nutshell. So that’s what happened and from there of course, we have churches all over the world, on every continent, I believe, all over the United States and I would advise anyone who is doing research if you have an opportunity to visit different areas from coast to coast you’ll find sometimes there are differences day and night.

M: So, you’ve grown up in the AME church and you said that when you “found yourself” you’re talking about this sort of experience of finding yourself; can you explain that a little more?

J: Oh, let me elaborate on that. You know as children that means that’s all I’ve known. When I came to realize self or whatever I said, ‘well, okay, I’m in a minister’s family. Cool! I never knew anything else- a very sheltered environment and often people, I don’t want to go off on a tangent, but people misunderstand there are certain standards, it’s like being in a glass bowl all the time and you know it’s...you learn a whole lot about patience, about service to other people. My father was always on the go, he had to be. It’s like always being on call and people call the minister from everywhere; the middle of the night. You know, you’re sitting down having dinner and all of a sudden someone calls and he has to go and settle a dispute or marry someone, never mind he’s eating dinner, so that’s the type of environment I grew up in. Always not knowing what’s going to happen next but always being prepared for whatever.

M: What has brought you to the Presbyterian Church?

J: I was led to the Presbyterian Church. It’s a strange thing, after my father’s passing two years ago, this July will be two years ago, I felt the calling of ministry and I didn’t want anything to do with that because I had grown up in it and it was the strangest thing because after he passed away, some of the last words he
told me was “you’re not going to win them all” and I was like, “what is he talking about?” and later I realized that he knew all along that I had this calling in my life and I knew nothing about the Presbyterian church, as a matter of fact when I lived in this area I passed this church every Sunday going back and forth to another church and I just felt you know it’s like a presence in calling me to come to this church and I know nothing about this church, I’ve never even been in this church and all I can say is it was the presence of God. God impressed upon me to do so and I don’t feel that pressure any more and that’s how I know that I am in the right place. So, it’s been an interesting journey.

M: Because this has been very recent...

J: Four months, that is why I was surprised I had to stand up on Sunday in front with all of the other new members.

M: Can you tell me a bit about your musical background?

J: I have an older sister that plays piano, she’s a natural, plays by ear, and she reads music. I used to watch her play piano and wish that I could do it. Finally my father agreed to have me do lessons, but the interesting thing is that we were taught differently. She was taught gospel, my piano teacher, was a classical music teacher. She was from Paris, France: Adrie Nosco, was her name, she was about this tall (5 ft), very strict, and she always ate ham. For some reason whenever we’d practice she always had a plate of ham and crackers and her French cheese.

So anyway, I took lessons from her for about five years. And her goal was to make me in to, and notice I used the word make me in to, a classical pianist. She said, Jacqueline, you’re going to play with so and so someday and I’m like, I don’t think so. So she taught me to read music and I have no background in choral music and I finding out that it is the same, but somewhat different. Because some of the terms Russell uses I have no idea, I go off of my command of the English language and Spanish, into the Italian to figure out what he is saying. So I took piano lessons from her for about five years and she wanted to go on and I wish I would have went on, but when I learned to read music I think that is what my father was satisfied with. Learning to read music and I never had the ear as my sister did to play by heart or ear, but I fell in love with classical music by that ruler that she had- she never allowed me to drop my wrists, she made me sit up straight, keep your fingernails short – oh she was very strict. And we did recitals and I don’t think I ever did great on the recitals because she always had, we practiced on one piano and she’d have us do recitals on a baby grand and I mean it just frightened me- was acclimated to the one we practice on. So that is the gist of my musical background and there is a lot that because I didn’t follow through with it, there’s a lot of things I have forgotten, the measures and the beats, but it is coming back to me now that I am in it every Wednesday, but the only thing I regret is that I never sang choral music before.

M: Why now, why the change?

J: Once again, calling to do so. It’s almost like, I wouldn’t say a midlife crisis, since I am not that old yet to go through one, but it’s like everything has come full circle.

M: Can you elaborate on that a bit? Because I’m really interested in this idea as music as a healer.

J: It is a healer, it is. Let me tell you what happened when I came here. Number one: I was frightened, and when I say frightened I mean, I was out of my comfort zone. It’s not that I am afraid of people, I have never been afraid of people, but I didn’t know. It’s like God pointed me in a direction. Eddie Soto [Faith pastor] always jokes with me, “Oh, you were one of those Jonah’s!” I came out of the belly of a whale. But it’s all very strange and all I knew was to be obedient to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit led me here for a reason and not only did I have to join, after I got comfortable out there in the audience, oh no, that wasn’t good enough.

M: Really? He said “Get up there?” [choir and choir loft]

J: And I didn’t understand and another habit of mine, and I am trying to break it, is that I question I’ve gone and I’ve had these “why? I’m not going to do that!”

M: “Yeah, you’ve got to be kidding me”

J: “Yeah, I’m like they sound beautiful...why...” and once again, that heavy hand, and it’s the only way I can describe it, it’s like this presence. Once I am obedient, it’s like a burden; it lifts up off of me and I now know why. I don’t think I know the full reason yet, to come, but I do know it’s healing. It’s very healing in areas that I didn’t even know I needed healing in. Number one: I know I am still grieving over my father’s death and I don’t know, I feel differently, I feel great, in spite of the job. The one thing that happened to me when I joined here, everything else went crazy – I mean the job – I’m like is this still God’s way of arranging things, shaking things around me. And from that I am still healing, it’s an inner peace thing. But once I joined, the very first Sunday that I came here, which was an experience in itself, I felt a peace that I can’t even explain. I didn’t know anything could be that peaceful. But it’s just peace.
M: Being here? Being in the choir? Or just the presence of everything?
J: The presence of everything, and it was among strangers. I'm like how bizarre- I felt like Abraham. I mean, even before I got here he kept telling me he's going to show me a land...go to...and so I did it and I am happy that I did because it is such a peace that you can't touch like you touch this cup, it's there. It's like I am home.

