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The Poetic Voice of Langston Hughes in American Art Song

Albert Rudolph Lee Jr.
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
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THE POETIC VOICE OF LANGSTON HUGHES IN AMERICAN ART SONG

By

ALBERT RUDOLPH LEE, JR.

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The members of the supervisory committee were:

Stanford Olsen
Professor Directing Treatise

David Kirby
University Representative

Douglas Fisher
Committee Member

Marcía Porter
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the treatise has been approved in accordance with university requirements.
In loving memory of Henry and Anna Coleman for demonstrating the importance of service to country, pursuit of knowledge, dignity in the face of adversity, and love of family. This endeavor is a part of your legacy.

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ABSTRACT

The preeminence of Langston Hughes as a seminal figure in twentieth century literature is a well-chronicled phenomenon in academic circles. What has not been researched in a comprehensive fashion is Hughes’ importance to both popular and classical genres of American music. This treatise lays the foundation for that research by first chronicling Hughes’ contribution to American music as a songwriter, playwright, and opera librettist and then examining how his poetic aesthetic is captured in American art song. It is the aim of this treatise to examine the various themes prevalent in the body of Hughes’ poetry and to discuss how different composers captured the Hughes aesthetic in musical terms. Additionally, it is the thrust of this treatise to place Langston Hughes as an heir to the legacies of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Heinrich Heine, and Victor Hugo: literary figures prominent in the art song repertoire who were compelled by the socio-political winds of their time to write verse which resonated with various composers. The art song settings of Margaret Bonds, Ricky Ian Gordon, Robert Owens, and Elie Siegmeister are examined here. A testament to the importance of Hughes as a source of poetic inspiration, each composer has over twenty-five settings of Hughes’ poetry among their compositions. The song cycles chosen for specific examination represent Hughes’ early poetry celebrating the culture and illuminating the lives of African Americans, his middle period foray into purely lyric poetry, and his late period poetry consisting mainly of social commentary and political protest both on behalf of African Americans but also on behalf of oppressed, underserved, and economically disadvantaged people universally. Through the music of the aforementioned composers, Langston Hughes’ poetic purpose, speaking on behalf of those whose voices might be easily marginalized and giving dignity to their experiences, continues to carry his literary legacy into the twenty first century.
CHAPTER ONE

LANGSTON HUGHES: A MUSICAL LEGACY

The intersection of poetry and music has long been a topic of discussion in scholarly music circles. The marriage of these two art forms has inspired centuries of art and entertainment. In the performance of vocal music, the literary figures responsible for inspiring the musical product are often relegated to a brief mention or a footnote, if mentioned at all, except in the rare cases where their work garners greater attention. In Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is the predominant figure in literature responsible for inspiring works in various genres of music. His writings, along with those of Joseph von Eichendorff, Heinrich Heine, Eduard Mörike, and Friedrich Rückert form the literary foundation of musical Romanticism. In France, Victor Hugo is often noted as the figure that provided the literary inspiration credited with elevating French *mélodie* to prominence and providing Italian opera with a continued stream of politically charged plots. Beyond the romantic musings of Hugo it is the various schools of French poetry, Parnassianism, symbolism, and surrealism; and their corresponding champions, Paul Verlaine, Charles Baudelaire, and Guillaume Apollinaire among them, which lead *mélodie* out of the age of Romanticism and into the twentieth century. It is in the twentieth century that the United States becomes the venue where art song continues to flourish.

In American music, Langston Hughes is one of the literary figures that hold a place similar to the aforementioned luminaries. In the literary field, Hughes is respected as one of the most important figures of the twentieth century. With the rise of African American Studies as an academic field in the 1970s, his life, writing, and influence has received frequent attention. What has not been documented in more specific terms is his importance to America’s musical culture in the twentieth century. Whether directly or indirectly, Langston Hughes has been a fixture in American musical culture, both popular and concert music, since the 1920s. In addition to his personal affinity for blues, jazz, and other specifically African American musical forms such as gospel music, his vast contribution to American music specifically and American music culture in a broader sense can be separated into four general categories. First, as a writer of lyrics for songs in support of workers’ rights in the 1930s and in support of the war effort in
the 1940s; second, as a writer of lyrics for musical revues and works suitable for Broadway; third, as a librettist for opera, chief among them William Grant Still’s *Troubled Island* and Kurt Weill’s *Street Scene*; and finally as a poet for art song settings by a distinguished array of composers, Samuel Barber among them.

**Langston Hughes the Lyricist/Songwriter**

Shortly after the publication of his second book of verse in 1927, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* and the dissolution of a close, personal relationship with his patron Charlotte Mason, Hughes found himself searching for artistic direction. During this period he briefly contemplated working for a Manhattan music publisher in what would likely have been the Tin Pan Alley musical scene. Although he did not go into that arena full time, a considerable amount of his artistic productivity came as a lyricist for popular song. By 1938 Hughes had joined the American Society of Composers, Arrangers, and Performers (ASCAP) as well as the Song Writers’ Protective Association. The allure of steady royalty payments was too great for Hughes not to make a move into a more commercially viable arena. Limited financial means would dictate Hughes’ artistic direction throughout his career as he endeavored to earn a living exclusively as a writer. Between 1926 and 1940 he had more than a dozen songs with various composers published.¹

This period also represents a shift away from the blues-inspired lyricism of his first two collections of poetry to a more militant style as his political inclination began to align itself with a decidedly leftist ideology. In the 1930s he wrote the lyrics for a workers’ round entitled “Park Bench” that was published only as a poem in Hughes’ 1938 collection *A New Song*. This work is part of a long collaboration between Hughes and composer Elie Siegmeister. Given the historical evidence, it is likely that “Park Bench” was considered for publication in *Worker’s Song Book 1* or *Worker’s Song Book 2*. Both publications were the work of the Composers Collective of New York City whose mission it was to give voice to struggling laborers during the

Great Depression. Other notable composers working with the Composers Collective were Marc Blizstein, Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, Roy Harris, and Charles Seeger.\(^2\)

Later in the 1930s, when America was on the brink of WWII and backlash against prominent citizens who were considered communist sympathizers became so intense that it threatened Hughes’ ability to earn a living as a writer, “America’s Young Black Joe” was written as a part of a musical revue for the Hollywood Theater Alliance.