M: How has it been since being in the choir and since being here? Is it evolving or just carrying you along?
J: I am trying to learn not to control things, I am trying to just, my sister has a term "let it rip." Whatever will be will be. I have this knack of trying to control. As a matter of fact what really got me here was that I had this nightmare. God had gotten tired of me not...and I'll tell you, it was November 30th, and I have told this before in meeting, but I had this dream that God in a tree, I don't know if you have ever had a dream when God is talking to you, but anyway I have had these experiences and it was like "It's the last day of the year." You know what was going through my mind? This is the last day of your life. That was my interpretation of the dream. But I heard the voice of God- it's the last day of the year. No explanation was needed, I knew what I had to do. I knew I had to come here. Because I was just crazy, because I thought it was the last day of my life. It was crazy. It wasn't literally the last day of the year, it was Nov. 30th, but I know for sure that I am in the right place and I did the right thing.

M: How do you feel having moved over from the AME to the Presbyterian church? Is it a matter of doctrine or just a matter of where you are comfortable?
J: I didn't even know I would be comfortable here, and that was one reason I was hesitant. It's like God is pointing me to a place I have never been before, a territory and it's not so much that it's a predominantly white church, because I noticed that what he has done all of my life, actually he has prepared me for that, because all of my life he has placed me in positions like that. Where I am the only minority or maybe one other and when I look back that's the way...(interruption) when I think about what I have been allowed to experience the privilege, He has really prepared me. But as far as doctrine, I did notice something. My later years in the AME church, I felt as if I wasn't growing. I felt as if there was more of an emphasis on African Methodism instead of what God wanted. And it's just my opinion. I don't know how many other people feel that way, but that's how I felt. This was long before my father's death, I just felt that there wasn't any growth and I don't know why. But what I have learned about the Presbyterian church I am very pleased with and it's almost like a hunger being filled. That's the interesting thing and I was like, wow, God knew this long before I did and I was trying to resist him all along and I've been trying to outrun him and fight him. I think another thing about the doctrine, I think we should get beyond, and when I say we I am talking about African Methodists Church, I know that there will probably always be racism, but I believe in my mind that I am going to be the best person that I can possibly be, I am not going to keep digging up the past. I find that many times that is mixed in with the denomination. And it's not good- you can't grow that way. How can you follow Jesus Christ and you have this thing on your shoulder you keep digging and so I saw all of that I knew then I had been praying to God for years, "What do I do?" It's like I had grown beyond this, and when he finally tells me what to do I run from it. How funny.

M: It's amazing to me to think, coming from the AME church, the music is very different than it is here. How are you adapting to that?
J: How do I do it? As I said, I have been prepared all of my life. I grew up in a musical family, with my sister playing piano, I have uncles who have their own musical group, play guitar and everything. And my classical music background, I look at how different my sister and I were taught in piano. She had a gospel music teacher. For some reason, my father, I was different, he just you're gonna have this teacher, so I have the best of both worlds. I am able to adapt. Because Adrian Nosco was very disciplined, which I find here, and as you know in AME we are very emotional, but Ms. Nosco wasn't like that. That just kicks in. I am very comfortable in both worlds.

M: That's great because it is so different and I would think having been in that kind of expressive environment, it would be hard, musically, emotionally expressive, and then to come to an environment where it was a little bit more restrictive, I would think that would be a little bit difficult. But no, you don’t find it that way?
J: Not at all. No in a way...another reason I think God sent me to the choir- I am learning a whole lot about the Presbyterian church, I am learning a whole lot about the order of things and I think the experience I had as a youngster with Adriane Nosco, I think her being European, she was French and you know how the French are, she left quite an impact. She scared the emotion out of one side because she was so strict- the way I dressed, the way I even held a cup- she was very stern about small things. The way you eat a cookie- she taught me things different things about that. I used to eat the way the English with the spoons- she
taught me things like that. My father was such an awesome man, within his wisdom, he had a third grade education, and can you imagine? In a world...even as a minister, but the wisdom he had and every parent knows their kid, but the wisdom he had to put me with a French teacher- he knew. And here I am; I am able to adapt to totally different...when I look back on my life, I was going to give you my resume, the places I have been have been of pure privilege, favor. And I can adapt because I have been trained to do so.

M: I am finding, and I don’t know that I could ask someone at the AME church, I was almost sort of shocked because I had this idea of a southern black church, already you are sort of knocking off one tier of the upper socioeconomic level, but that was totally inaccurate because what I am finding, and perhaps it is just this church, these people are very wealthy people, very well educated, extremely intelligent, and I am generalizing of course, but the people I have come into contact with it’s just completely knocked my socks off because I came in with this narrow tunnel vision.

J: And that’s why I am encouraging you to visit other churches. Now you do have churches that are the southern, they aren’t as educated, they are AME’s but Bethel is considered the First Church. In most cities the churches by the name of Bethel are considered upper middle class, that is something for you to know.

M: I did not know that

J: Many people wouldn’t have given you the benefit of the doubt.

M: I mean, but I was happily surprised. There is nothing better than going in to a place with one view and coming out with a completely different perspective. That is good to know.

Dr. Rose Hill
Bethel AME
Thursday, April 1, 2004
2:35 p.m.

M: I just have a list of questions, so if we can just start with the basics and you can tell me a bit about yourself, your history, your musical repertoire, how you came to Bethel.

DH: Ooo...well, I came to Bethel a whole lot of years ago, because I came from Philadelphia and I came to Tallahassee because my mom wanted me to go to Florida A&M University, so I came to Tallahassee as a junior in high school so that when I finished it was an automatic transfer and you don’t have the out-of-state fees and all of that kind of stuff to consider. So that’s why I came, but I joined Bethel immediately upon coming. I was a music major at FAMU and played for the choir at Bethel at that time it was choir number 2, at that time we only had two choirs and they were both adult choirs and then children’s choir and there was myself and another musician because my music teacher in high school had recommended me, she was also a member of Bethel and she got married and was going to go somewhere else. So under her wings I started at Bethel. So that’s how I got started here and I played for the choir most of my life, in fact I have played for almost every choir in this church over the span of that time because with them, and then I started a youth choir...

M: What year was that?

DH: Oh, you’re going to make me think what I am going to do. Well I did write a little history and I did that because it occurred to me that many of the people who were around during that time are no longer around and there’s nobody to tell the history. Upon the pastor’s request for all of us to start thinking historically about how we got started I put one together for the music department to show all of the changes that have been made. So, that’s how I got started and that was in 1953-54. I played all during college and I worked also, but I did not give up on playing for the choir. And then my senior year in college was when I started the youth choir, we had a youth choir and I guess it’s intriguing because some of the people in my youth choir at that time are still in the choir with me. Some people have come up to me and said “Don’t you remember that I was in your choir, we had a youth choir.” So you get to see people grow up, and move away, and be on their own and be their own person, so it’s interesting to watch that. And I’ve had the pleasure of doing that. Somebody reminded me the other day that I have been through so many pastors: I started with Reverend Littles, then there was Reverend Harris and then there was Rev. Roberts, Rev. Hinson, Rev. Richardson, and now Rev. Green. Well, that’s about 50 years of experience that we are talking about and I have been here through all of that.

M: So you’ve seen a lot of changes, in general, but especially with the music and you have been at the hand of all those changes –that’s amazing. Some of the bulk of the questions that I have for you is the actual structure of the choirs is set about, because when I came to you initially I said I would like to be working
with the gospel choir—so how did those come into being. Was there a need or did people come to you and say...

DH: Well, there’s a need in a sense because worship changes as people change as the environment changes, the social environment that we all live. So as that changed, the music changed, the taste of people changed, and that sort of thing. Because we are the largest in terms of black churches in town, and you attract all kinds of people coming to our church, and this being the state capitol you’ve got lots of people coming in for jobs and you watch all of that turn over and in order to keep the interests and the attraction, you learn to try to make that music in the worship service go along with changes that people are experiencing in order to keep them here. It’s not easy to describe how all of that happens, but it does.

When I first started we were a very, very conservative church, with everything, because most of our members were people who taught on the university campus or who were teachers because in that day for the black population that’s what you were, if you were a professional, more than likely you were a teacher or you worked on the campus and those were the options that we had. And so you catered toward a clientele that had a different kind of intellectual level. We were very conservative and the church was very conservative and that’s in terms of the kind of people who worship and operated and ran the church and we met those needs and because we met those needs that sustained Bethel as a leading church in the community. And then we got into Civil Rights and Bethel was the hub then, and when groups were meeting and people were meeting and dealing with the issues that we had to deal with, they did it at Bethel. And our pastor at that time was adamant that we had to be involved because really if you really look at the Christian message, it is a missionary message it is an outreach message and it is concerned about the whole person and so if you really believe in all of that and you believe in how Christ reached out to make that difference, we have to do it too. You don’t stop to think about that a second time. During the Civil Rights Movement we were very busy and very involved and many of our members were leaders in the movement and helping to make things happen and get things done and being spokespersons for whatever the issues were and all of that. We moved into that. You’ve got to remember too that we have always had the college clientele. When you are dealing with the college students, who I don’t care what era we are talking about, they are always “rebellious” or whatever and I don’t see it as being rebellious now, I guess I did when I was younger, but its not, its just that they’re on top of the issue because they’re impacted by it in a different way; when you get to be mature and adult you can see things a little differently and you have a little bit more patience about some things, but when you’re young and 21 and 22, patience is not a virtue. That always makes the difference. If the church is really sensitive to that peace, you find yourself starting to do things to help to make those things happen. And that’s been the life of Bethel. After we got out of the Civil Rights Movement, and we’re not really out of it because the NAACP and Urban League and all of those groups still use this as the hub for those activities and if you watch the newspaper when there are issues that impact the community, they come to Bethel to meet. So we still play a strong role in what you would call community change. That’s something we live with and we don’t have a problem with accepting. Given that kind of backdrop, of course your music is going to change. Um, I think our gospel choir did, it started when we were over on Virginia Street. You know about the church we had at the building we had before?

M: No...my knowledge about this is very limited at this point...