I’m America’s YOUNG BLACK JOE.
Most times good natured, smiling and gay
My sky is sometimes cloudy
But it won’t stay that way.
I’m coming’, I’m comin’ –
But my head ain’t bending low!
I’m walking proud! I’m speaking out loud!
I’m America’s Young Black Joe!\(^3\)

When the song had such a positive reception at a performance of a skit from the revue for an NAACP gala, Hughes sent it to one of his most important supporters Carl Van Vechten, his literary agent Maxim Lieber, and also to John Hammond of Columbia Records. In a letter to Lieber, Hughes suggested that the song “had a good chance of becoming a kind of Negro GOD BLESS AMERICA, expressing their patriotic and democratic sentiments.”\(^4\) Hughes was able to use this song as a way to align himself with an increasingly more nationalistic atmosphere in the United States as the country was set to enter WWII. A continued effort to produce patriotic songs as well as write scripts during the early 1940s was a part of an ongoing effort to repair a reputation tarnished by accusations of communist activity. Equally important to Hughes in this effort was an attempt, once again, to sustain himself financially. Collaborations with blues composer, W.C. Handy; attempts to give songs to Billie Holiday, Mahalia Jackson, and Lena

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\(^3\) Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, 1:392-393.

\(^4\) Ibid., 393.
Horne; and a campaign song for Adam Clayton Powell’s bid for Congress all proved unsuccessful as means to a financial end.⁵

**Langston Hughes the Playwright**

Already a published poet, Hughes moved to New York City in 1921 to begin studies at Columbia University. He had no genuine desire to go to Columbia University, but it was the only way to get out of his father’s home in rural Mexico, where he lived for almost a year, and to New York City at his father’s expense. One aspect of New York City’s allure was the critical acclaim and positive depiction of African Americans in the Broadway musical, *Shuffle Along*. On Broadway at the time, its most important contribution to the musical theater repertoire is the song “I’m Just Wild About Harry.” What the work represented for Hughes was an opportunity to be surrounded by his own people and to see a depiction of African Americans for himself that up until now he had only heard about from his grandmother. This positive depiction of the African American community was one his father vehemently attacked and could be partly responsible for a strained relationship between father and son. Hughes spent much of his first year living in New York City attending performances of *Shuffle Along* and several other Broadway shows that reached beyond the boundaries of African American themes.⁶

After leaving Columbia University, spending a year abroad working on a ship, and then enrolling in the historically black Lincoln University where he was a classmate of future Supreme Court Associate Justice Thurgood Marshall, Hughes began working on a musical revue in hopes of luring Paul Robeson to star in the project in the summer of 1926. *O Blues!*, as the work was to be called, was never performed, but it was the first in a series of attempts for Hughes to work with Paul Robeson, a figure whom he admired greatly. Hughes would complete what would be his first songwriting endeavor as a part of this venture. The work as Hughes described it in the copyright was a “dramatico-musical composition” entitled “Leaves: A novelty song number for singer and chorus.”⁷ Several years later Hughes would again attempt to write for Paul Robeson when he teamed with playwright Kaj Gynt in an effort to revise her musical

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⁷ Ibid.,133.
Cock o’ the World. Work on this project went on for over ten years. Not even the prospect of bringing Duke Ellington onto the musical team would convince Paul Robeson to sign on to the project. Hughes and Ellington wrote a few songs for the musical but it was never performed.⁸

In 1940 Hughes began working on two promising projects for the “American Negro Exposition” in Chicago. He agreed to write the script for a collage of scenes from celebrated musicals, including Shuffle Along. The work was titled Jubilee: A Cavalcade of the Negro Theater. The second project was the result of a collaborative effort between Hughes, his longtime friend Arna Bontemps, and several notable musical figures entitled The Tropics After Dark. Classical composer Margaret Bonds; gospel composer Thomas Dorsey, who wrote “Precious Lord, Take My Hand;” and jazz great, Duke Ellington were all on the musical team for these projects. Complications navigating Chicago’s political establishment, which was partly responsible for the funding, doomed both projects.⁹

Several years later, Hughes took a job working as a regular columnist for the Chicago Defender. The Chicago Defender was historically significant for its depiction of life for blacks in America and for its role in the growth of the African American population during the Great Migration. As a part of Hughes’ weekly column, he created a character, Jesse B. Semple, through whom Hughes could satirically comment on the events of the day. The Semple (later called Simple) stories were later fashioned into a musical, Simply Heavenly, which enjoyed a run both on and off Broadway and a short stint in London.

Hughes’ most significant contribution to the musical theater genre is his gospel plays. Gospel music as a genre had achieved significant commercial success by the 1950s with its blend of traditional spirituals, hymns, and blues. While Hughes demonstrated a great admiration for all black musical forms, his love for gospel music was particularly noteworthy. A childhood episode in church had left him a religious skeptic.¹⁰ There is no record of any active participation in organized religion following this incident. Backlash from church leaders for some of his more radical poems vilifying the church for its complacency in fighting injustice in the 1930s threatened his livelihood as a writer. Some of these poems include “A Christian Country” and “Goodbye Christ.” Additionally, in a column he wrote in the Chicago Defender he

⁸ Ibid., 328.
⁹ Ibid., 386-387.
¹⁰ Ibid., 21.
uses his fictional creation Jessie B. Semple to take a veiled swipe at the newfound fame of gospel artists and the seeming contradiction between the message they were singing and the extravagant lifestyles they were living.\(^\text{11}\)

Hughes’ *The Sun Do Move* was his first play on a religious theme and was a foreshadowing of the gospel plays. Its music and its subject matter were a part of his effort to strike the right patriotic tone during WWII and to continue to fight off accusations of communist activity. The most telling sign of his intention was written directly into the script. After the curtain call a rendition of the national anthem was to be performed. Overall, the music in the play is a compilation of spirituals and patriotic song.\(^\text{12}\)