DH: Oh, I’m sorry. Well, Bethel was originally on Virginia Street, Virginia and Duval, you know where the bus station is? Well we were right behind the bus station. In that day we were really downtown. It was a downtown church and people kind of came from everywhere. But like someone we were talking about the other day, it was a residential area—people could walk. We didn’t have as many cars as we have now. People could just walk from where it is. Parking was not a problem. And then one day we recognized parking was a problem...there’s nowhere to park down here. And so we got the lot across the street from us and there’s an auto parts place right behind the church and that guy used to let us, as I said we only had a few cars, those people who had cars, park in front of his store. And it just grew, but what happened of magnitude was, in 1979 the beam broke in the church and of course the church got condemned. And it was on a Sunday morning when it broke and the church was condemned, so then we had to move out of the church, next to the church there’s an education building, which we had built, so for a while we had service in the education building, but the congregation kept growing and it was not large enough to do what we were doing, so they started planning to build another church, and as they plans were being unfolded, we used to have church in (Perry Pays??) building on FAMU campus. We’ve also had church in Lee Hall on FAMU campus, so FAMU has been very very good to us, you know. We were out in the wilderness is the way we term it, for about four years, which is a long period of time. While we had to find the property, buy
DH: No. It’s changed a little bit. He brought all of those in, so everybody had a specialty, so to speak, and to handle all of these people and do the kind of worshipping and programming that we really needed to do. And so Rev. Richardson at the time, who was our pastor, you know we really started to planning mode, and what he did with the choirs was to give them specific charges. So then we had a male choir, we had a heritage choir, which was the choir that I used to play for, and that was choir number two, these were the older men and women who used were used to singing the old time gospels and spirituals. And then we had choir number 1 who were what we call the Anthem choir, they used to do the anthems and things, so they became Sanctuary choir. And then we had the children’s choir, which I worked with also, and then we noticed that we had all of these youth sitting out there, so we had to do something about that. So, Marty’s mom started working with them, so now we had 5 choirs, and when we were in the church we had 2 choirs. Well, we had three because we did start the gospel choir over there just before we were getting ready to leave out of there, when we recognized that we had all of these college students who wanted to be a part of the music program. Who had a different sense and a different taste for music, we started the gospel choir right before we left out of that building. So then we brought the gospel choir over. I must have left somebody out...Male Choir, Sanctuary choir, Gospel Choir, Children, Youth.

M: And that’s what you still have today?

DH: That was in this building, yeah in the 80’s. When we started using the instruments and then Rev. Richardson, who himself had been in the FAMU band, he played saxophone and was a drum major, brought in a drummer. And so people had to get used to that, now like I said we started off as a very conservative church.

M: What was the reaction to that?

DH: Well, you got mixed reactions: for some people “yeah” for some people “ah, we doin’ that. We don’t need that noise in here.” So there was not a sense that people disliked it to the point that they rebelled against it. They kind of got used to it because we kind of did a little by little, you know that kind of thing, so we brought the drummer in and then with the youth choir that Marty’s in, with their singing, they started really using the drums because their music is more upbeat. So that was a new piece for everybody. And they start, at first, and some people were there and some people weren’t, but then it got to be as the choir grew and they got better at what they were doing, and they’re excellent, because everybody is always pulling at them, they are very well excepted. You know, this is what we gonna get when the youth choir is singing. And we call them “Youth and Young Adult choir” because there are college students in there who came through it as a young person, who are now out of college, but they don’t want to leave the choir. (laughs) But they’re there. And I think that they are a very family oriented group, they are a very tight knit group. They’ve been together a long time, I mean you can just see it, they love each other and they do stuff together and you can’t break ties like that and it’s not necessary to do it. Whenever they get to the point when they want to do another choir, they’ll do it. Now they enjoy what they’re doing. We’d rather have them here, enjoying what they’re doing, then be somewhere else. I don’t think anybody even thinks about it anymore. You know, they’re a part of the fabric and that’s the way we want it to be anyways, so that’s how we grew there. Then when Rev. Green came, no before he came, we used to try to do things that would pull the whole music department together and it was Rev. Richardson who then hired a minister of music. Somebody who could help us weave all of this and make it one, so that you don’t, you’re not dealing with choirs, you’re dealing with a music ministry, and that was his goal. Rev. Green came in and he too was more or less music ministry oriented and we got another minister of music to help us do that and as we worked on building a concept of music ministry, the thought was that we don’t need all of these choirs. Bring them all together because we would do it occasionally anyway, so why do we have all of these choirs.
So you really have to reach back and try to deal with this now if we do this, why are we doing it and what is the impact. So we kind of struggle with that in order to get it together, And so Rev. Green had it where we had the Sanctuary and the Heritage choir became one. And they wanted to keep the male choir because there is a sense that we want that male image out there we don’t want to lose that male image. It’s important.

M: Why is that?

DH: Well, that’s a social thing (laughs)- I don’t think it has anything to do with religion. That’s a social, macho thing. Okay?

M: I understand, I do.

DH: So we maintained the male choir and put the other two together, and of course we maintained the youth group to take care of that segment, and we have the children so that as they grow, they can come into this. The idea is that there is a growth pattern there. With the exception of the male chorus. At one time we were trying to figure out if we could start a male group that would feed into the others, and we talked about it. We had a male group that we called “The Sons of Allen” and they did all kinds of special things with them. To keep their attention as well as provide a support base for the young guys so that they would feel a sense of belonging too. But they were not interested in choir, so to speak, they liked the boy things and the man things. I think in some people’s mind there is still a little bit of taboo about men and music.

M: In choir singing especially, because if it were a jazz band it would be a totally different story. You know?

DH: that’s true. So you still have to work with that, and that’s out there. It’s not as pronounced as it used to be, and I don’t think people express their dislike as much, but every now and then you can feel it.

M: I have a question about the actual service, during the actual service. And during the service there seems to be, in talking with Daryl very briefly, he mentioned that each service has I think there’s a praise song, there’s a hymn, are there different...