Each of Hughes’ gospel plays had varying degrees of success. Begun in 1956 and first performed in 1960, *Tambourines to Glory: A Play with Spirituals, Jubilees and Gospel Songs* was well received by audiences but was accused by some reviewers of being condescending to African Americans. It later moved to Broadway but closed soon thereafter. *The Prodigal Son* was paired with Bertolt Brecht’s “The Exception and the Rule” and enjoyed success in its initial run. *The Prodigal Son* later went on a European tour as a stand-alone show. Still receiving annual performances in many parts of the United States, Hughes’ most successful gospel play is *Black Nativity*. The initial title was *Wasn’t That A Mighty Day*. When Hughes chose to change the title, the choreographer and Alvin Ailey, the person dancing the role of Joseph, pulled out of the project. Despite the major defection, *Black Nativity* opened on Broadway to rave reviews. The Broadway run which began at the end of 1961 was followed by performances at Gian Carlo Menotti’s Spoleto Festival and a European tour in 1962. “The critics hailed *Black Nativity* as the undisputed critical and popular hit of Spoleto’s season.”\(^\text{13}\)

**Langston Hughes the Librettist**

During the summer of 1926 Hughes first had the idea of writing for opera. His idea was to create an opera based on blues and jazz. This project was to be a joint venture between he and


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 354.
his friend, Harlem Renaissance luminary and author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston. The collaboration between Hughes and Hurston did not result in an opera but did result in a play, *Mule Bone*. Events surrounding this work also led to the dissolution of their friendship. Unbeknownst to Hughes, Hurston copyrighted *Mule Bone* while Hughes was out of the country and was submitting the work to theaters in an effort to have it produced.\(^\text{14}\) It would not be until 1949 that Hughes would realize his dream of writing a black opera and seeing it performed.

In 1928 Hughes began working on a musical, *The Emperor of Haiti*, as another vehicle for Paul Robeson. Once again that collaboration never did come to fruition but the show opened in 1936 in Cleveland, Ohio under the title *Troubled Island* after his agent objected to the original title. Upon the completion of this production, Hughes began fashioning this work into a libretto to be set by composer William Grant Still. It was not until 1944 that Leopold Stokowski began to champion the work in an effort to have it performed at the New York City Center. When City Center would not finance the production out of its budget, the production was postponed while fundraising efforts were begun. *Troubled Island* finally opened in 1949 as the first opera written by blacks produced by a major American opera company. For all its historical importance, it was not a success with the critics and Still would blame Hughes’ association with the political left for its failure.\(^\text{15}\)

The largest financial success of Hughes’ career came from a venture in which he was invited to participate by German-born composer Kurt Weill and author Elmer Rice: an adaptation of Rice’s Pulitzer Prize winning Play *Street Scene*. Hughes’ empathy for the plight of the common man and his ability to write in a style that was intelligible and unpretentious was viewed as best for capturing the essence of Rice’s characters. *Street Scene* opened on Broadway in 1947 and Hughes used the income generated to purchase a home that now sits as an historic landmark at 20 East 127\(^{\text{th}}\) Street in Harlem.

While Hughes spent considerable time working on projects that related to the theater, he often expressed a disdain for working in the field. Hughes provides telling insight into his opinion of commercial theater in the poem “Note on Commercial Theater.”

You’ve taken my blues and gone –

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 195.
\(^\text{15}\) Ibid., 166-167.
You sing ‘em on Broadway
And you sing ‘em in Hollywood Bowl,
And you mixed ‘em up with symphonies
And you fixed ‘em
So they don’t sound like me.
Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

But someday somebody’ll
Stand up and talk about me,
And write about me –
Black and beautiful –
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it’ll be
Me myself!

Yes, it’ll be me.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Langston Hughes the Poet}

The genre for which Langston Hughes came to national attention in 1919 with the publishing of “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and for which he is still revered is poetry. “There is general critical agreement that poetry was the genre in which Langston Hughes achieved his greatest artistic and popular successes and the form he used most adroitly to apprehend the condition of his people.”\textsuperscript{17} Bearing the influence and inspiration of Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, and the African American populace, the body of Hughes’ poetic output contains over five hundred poems published in fifteen separate volumes and spans six decades of the twentieth century. His poetry alone provides a most unique lens through which we can see the evolution of America over the course of the century. Hughes’ poetry has provided inspiration for numerous

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 60.
composers to set his verse in the art song tradition. The cast of composers who have found inspiration is Hughes’ poetry is as diverse as America itself.

The first known art songs based on Hughes’ texts, John Alden Carpenter’s *Four Negro Songs*, were published in 1927. Carpenter was a product of America’s most conservative musical tradition, having studied with John Knowles Paine at Harvard University. *Four Negro Songs* are settings of three poems from Hughes’ first collection of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, and one poem from his second collection, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*. These particular collections of poetry demonstrate the influence of blues on Hughes writing. Carpenter was also fond of jazz and blues and found this poetry fitting for treatment as art song. German-born American composer, Jean Berger, composed *Four Songs on Poems of Langston Hughes* in 1951 using various poems Hughes wrote in the 1930s and 1940s. These poems, while still bearing Hughes signature style are less overtly African American in their themes and represent Hughes’ strictly lyric poetry.

In an effort to limit the scope of this document only song cycles using Hughes’ texts are examined, not individual songs. As is true of the great works of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Fauré, Debussy and Poulenc, song cycles are very often the genre in which a composer has the opportunity to demonstrate his or her creative genius in responding to multiple poems of a given poet and/or a specific theme. Song cycles reveal the composer’s musical flexibility and ingenuity in their attempt to weave a dramatic arch or present a musically varied account of a particular poetic theme or narrative. The choice of composers for this treatise is in no way arbitrary. The cycles being considered represent the works of a culturally diverse group of composers who have set a significant amount of Hughes’ texts. The intent is to document the presence of Langston Hughes’ poetic aesthetic in American art song; how the history, literature, and music converge to embody his literary purpose and further define what constitutes American music.
CHAPTER TWO

MARGARET BONDS’ *THREE DREAM PORTRAITS*: LANGSTON HUGHES, POET OF HIS PEOPLE

“One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”\(^{18}\) This quote from W.E.B. Du Bois’ collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk* represents one aspect of his philosophy on race. Through his work with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and by championing higher education for African Americans, Du Bois’ chief goal was to obtain equal status for African Americans in American society. Of course Du Bois’ thoughts were not the only prevailing wisdom governing African American consciousness at the turn of the twentieth century. Booker T. Washington’s convictions regarding self-help, accommodating segregation, and a more practical educational model that emphasized developing agricultural and industrial skills useful to the white community was also a prominently held belief.\(^{19}\)

Generally speaking, these men and their philosophies are the nexus though which an understanding of the complex social structure in the African American community at the beginning of the twentieth century can be discerned. Moreover, these philosophies also help to contextualize Langston Hughes’ career as a writer and Margaret Bonds’ rise to prominence as a black woman composer during a time when the only American woman composer to receive significant national acclaim was Amy Beach. In discussing the life and works of Margaret Bonds, specifically her song cycle *Three Dream Portraits*, one may observe that the social structure and seemingly disparate musical influences give rise to a hybrid of American and European musical styles. The catalyst behind this hybrid is the poetry of Langston Hughes.