DH: Yeah, and I’ll give you the write up on that. I do workshops for our church so there’s a write up to explain to you the meaning behind each piece in the service and why we do it. We start with the processional, and then the Praise God is always our doxology, and then our opening hymn is what we call a hymn of praise. That’s always focus on God, or Christ, the creator...whatever you want to call it. The opening hymn is always of that nature. And then of course after the opening hymn there’s prayer, and then after the prayer there is the selection by the choir. And what we try to do with that is encourage the choir to come up with selections that support and enhance whatever the message is for that Sunday. And you know that takes a whole lot of planning. So, what our pastor did this year is that we got themes throughout the year, and if you have seen the bulletin, it’s in there, so that’s why we have the themes, so that our choirs can focus on the theme as they select whatever it is they are doing. Now naturally because we use a Liturgical calendar, Easter and Christmas is a natural, but some of the other religious symbols and things is not a natural if you are not looking at the liturgical calendar. So the hymns and the selection, and then there’s the scriptures, based on the liturgical calendar, and then we do Gloria Patri and there’s another selection. And after that selection, what we do is to deal with the membership so to speak, cause you have welcome, have announcements and all of that kind of thing. The first thing was to recognize and acknowledge God, and acknowledge why we are here, so that’s the first part of it, and then you’re going to the congregation and the fellowship part of it. And after that and the offering, you’re back to the seriousness of the worship. I shouldn’t say seriousness, for lack of a better word, back to worshipping of God, okay? And then we go to a sermonic hymn, sermonic hymn meaning that it is a hymn that too will speak to the message that the pastor is going to give. And then of course the sermon, and then after that we have the invitation, or what we call the opening of doors, because after that you’ve heard the message, you’ve heard the prayer, you’ve heard the scripture and that kind of thing, and now we’re saying “all who would like to be a part of this body, whether you are people who are coming from somewhere else, or people who have never been a part of any religious body and who now see or have a belief in what we believe in, and that’s to trial (?) in God, you know you can come join the church, come join the membership, so to speak. And then after the invitation is generally moving to leaving, departing, to serve departing, to do whatever you’ve done now that we have touched bases with what is in your heart and what is in your head, and hopefully you’re gonna leave with some message, whether it was from the prayer or the scripture or the word itself, or you know, the song.

M: It appears that music does play such an important part in enhancing that message. I am wondering, one of the things I find interesting is that, looking at the hymnal sometimes, and I’ve noticed this in rehearsals with Marty, is that the text is the same as what they are using for the hymn, but the notes, the rhythm is all
very different than what’s actually written in the hymnal. And I was wondering if you sort of do the same thing or is that a Marty thing or is that common and if so, why is that?
DH: Alright, you’re saying that the text is the same but the music is different from what you see in the book? Oh, okay...(laughs) well, now there may be two or three different things happening. One thing is that we use what we call metered music for some of the hymns, you know what that is right. So it can be a common meter, short meter, long meter...so depending on which one of those tunes if I see it’s a common meter and it may be written in the book on the page that you see it in one tune, knowing the congregation, I might select another tune that they are more familiar with.
M: Really? So you’ll select the text that’s actually written, say hymn 72, you’ll take that text, but you’ll take the actual melody that they know and apply it to that text. That’s interesting. Is that pretty common?
DH: In the Methodist church, yes.
M: In my historical knowledge of the African American Church and since it’s inception, that most of this music was learned not by opening up a hymnal until 1801, so I am just wondering if the hymnal was a symbol of validation as saying, yes we are now officially our own church, and we’re being recognized with this hymnal, but even today, most of the music is learned by ear, at least in the gospel choirs.
DH: Yes, at least in the gospel choir, it’s all by ear. But, that’s an interesting observation because most of our churches, our church came out of the white Methodist church, so we brought those hymns with us. But we have our own style. Have you ever seen the tape on Amazing Grace? Because it’s just amazing how many different ways Amazing Grace is sung. And somebody was smart enough to put it together historically. But that’s it. The hymn takes on the emotion and the feeling of the hymn that sings it.
M: Do you think in 1787 do you think that this played an important part in establishing the African Methodist Episcopal community? Do you think the music might have had some sort of influence during that separation? Because now they were no longer restricted to learning the white hymns, and then they were allowed to do their own interpretation?
DH: Yeah, but they’ve always done their own interpretation. That’s how we got these spirituals. For which you won’t find music. If somebody doesn’t still have it in their head, you can hang it up. But they did their music...music was a way of life. And it’s for the soul and in the black community it really was for the soul. And some writers say that the black church is an emotional church. It’s an emotional experience and so they bring that with them, to the church experience so I think that’s part of what we are dealing with. And when I give you my little historic piece you’ll see it in there. The person, the minister who started the AME church, put out the first hymnbook that was used in black churches. But now there was no music to it, it was just words.
M: That’s this.
DH: Right, so naturally they brought the words with them, but they did what they wanted with the melody and they sing it from the soul. So it comes out as a different kind of piece from the way it was taught to them; it’s soulful music. I (chuckles) work with the choir at my daughter’s church, she’s in California, and it’s a white church, she’s Presbyterian, and they always want me to come and teach them something ‘cause they say “You make us have soul” and I’ll say “but you’ve got soul” and there’s a misconception that quality and soul don’t go together, but it does. You know, there’s soulfulness in anybody’s music, even the white European, if you hear the right person singin’ it, you’ll say, “wow” you know it just sets you hair on your head. There is soul, but the soul comes from within and you have to get people to understand that that’s what it is, that’s there and what expression of whatever those words were saying. And so you just accept that. And that’s the only real difference between the so-called European way the hymn is sung and the way it’s sung when you hear it in an African Methodist Church or a Baptist church. You’ll even hear it in a Baptist church different than you would in our church. But it’s all about the emotion, the soul, the expression, the feeling.
M: In my experience, because I am up at the Presbyterian church, there always seems to be this inhibitor, between say the music making, and what’s actually the ultimate goal, is some sort of spiritual connection. There seems to be almost a guard, and perhaps that’s a number of different factors and that could also be personal. But at least in my experience here with the choirs there seems to be almost a direct connection. What is it about the music or the style or what it is that enhances that or that creates that?
DH: I think it’s all in our perception of how you worship God. Some of it is intellectual and some of it is strictly feeling. Now that’s all that I have been able to come up with. In our head we accept God, in our head we know that when we go to church that we are there to worship, and in our head we say, okay if we’re here praying, and singing and reading the scripture, that’s worshipping God. And I always start my workshops by asking people what is worship. Cause I don’t think we really get into it with an
understanding. Some of us come to church 50 years you know, we gonna do that at 11:00. (laughs) cause I come to worship. If you come to church I worshipped. But when you’re looking at a Marty’s group, or some of these other groups, they come to church, but they come to make that connection. They come to commune. And very seldom when I’m trying to deal with groups on what is worship, very seldom do they use the word commune. They’ll be able to tell me that I come to pray, hear the scripture, hear the pastor preach, and I get something from that. But it’s a different kind of emotional peace. And I don’t know how you deal with it, I really don’t, I just do it just to because most of the workshops I do is on worship and music and I try to put the connection together so that they’ll know the difference. And in some churches, the church is music driven, they come to hear the choir, they come to see them perform, they don’t come to get involved in the worshipping of God. And then you’ll say “did you go to church” “yes” “how was it?” “oh, it was great” “what did the pastor say?” “I don’t know but it was great” so I always have fun with that little piece. Just to get people to start thinking about you know, well why do we really go? 

M: That brings me to another area, this idea of music and healing. And I have one experience here with the youth choir where they did this praise for the entire rehearsal. And in fact afterwards Marty just said, “Well, I wasn’t planning on that, we’re going to have another rehearsal just so we can get something done” but the feeling leaving that rehearsal. People came in and they did this praise the whole time and it was amazing because Marty would play a piece and Marty would just kind of improv and people would sing over that. But the feeling afterwards was one of resolution and I’m just wondering if you have experienced this? 

DH: Mmm, hmm...that is to say that is part of the reason why I ask people what worship is. And there is a healing, there is a balm in Gilead. There is a healing, but it has to do with your ability, your willingness, your openness, to really communicate with God. I mean that puts everything else outside of your realm. I mean, you don’t know that Jay Jones was sittin’ over there, because that’s not what you’re there for. If you’re really worshipping, you’re trying in your own way, whatever that might be, to tune in with the presence of a Magnificent Creator, that’s a different peace. That’s not an intellectual here again. That’s deeper.

M: Do you think that music has some influence? 

DH: Oh yeah, I think so. It’s like yoga. Yeah. And I know even for me, when I have had all of the struggling that I have to do up here everyday, I go home and 12:00 at night I am at my piano. And I may be just as sleepy as I wanna be, but once I get there I’ll sit there a couple of hours and I can deal with it. And I can calm down and I can be at peace with myself.

M: That’s amazing.

DH: But that’s an inward thing. And I try to help my choir understand that we all have our own way of tuning in. You know? But you learn that as you go, that’s not something that happens overnight. You learn that as you move along and as you...I am trying to think of how somebody says something...I forgot that now. But it has to do with milk. I’ve forgotten. I’ll come back to it. But it’s a maturation kind of peace. But it really requires an opening and a way of getting itself...(student interrupts)...It’s an inward thing. Some people can go within and some people can’t. That what’s yoga is about, they teach you how to focus inwardly and into your spiritual self.

M: Do you think that you’re sort of the equivalent to a yoga teacher?

DH: Oh no... 

M: but in essence, you’re teaching people how to sing and how to do all of these different things with the music.

DH: Well, I guess. I never really thought of it that way... 

M: I mean, you’re role as a director and as a music facilitator and instructor you’re giving people the tools maybe to actually achieve something that they weren’t otherwise able to achieve.

DH: Yeah, when you say it that way, yes, yes...um, but what I’ve also learned to is that you can help them, what I try to do is to help to build an understanding for how you do it, but I can’t do it for them. And some people kind of get misled and I hear directors talking all of the time because you know, you can really burn out with this because people expect that it is something that you do to them. It is not anything that we do to them, it is what we do for you and you have to do the rest. You know? I can’t wave a magic wand and immediately you are changed into whatever. It’s like I heard coach, the new coach for FAMU’s basketball team and they had a celebration there because FAMU’s basketball team went to the NCCAA. And this is only his second year there and he was saying that things turned around when the boys decided that they would let him be their coach. I said, “how profound,” cause that’s true and I sat there and I guess I should have heard what else he said beyond that, but I guess I started wandering...I start reflecting, I really did.
said, you know, there is a whole lot of truth to that. Because I’ve been working with groups over a whole lot of years now and that is true that when people decide that you have something to offer and you can coach them into whatever it is, it will make a difference. But, if they expect that you just going to change them, that’s not going to happen. It’s like knocking on this table trying to knock something in their heads and you wonder why now, I worked so hard today and we went over that a hundred times and they still don’t know it, they don’t get it. But it has to be in part them too. And I said well, I’ve got to remember that and I really reflected on that. You know, it makes a whole lot of sense.

M: It does. One other thing I want to sum up with is, in my experience in ethnomusicology, and that is the field I am in, it’s studying cultures, diverse cultures. Initially when I came to my professors and I said I wanted to study gospel music they kind of looked at me and said, “What are you talking about, well, why?” and so eventually I did my preliminary research on the FSU gospel choir and they started to see that yeah, you know maybe this is something to sort of be looking at. What, if somebody came and asked you what is it about this music, should it be validated, should it be researched or looked at in depth, what would you say?