In Hughes’ landmark essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” published in 1926, he contributes to the discourse on race by further substantiating Du Bois’ assertion of

“two-ness”. Hughes’ analysis however, focuses on a struggle within the African American community between American standardization and cultural uniqueness. For Hughes, denying cultural uniqueness in favor of American standardization was a false choice, but one that was fostered by blacks and whites alike. It was Hughes’ ability to draw upon the peculiarity of the African American experience and more specifically its music, which gave his art its resonance.

As musicologists investigate the history of American music culture in very broad terms, the prevalence of African American influence is widely acknowledged. No serious discussion of twentieth century American music can be had without recognizing the pervasiveness of African American idioms in the musical fabric. However, William Grant Still notwithstanding, examination of specific African Americans and their contribution to the evolution of American music has been mainly limited to those writing in popular genres. Considering composers of ragtime, blues, jazz, and other popular forms alone inadvertently paints a monolithic picture of musical tastes within the African American community and neglects music through which a more thorough depiction of the complex social structure of the African American community can be examined.

As slavery in the United States evolved, the church became the center of religious, social, and musical life for African Americans. The end of slavery, increasing educational opportunities and political influence, and somewhat favorable conditions for entrepreneurial enterprise created by a “separate but equal” African American marketplace together contributed to the establishment of a black middle class as the nineteenth century came to a close. As a result, class structure within the African American community began to mirror the broader population and intense social struggle between those who were content with their status as second-class citizens, albeit better off than many African Americans, and those who sought equality also ensued.

For many upper middle class black churches in urban settings at the turn of the century, the musical forms held over from African traditions, such as call and response and ring shouts, too closely reflected their former status as slaves and therefore were deemed low class. The emotionalism that came with this type of worship experience was frowned upon by the educated elites as playing into stereotypes of intellectual inferiority associated with African Americans. This is the same type of criticism that Langston Hughes was subjected to by some middle class African Americans throughout his career for presenting aspects of African American life in his
poetry that the elites preferred not to acknowledge. Ostensibly, in an effort to mirror the lifestyle of the white upper class, classical music became an important part of the musical culture for upper middle class, African American churches. Within Margaret Bonds’ native Chicago, for example, African American churches and musical associations often presented concerts featuring standard classical repertoire as well as repertoire by African American composers.20

It is important to point out that W.E.B. Du Bois’ philosophy of higher education for racial uplift was not exclusive to men. It was believed that African American women should also be well educated if true equality was ever to be achieved. By 1867 Oberlin Conservatory of Music, the Boston Conservatory of Music, the Cincinnati Conservatory, and the Chicago Musical College accepted African American students. These institutions were responsible for training hosts of African American singers, pianists, and organists in the latter of half of the nineteenth century. While there were few African American women composing at the time, several were receiving attention – no minor accomplishment. Miriam E. Benjamin had one of her marches performed by the U.S. Marine Band under John Phillip Sousa.21

A pianist, composer, and teacher, Margaret Bonds developed her musical gifts on the south side of Chicago. Bonds was born to an upper middle class family with a history of intellectual prowess, entrepreneurial success, and musical talent. Her mother and maternal grandmother were both musicians. Her mother was trained at Chicago Musical College and later served as the organist and choir director at the Berean Baptist Church. Bonds’ father, a very accomplished man, was a practicing physician, founded a hospital for African Americans in Texas, organized a medical association for African American physicians, and published two books; one devoted to the accomplishments of African American women.22

Bonds’ musical training began with her mother and continued at a community music school named after accomplished Afro-British composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Many of Bonds’ earliest performance opportunities were at her family church. It is at the Coleridge Taylor Music School, however, that Bonds was engrafted into America’s classical music tradition and began to continue the legacy established by the Second New England School.

22 Walker-Hill *From Spirituals to Symphonies*, 22.
Florence Price, Bonds’ piano and composition teacher, was a student of George Chadwick at the New England Conservatory. It stands to reason that Price, having been in Boston during Amy Beach’s rise to prominence would have been aware of Beach’s work and may have been inspired by her success. Price is remembered today for her art song compositions and spiritual arrangements but her earliest success as a composer came in large form works. Price and Bonds both won recognition at the Rodman Wanamaker Musical Compositions for Composers of Colored Race Competition in 1932; Price received the top prize for her Symphony in E minor and Bonds won in the song category with her song “Sea Ghost.” Bonds later performed Florence Price’s *Concerto in D Minor* with the Chicago Women’s Symphony.

In 1929 Bonds entered Northwestern University as one of only a few African American students. While Northwestern accepted African American students, these students were not given on-campus accommodations. It was during her time there that she came across a poem in the basement of the Evanston Public library; a poem that she said helped save her while she was in “this terribly prejudiced place.” This is what she read:

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I’ve known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
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My soul has grown deep like the rivers.\(^{23}\)

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” was Langston Hughes first nationally published work. The poem initially appeared in the official magazine of the NAACP, *Crisis*, for which W.E.B. Du Bois was founder and editor. The poem then appeared in Hughes’ first collection of poetry, published in 1926. Bonds states, “I was intrigued by his first published poem. I myself never suffered any feelings of inferiority because I am a Negro, and I had always felt a strong identification with Africa, but here was a poem which said so many different things I had known and was not able to verbally express.”\(^{24}\) Bonds would meet Hughes in 1936 at the home of a mutual friend. Their meeting marked the beginning of a personal and professional friendship that would produce art songs, oratorio, and musicals over the following thirty years.