DH: Oh I would say yeah, I mean really I was quite fascinated when you told me because I don’t know anybody else who has taken it on. I know we have some black writers who have done it, and I think we do it more out of a sense, it’s a selfish sense, I’ll admit that. But to have someone say that I really do want to understand. You see, part of us think we do have some understanding about it, cause we’re in it, so we do have some understanding, but you’re an outsider lookin’ in. I said, wow you know, that’s interesting.

M: Well, and for me, I want other people to understand it, you know? Because I find it absolutely amazing music for me, it’s just an incredible culture that I think other people need to be aware of and just know what is going on. And hopefully have some understanding of it.

DH: Right, and with understanding brings appreciation.
APPENDIX B: EXCERPTS FROM RICHARD ALLEN’S 1801 HYMNAL

COLLECTION

OF

HYMNS & SPIRITUAL SONGS.

FROM VARIOUS AUTHORS.

BY THE REV. RICHARD ALLEN,
MINISTER OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

PHILADELPHIA,

PRINTED BY T. L. FLOWMAN,
CARTER’S-ALLEY.
1801.

Sold at No. 350, Spruce-street.

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1. AND are we yet alive,  
   And see each other's face?  
   Glory and peace to Jesus give,  
   For his redeeming grace.  

2. Preserv'd by pow'r divine,  
   To feel salvation here;  
   Again in Jesus' name we join,  
   And in his light appear.  

3. What troubles have we seen,  
   What conflicts have we past;  
   Fightings without and fears within,  
   Since we assembled last.  

4. But out of all, the Lord  
   Hath brought us by his love;  
   And still he doth his help afford,  
   And hides our life above.  

5. Then let us make our boast,  
   Of his redeeming pow'r;  
   Which saves us to the uttermost,  
   Till we shall sin no more.  

6. Let us take up our cross,  
   Till we the crown obtain;  
   And gladly reckon all things lost,  
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APPENDIX C: CONCERT PROGRAMS

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY GOSPEL CHOIR
PRESENTS ITS ANNUAL SPRING CONCERT

Saturday, March 29, 2003
6 o’clock PM
Christian Heritage Church
Richard Ledford III, Pastor
Min. Michael S. Figgers, Director
Rev. Calvin J. McFadden, Master of Ceremony

Welcome & Introduction of Emcee........Pastor Richard Ledford III
Prayer & Introduction of FSU Gospel Choir........Rev. C.J. McFadden

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY GOSPEL CHOIR
PART I

Lift Him Up........................................Andre’ Forbes
Damon Dandridge- Lead

Oh How Wondrous....................................John P. Kee
Michael Figgers- Lead

Safe In His Arms....................................Darius Brooks
Kimberly Ward- Lead

Oh Happy Day......................................Edwin Hawkins
Michael Kilgore- Lead

He’ll Give You Peace..............................Sharvis Whitted
Stacy Harden- Lead

I Won’t Let Go......................................John P. Kee
Jamaal Robinson- Lead

Florida State University provides accommodation for persons with disabilities. Please notify the School of Music at (850) 644-3424 at least five working days prior to musical event. Please provide accommodation for a disability or if this publication in alternate format is needed.
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY GOSPEL CHOIR
PART II

Sanctuary ..................................................Kevin Davidson
Mitchell Lewis- Director

For Every Mountain/It Is To You ..................Kurt Carr/Byron Cage
Sharon Sylhomme/Damon Dandridge- Lead

It Won’t Be Long ........................................Twinkie Clark
Stephanie Garcia- Lead

Jesus Saves ..............................................Twinkie Clark
Herica Valerus- Lead

Why Not Today .......................................Michael Figgers
Michael Figgers- Lead

Closing Song ..............................................

SOPRANOS
Althouse, Catherine
Ambrose, Erica
Bairley, Amanda
Banks, April
Bartow, Sabina
Brookhill, Summer
Carroll, Myshia
Charlton, Samantha
Clarke, Deseree
Constantine, Jenny
Drake, Nicole
Dunn, Leah
Erickson, Macele
Ford, Tramaine
Garcia, Stephanie
Gardner, Tamara
Gernert, Amy
Graham, LaToya
Harden, Swen
Hayle, Patrick
Hudson, Alyesha
Hyatt, Koren
Jackson, Michelle
Jenner, Lindsy
Jones, Tiara
Kipp, Kathryn
Lewis, Jacqueline
Lipsius, Marianna
Nelson, Ashley
Norris, Candice
Orinag, Katie
Richards, Samantha
Shell, Grace
Sylhomme, Sharon
Tillbrook, Melanie
Uths, Sanva
Ward, Kimberly
White, Lynice
Williams, Joan

ALTUS
Alford, Brooke
Bennam, Jol
Bentley, Lotoya
Brannin, Jania
Bratton, Jessa
Brayton, Natasha
Collins, Typhoon
Caldwell, Candace
Davis, Dishan
Davis, Tamela
France, Modesta
Hargrove, Chakia
Harper, Elianor
Heflin, Joanna
Horton, Kirtlin
Howard, Michelle
Jackson, Kaitla
Johnson, Jessica
Johnson, Kapreza
Johnson, Lisa
Johnson, Quanta
Kilasheer, Beth
Kinscher, Lillian
Kuntz, Elizabeth
McRae, Leigh Ann
Mills, Althea
Morriss, Jessica
Morris-Barclay, Clauda
Nelson, Kristin
Owens, Megan
Richardson, Jana
Thompson, Sonia
Valeras, Herica
Washington, Tabitha
Williams, Brandi
Williams, Jameron
Wilson, Shalaya
Woods, Tiffany