After meeting Hughes, Bonds set “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” as an art song and later submitted it for consideration to renowned contralto Marian Anderson. Bonds moved to New York City in 1939, bringing her to the epicenter of what was the Harlem Renaissance and its continued legacy of racial uplift through the arts. Bonds’ interest in art song composition and her eventual style traits are no mere coincidence. During her childhood in Chicago, Bonds was in direct contact with many noted musical artists of the day. Most influential to Bonds’ career as a composer of art songs was Abbie Mitchell. An accomplished stage singer and recitalist, Abbie Mitchell was the original Clara in Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* and was married to composer Will Marion Cook. It was Mitchell who introduced Bonds to German *Lieder* and French *mélodie*. Bonds credits Mitchell with teaching her the significance of the union between text and music in quality art songs. It was also Mitchell who introduced Bonds to the art songs of Harry T. Burleigh. Bonds discovered an unmistakable but subtle African American idiom in two of Burleigh’s songs: “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors,” a Walt Whitman setting and “Ahmed’s Farewell,” one of a cycle entitled *Saracen Songs* with poetry by Fred G. Bowles. Within “Ahmed’s Farewell” the spiritual theme “Somebody’s Knocking at Your Door” can be found. Bonds credits being introduced to the Burleigh art song settings with inspiring her composition “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.”\(^{25}\)


A significant number of Bonds’ vocal works are settings of Langston Hughes’ texts. Additionally, they collaborated on a host of dramatic works and several works for chorus and orchestra. Hughes’ enduring literary legacy in the area of poetry can be seen in his first published collection of poems, *The Weary Blues*. He is credited with being a pioneer in a literary form now known as blues poetry. “In his blues poetry, Langston Hughes captures the mood, the feel, and the spirit of the blues; his poems have the rhythm and impact of the musical form they incorporate.”\(^{26}\) One of the great hallmarks of nineteenth century musical Romanticism is that the eighteenth-century literary movement of the same name gave rise to the musical expression. For Hughes, however, it is the musical expression that gives rise to the literature.

Of the large body of work resulting from Bonds’ and Hughes’ collaborative efforts, the song cycle *Three Dream Portraits* is the most prominent because it is the work that is most widely available. G Ricordi and Company first published the cycle in 1959. Two subsequent publications, one in a collection of works by African American composers and another in a collection of works by African American women composers together contribute to the cycle’s enduring popularity among African American recital artists. The pertinence of *Three Dream Portraits* to the scope of this study rests in its musical representation of much broader themes in Hughes’ poetry. *Three Dream Portraits* consists of settings of three poems published in Hughes’ 1932 anthology *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*. Generally speaking, the poems are a microcosm of Hughes’ poetry devoted specifically to race and provide fitting examples of Hughes’ blues poetry. Yusef Komunyakaa, award winning poet and author of several articles on Langston Hughes, draws a compelling distinction between Hughes and one of his poetic inspirations, Walt Whitman, in his essay “Langston + Poetry = The Blues.” “Where Walt Whitman embraces the long musical lines of Italian opera as a catalyst for his poetry, Hughes uses the truncated phrases of blues as his main mode of expression.”\(^{27}\) For Hughes, blues represented the resilience and tragedy but also the beauty of the African American underclass.

In musical terms, “Minstrel Man,” “Dream Variation,” and “I, Too” hearken back to the German *Lieder* tradition and are neo-Romantic in their musical language. What makes this work important to the canon of American art song is its fusion of Hughes’ blues-inspired poetry and


\(^{27}\) Ibid., 140.
Bonds’ expert craftsmanship and use of jazz inspired harmony. It is clearly art song but takes as its inspiration more popular idioms. While these are not strict blues poems in form, they do invoke the spirit of the blues.

The first song in the cycle, “Minstrel Man,” is a stirring poetic and musical response to America’s century old history of blackface minstrelsy. Minstrel shows began early in the nineteenth century and featured white performers wearing burnt cork or grease paint to appear darker skinned. While there is a considerable amount of detailed literature on minstrelsy, the thrust of the shows was a parodying of African American life using African American cultural material. While minstrel shows can easily be dismissed as racist, this simplistic assessment does not account for later African American adoption of the shows. Even while Frederick Douglas lambasted white blackface performers as “the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens,” some African Americans embraced minstrel shows as a form of entertainment and even earned a living creating their own shows. Others found the inherent stereotypes degrading and a gross misrepresentation of African American life. At the time Langston Hughes penned “Minstrel Man,” traveling minstrel shows were on the decline but the motion picture The Jazz Singer (1927) was highly acclaimed. One of the first films where spoken dialogue was not prerecorded, the movie is a montage of American pop-music styles of the previous thirty years. While the songs performed are not actually jazz, the title character was played by Al Jolson in blackface and the movie as a whole can be viewed as an appropriation of African American culture for economic gain. Hughes’ poetic response to the racial misrepresentation of minstrelsy is not merely a bitter response to people doing blackface. Hughes’ words attempt to humanize the caricaturized representation of the minstrel performer:

Because my mouth is wide with laughter
and my throat is deep with song
You do not think I suffer
after I have held my pain so long.

Because my mouth is wide with laughter

---

you do not hear my inner cry
Because my feet are gay with dancing,
you do not know I die.\textsuperscript{29}

Nearly a century after minstrelsy’s decline, Spike Lee’s movie “Bamboozled” (2000) acts as an analog to historical minstrelsy in an effort to ignite a conversation on the representation of African Americans in contemporary media. Tyler Perry’s series of stage plays and movies over the last decade featuring Perry dressed in drag playing the fictitious character “Madea” covertly refers to the minstrel tradition, distorting and stereotyping relationships between African American men and women. Well into the new millennium minstrelsy’s legacy is still being debated in contemporary culture.

The prelude of Bonds’ “Minstrel Man” begins with a syncopated figure in both hands of the accompaniment, reflecting the rhythmic impulse of Hughes’ blues poetry. Bonds employs a decidedly minor tonality in the prelude which gives rise to a more optimistic major tonality as the vocal line enters.

![Musical example 2.1](image)

Altered seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords show a definite influence of jazz harmony in Bonds’ writing. The form of the song is a very simple AA’. Bonds takes the liberty of repeating Hughes’ final phrase of text “you do not know I die” reminding us of liberties taken by Schumann in many of his lieder where he alters or repeats text to fit his musical construction. Central to the theme of this poem is the juxtaposition of laughter and tears (also dancing and dying.) These opposing emotions are a recurring feature in the work of Langston Hughes and African American literature more broadly.\(^{30}\)

The jazz influence can be seen again in the second song, “Dream Variation,” in its use of quartal harmonies effectively blurring the tonal center and musically depicting the dream-like reverie of the text (See musical example 2.2):

![Musical Example 2.2](image-url)

\[
\text{To fling my arms wide in some place in the sun,}
\text{To whirl and to dance till the white day is done,}
\text{Then rest at cool evening beneath a tall tree}
\text{While night comes on gently dark like me,}
\text{That is my dream}
\]

\[
\text{To fling my arms wide in the face of the sun,}
\text{Dance! Whirl! Whirl till the quick day is done}
\text{Rest at pale evening; a tall, slim tree}
\text{Night coming tenderly, black like me.}^{31}\]

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\(^{31}\) Hughes, The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, 11:78.
“Dream Variation” represents Hughes’ love and aspiration for himself and for people of color more broadly. Extensive international travel sensitized Hughes to the plight of people of African descent throughout the world. However Hughes’ love for people of color is in no way exclusionary. His racial pride is at the foundation of a genuine love for the innocent, the weak, and the downtrodden. As can be seen in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” his admonition to people of color is to embrace their differences and see it as a part of their unique contribution to the ever-evolving definition of what it is to be American. Similar to the juxtaposition of laughter and tears as a poetic theme in Hughes writing, dreams are also a recurring theme. Specific examples in Hughes writing include the poems “Dreams,” “The Dream Keeper,” and “I Dream A World” and the collection Montage of a Dream Deferred.

Continuing the blues and jazz inspiration, the third song “I, Too,” features blues chords in a repeated rhythmic pattern. While each song basically employs strophic form, in “I, Too” Bonds “makes the structural melodic notes in the first strophe the basis of melodic extemporization in the second strophe – a technique widely used in jazz improvisation.”

(Musical Example 2.3)

Musical Example 2.4

Written while Hughes was stranded in Europe, having lost his passport and unable to secure passage back to the United States, the text of “I, Too” is a plea for respect and inclusion into the fabric of American society:

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll sit at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

It is important to understand that for Hughes, respect and inclusion should not be given merely for those of a certain social class or those willing to divest themselves of all cultural individuality. For Hughes, dignity is a human right.

While the Great Migration brought new popular musical idioms (jazz, blues, and gospel) from the south to northern cities, classical music remained the music of choice of many in upper middle class African American circles. Bonds, however, goes against the grain of her own upbringing by including more strongly identified African American musical elements in her compositions. Bonds’ predilection toward the ideals Hughes put forth in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” seem to have been principally birthed out of the challenges of racial discrimination endured while she was a student at Northwestern. To say this is the only reason for her hybridized musical style would be a gross oversimplification, however. What is remarkable about Three Dream Portraits is that Bonds finds a way to elevate jazz harmony and Hughes’ blues poetry, often dismissed as inferior music at the time, to the level of German Lieder. In essence, Bonds brings together the music of her upper middle class childhood and fuses it with the music of her adult journey in a way that legitimizes jazz and blues in the eyes of the elites while not composing over the heads of the untrained.

In May of 1972, approximately one month after her death from a heart attack, Zubin Mehta and the LA Philharmonic performed excerpts from Bonds’ final work, Credo. The work for soloists, chorus, and orchestra is a setting of text by W.E.B. Du Bois and is dedicated to the memory of Abbie Mitchell and Langston Hughes. Throughout Margaret Bonds’ compositional career her spiritual arrangements and art song compositions frequently demonstrate the “two-ness” described by Du Bois as inherent to the consciousness of African Americans. Her diverse compositional efforts and wide-ranging career trajectory as a composer, teacher, and conductor

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33 Hughes, The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, 11:82.
reflect a keen ability to adapt to the social restrictions of the day in a way that is reminiscent of Booker T. Washington’s philosophy. Moreover, Margaret Bonds’ life is evidence that in isolation, neither the Du Bois nor the Washington philosophies were solely responsible for the progress gained by African Americans through the twentieth century. The first African American to solo with the Chicago Symphony in 1933, Margaret Bonds career, life, and works are uniquely American. Perhaps this quote from Alain Locke’s 1936 essay, “The Negro and His Music” referring to Margaret Price’s *Symphony in E Minor* is a more fitting embodiment of Bonds’ contributions.

In straight classical idiom and form Price’s work vindicates the Negro composer’s choice to go up Parnassus by the high road of classicism, rather than the narrower, more hazardous, but often more rewarding path of racialism. At the pinnacle, the paths converge, and the attainment becomes, in the last analysis, neither racial nor national but universal music.  

*Three Dream Portraits* represents in poetic terms Hughes’ undying commitment to African Americans throughout his career. In musical terms it represents American music at its core, a fusion of our European musical heritage and our African American folk idiom.

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CHAPTER THREE

FIELDS OF WONDER:
SETTINGS BY RICKY IAN GORDON AND ROBERT OWENS

The foundation of Langston Hughes’ reputation as one of the foremost literary figures of the twentieth century lies firmly in his verse on African American themes. From that foundation established in the 1920s and continuing throughout his career as a writer, Hughes shifted from poetry which depicted African American culture to verse that was more squarely aimed at social justice and political protest. Insomuch as Hughes is known, studied, and revered for expressing both the beauty and pain of African American life and for challenging the governmental structure that created and often exacerbated this pain, the literary gifts developed in that work also served Hughes as he wrote poems on the more traditional themes of nature and universal human emotion.