TENORS/CONTRAalto
Carroll, Erie
Cazier, Antionio
Daniels, Darnell
Fish, Donny
Goldstein, Amsby
Hamra, Harold
Haw, Jeremy
Howard, Jarren
Johnson, Jason
Killings, Michael
Lindens, Angelo
Matthews, Maurice
McCarr, Darron
Parker, Taven
Roberts, Freddie
Robinson, Jamil
Sail, Michael
Salmon, Salif
Stephen, Darro
Tillman, Dwayne
Walker, Keith
Wilson, Teray
Wright, Syreeta

MUSICiANS
Fenw, Alford- Bass
Forbes, Andre'- Keyboards
Howard, Derrick- "Dojo"- Drums
Mitchell, Lewis- Keyboards
Whitney, Shavvis- Keyboards
Allied, Brooks- Violin

LITURGICAL DANCERS
Caldwell, Candace
Gardner, Tamara
Mills, Althea

SPECIAL THANKS TO: FSU School of Music, Pastor Richard Ledford III & The Christian Heritage Church, Kristy Cole, Rev. C. McFadden, Steamboat Studios & Cumulus Broadcasting

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The Bethel AME Youth, Collegiate and Young Adult Choir

presents...

"WORTHY"

"For You are worthy, O Lord our God to receive glory, honor and power."

Revelations 4:11

Concert 2004

Saturday, April 17, 2004
6:00 PM
The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
Rev. Dr. John F. Green, Senior Minister
Program

"Worthy"

Mistress of Ceremonies: Pastor Jacqueline Kinney, True Light Ministries
Welcome: Lydia Ali and LaShanda Johnson
Invocation: Nikki Harris

Introduction of The Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate and Young Adult Choir

The Anthem
"Worthy Is The Lamb"
Soloist: Melanie Montgomery

The Praise
"Come on Zion!"
Soloist: Marvin Boasman
"Magnify Him"
 Soloist: Brooke Jefferson
"We Acknowledge Your Presence"
Soloist: Brooke Jefferson

The Message
"That's What Jesus Means To Me"
"I Want to Live So"
"Even In The Rain"
Guest Soloist: DeAngela Roberson
"God Will Take Care of You"
"You Can't Hurry God"
Soloist: Curtisia Randolph

The Worship
"Sound of Praise"
"Worship! The King"
Guest Soloist: Travanda Wallace
"There Is A Name"
Guest Soloist: Minister Omega Forbes
"God Is Here"
Soloist: Kerri Anderson
Call to Discipleship .................................................. Rev. Dr. John F. Green
Acknowledgements/Presentations .......................... Kim Stevenson, Choir President
Mrs. Eartha A. Lamar, Choir Coordinator
Benediction .............................................................. Rev. Dr. John F. Green
Recessional

~ Please remain seated until the choir has exited ~

Guest Soloists
Minister Omega Forbes
DeAngela Roberson
Travonla Wallae

The Praise Dancers
“We Acknowledge Your Presence” & “You Can’t Hurry God”
Curtis Cooper
Wendel Cavaster
Jewel Richardson
Jamal Sanders

The Praise Dancers
“Sound of Praise”
Robin B. Thomas
Derecia Smith
Leoma Bullard

Sign Language
Bill Sanders

Musicians
Tamera Reese, Organ
Carlos Presley, Piano
Kevin Smith, Bass
Sean James, Percussion
Ashanti Floyd, Violinist

Sound Technician
Al Jones

We, the Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate and Young Adult Choir, wish to thank our
guest program participants for sharing their time, talents and commitments with us.
Your participation has truly been a blessing in the lives of everyone who participated
and witnessed this “Awesome Worship Experience.”
APPENDIX D: SONG TRACKS FOR CD

Bethel A.M.E. Youth, Collegiate, and Young Adult Choir “Worthy” Concert
April 17, 2004

1. Worthy is the Lamb
2. Come On Zion
3. Magnify Him
4. We Acknowledge Your Presence
5. I Want to Live So
6. That’s What Jesus Means to Me
7. Even in the Rain
8. God Will Take Care of You
9. You Can’t Hurry God
10. Sound of Praise
11. Worship the King
12. There Is a Name
13. God Is Here


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

SARAH ARTHUR

EDUCATION

*Florida State University*, Tallahassee, Florida, December 2004
School of Music
Master of Musicology (Ethnomusicology)

*University of Illinois*, Champaign, Illinois, May 2000
School of Music
Bachelor of Music Education (Choral)
Illinois Certification: Special Certificate in Music (K-12)

*Northwestern University Study Abroad Program*, South Africa, Summer 1999

WORK EXPERIENCE

*Faith Presbyterian Church (USA)* (August 2002 – December 2004)
Assistant Music Director

*PCEA* (*Presbyterian Church East Africa*) Kikuyu, Kenya (May 2001 – August 2001)
Hospital Volunteer / Music Director

OTHER RELATED EXPERIENCE

*Society for Ethnomusicology Annual Conference, Miami, Florida* (October 2003)
Volunteer Coordinator

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Society for Ethnomusicology
- Pi Kappa Lambda, national music honor society
- President, World Music Society, Florida State University 2003-2004
- Student Representative, Society for Ethnomusicology Southeast/Caribbean Chapter 2004-2005
- President, Society for Musicology, Florida State University 2004-2005

PUBLICATIONS