Hughes only collection of entirely lyric verse, *Fields of Wonder* (1947), is largely on nature topics, love relationships and other universal themes. With rare exception, Hughes avoids issues of race and social and political protest in this collection. The shift to purely lyric verse for Hughes was inspired by his work on the libretto for *Street Scene* and is also a part of his efforts to sustain his career after his revolutionary foray in 1930s. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., the publisher of Hughes’ breakthrough collections of poetry *The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) refused much of his more radical verse in the 1930s. *Fields of Wonder* was an attempt to more closely adhere to their literary standard, to continue to prove that he had broken with his radical past, and to prove his versatility as a poet.35

Hughes faced varying reactions from the press for *Fields of Wonder*. *The New York Times* book reviewer Herbert Creekmore believed the work to be appealing but lacked the originality of his more celebrated collections. Additionally, Creekmore credits Emily Dickinson and other poets as being foundational to its structure.36 Communist publications, which had published Hughes’ work when Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. refused, believed the work lacked the same

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fever of his more radical verse. African American reviewers who had often castigated his poetry on African American themes as representing the lowest forms of African American life praised this volume, believing that Hughes had finally regained his former glory. Composers Ricky Ian Gordon and Robert Owens each set a significant number of Hughes’ poems from *Fields of Wonder*. These settings demonstrate the universality of Hughes’ verse and are a continual example of Hughes’ preeminent place in inspiring song composition based on the lyric tradition.

The works of Robert Owens (b. 1925) go virtually unrecognized in the traditional canon of American art song. Born in Denison, TX and raised in the San Francisco Bay area, Owens was trained as a pianist in his early years by his mother before completing high school, serving in the military, moving to Europe, and then enrolling at the *École Normale de Musique* in Paris funded by the GI Bill. After receiving the *Diplome de Perfection* in piano there, Owens continued his studies at the Vienna Academy of Music. He returned to the United States in 1957 to teach at the historically black Albany State College in Albany, GA. Owens navigated the unwritten rules of southern black society, rules he often chose not to follow largely by acting as a foreigner. Believing that he was French, Owens was not held responsible for his breaches of southern decorum on a conservative college campus. Owens showed no interest in adhering to a class structure in the minority community that he deemed a mirror image of the same structure espoused by those imposing segregation.

In 1958 while on semester break from Albany State College, Owens was given a letter of introduction and encouraged by a family acquaintance to introduce himself to Langston Hughes the next time he was in New York. Upon meeting Hughes at his home in Harlem, Owens was given a copy of *Fields of Wonder* with a personal dedication from Hughes and given the instruction, “see what you can do with it.” Owens response to Hughes’ poetry is reminiscent of the response Hugo Wolf had to the poetry of Eduard Mörike, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Joseph Eichendorff and Paul Heyse. From a brief meeting between the two men and a collection

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of poetry largely anachronistic to what is considered typical of Langston Hughes’ poetic output, proceeds a total of six song cycles containing forty-six songs set by Owens.

_Tearless_ and _Silver Rain_ are the first two cycles and were written simultaneously upon Owens’ return to Georgia after meeting Hughes. Owens returned to New York City the following year and arranged to have the two cycles performed for Hughes. Hughes reaction to Owens’ music, according to the composer, was very positive. Given the lackluster reception of Hughes’ poetry during this period of his career, Hughes was eager to have Owens perform the songs as much as possible.³⁹ At the time of their meeting in 1958 Langston Hughes was virtually unknown to Robert Owens. Although an African American, the blues tradition and other vernacular musical forms were not apart of Owens’ compositional vocabulary. The result is art songs that bear the mark of Owens’ French and German musical training.

In _Silver Rain_, a cycle for tenor, Owens makes every effort to remain completely faithful to Hughes’ original writing bearing the same title and including all seven of Hughes’ poems. This speaks to Owens’ reverence for language as an expressive tool and his desire to challenge singers to explore varying possibilities in their own voices.⁴⁰ Harkening back to the traditional song cycle, _Silver Rain_ is a narrative cycle recounting the journey of two lovers from the inception of their love until death. Owens describes his compositional process as being completely inspired by the text. He then employs the piano to discover the musical atmosphere that will eventually support the melodic line.⁴¹ “In time of silver rain,” the first song in the cycle begins with a cascading sixteenth note figure in the accompaniment as a representation of the rain. (See musical example 3.1)

![Musical Example 3.1](image-url)

³⁹ Ibid., 17.
⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.
⁴¹ Ibid., 21.
The sixteenth note motion effervescently continues throughout the song in varying patterns as if representing the rain fertilizing new life.

In time of silver rain
The earth
Puts forth new life again,
Green grasses grow
And flowers lift their heads,
And over all the plain
The wonder spreads
   Of life,
   Of life,
   Of life!

In time of silver rain
The butterflies
Lift silken wings
To catch a rainbow cry,
And trees put forth
New leaves to sing
In joy beneath the sky
As down the roadway
Passing boys and girls
Go singing, too,
In time of silver rain
   When spring
   And life
   Are new.\textsuperscript{42}

The accompaniment supports an independent and lyrical melody, creating an atmosphere best described as fresh and full of optimism.

\textsuperscript{42} Hughes, \textit{The Collected Works of Langston Hughes}, 2:124.
With “Fulfillment,” the next song in the cycle, Owens demonstrates his versatility as a composer in responding to Hughes’ text. “Fulfillment” has a much more settled or grounded quality contrasting the ebullience of “In time of silver rain.” This quality is reflected in the accompaniment as it explores the lower range of the piano. The three sections of the song, dawn, day, and night, reflect the poem’s three sections. Once again Owens uses the accompaniment to initiate those changes, beginning with a dotted eighth followed by a sixteenth-note figure in the left hand against a three sixteenth-note figure off the strong beat in the right hand. The second section has an eighth-note pulse throughout which gives way to sixteenth-note pulse in both hands in the final section. Owens ends the song by transitioning back to the figure of the first section as if ending the day where it began for the two lovers. The character of the melody is again very lyrical. One unusual feature is Owens’ use of a melisma to embellish the word “fulfilled” adding a quasi-baroque nuance to the song. (See musical example 3.2)

**Musical Example 3.2**

In these first two songs and throughout the cycle, Owens makes specific demands of the singer and accompanist with very detailed musical instructions. Owens’ melodies require seamless legato, great attention to the nuance of the text, and a willingness to remain flexible with regard to tempo. In both songs there are times when a strict tempo is demanded, followed by either forward motion or a relaxing of the tempo. In every case, Owens is very exacting when indicating the musical requirements for executing his settings of Hughes’ text.

As is evidenced throughout the cycle, these songs represent Owens’ personal, musical interpretation of Hughes’ text. In “Silence,” the fourth song in the cycle, Owens takes a very short poem on what seems to be an obvious theme but creates a musical setting which is its polar opposite.
I catch the patter  
Of your silence  
Before you speak.

I do not need  
To hear a word.

In your silence  
Every tone I seek  
Is heard.\(^4\)

Again, Owens uses the accompaniment to guide his interpretation of the poem. The accompaniment opens with three chords marked \textit{sforzando}. (See musical example 3.3)

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\end{center}

\textbf{Musical Example 3.3}

It is the voice that carries the expected, hushed dynamic of the text. As indicated by Owens’ markings, the initially staid quality of the vocal line gives way to a gradual crescendo over the course of the song. In Owens’ interpretation, the title conceals a much larger emotional state only revealed when exploring ideas beyond the logical meaning of the text. It is Owens’ subtext that drives his compositional choices here. Owens chooses to set this in a musical style that might be better characterized as \textit{arioso} in that the vocal line falls somewhere between recitative and melody, and the texture of the accompaniment is sparse.

“Silence” and the final two songs of the cycle “Songs” and “Sleep” are settings of poems that typify Hughes’ poetry in that each uses very few words in an unpretentious fashion to communicate emotionally rich ideas.

\footnote{Ibid., 126.}
“Songs”
I sat there singing her
Songs in the dark.

She said,
*I do not understand*
The words.

I said,
*There are*
No words.

“Sleep”
When the lips
And the body
Are done
She seeks your hand,
Touches it,
And sleep comes
Without wonder
And without dreams
When the lips
And the body
Are done.44

“Songs,” and “Sleep” end the lovers’ journey in *Silver Rain*. Unlike the rest of the cycle, the musical interpretation of “Song” is centered almost exclusively on the melody and the articulation of the text. The nine-measure song is the simplest in the cycle, both in its accompaniment pattern and its harmonic language. The quality of the song as a whole is similar to the compositional style in “Silence” with a sparse accompaniment and a melody that falls

44 Ibid., 128.
between recitative and melody. In “Sleep,” as in much of the cycle, Owens uses the
accompaniment as his chief interpretational tool with a descending eighth-note pattern in the
right hand of the accompaniment and a descending figure in the left hand. The tempo marking is
pesante, subtly depicting the coming of sleep and the end of the lovers’ journey in life. In *Silver
Rain* Robert Owens captures Hughes’ profound simplicity with music of the same character
adding musical depth to the sweetness of Hughes’ verse.

In addition to *Tearless*, a cycle for baritone, and *Silver Rain*, Owens set four other
sections of *Fields of Wonder* as song cycles. Those cycles include *Desire*, another cycle for
tenor; *Heart on the Wall*, for soprano; *Border Line*, for baritone; and *Mortal Storm* also for
baritone.

Ricky Ian Gordon’s response to Langston Hughes’ poetry is in stark contrast to each of
the other composers discussed thus far. While Bonds, Seigmeister, and Owens generally choose
poems from the collections as Hughes published them, Gordon chose a very different path.
Gordon chose poems from an edited collection of Hughes poetry that was published after his
death. Gordon’s approach to choosing poetry can be best described as impulsive and is very
much in keeping with his eclectic musical influences.

Born in 1956 and raised in a liberal musical household, Gordon’s musical influences
range from Joni Mitchell, Elvis Presley and the Beatles to Samuel Barber, Bela Bartok, Alban
Berg, and Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland. This montage of musical influence is
evidenced in the versatility of Gordon’s compositional output, which ranges from nightclub acts
to ballet, musical theater to opera, and art song. Gordon’s two works to texts by Langston
Hughes are the song cycle, *Genius Child*, and the theater piece, *Only Heaven*. *Only Heaven* was
later published as a collection of songs. Each work draws from the entirety of Hughes’ output.
Continuing the discussion of Hughes, the lyric poet, nine of the twenty-seven songs from these
two works take their poetry from *Fields of Wonder* and further codify Hughes as a seminal
literary figure in the study of American art song.

*Genius Child* was commissioned by Harolyn Blackwell and first performed in 1993 with
pianist Neal Goren. The work includes ten songs taken from Hughes’ collections *The Weary
Blues, Fine Clothes to the Jew, The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*, and *Fields of Wonder* as

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45 Benton, Cayce Brecheen. "A Study of the Musical Settings of Langston Hughes Poetry in
Ricky Ian Gordons Song Cycle "Genius Child" (D.M.A., diss, University of Miami, 2001), 71.
well as several uncollected poems. “Genius Child,” “Strange Hurt” and “Border Line” are from various sections of Fields of Wonder and reflect the diversified nature of the subject matter that characterizes the collection as a whole.

“Genius Child,” the title song of the cycle, elicits very strong feelings from the composer.

This is the song for the genius child.
Sing it softly, for the song is wild.
Sing it softly as ever you can –
Lest the song get out of hand.

Nobody loves a genius child.

Can you love and eagle?
Tame or wild?

Wild or tame,
Can you love a monster
Of frightening name?

Nobody loves a genius child?

Kill him – and let his soul run wild!46

Gordon likens the genius child to the marginalized and disenfranchised artists of society. Often ostracized and underfunded, the genius is in a ceaseless struggle to find congruence between his conflicting natures. Gordon sees the final line of the text as a triumph of the genius’ spirit. Any attempt to destroy genius only enables their work to live on. In Gordon’s words, “you are powerless over it because the genius child is God speaking through people. It’s unstoppable.”47

Gordon’s setting of the poem relies heavily on rhythmic elements to interpret the poem: changing meter, syncopations, and rhythmic motives. The song opens with a two-measure

47 Benton, 73.
prelude that introduces a recurring sixteenth-note motive rhythmic motive. (See musical example 3.4)

Musical Example 3.4

The melody follows in the same syncopated character of the initial sixteenth-note rhythmic motive. A vacillating meter throughout the remainder of the song continues this syncopated feel. The strength of Gordon’s setting of Hughes’ text is how he sets the final line of the poem. The line “Kill him – and let his soul run wild!” is preceded by a similar accompaniment pattern to the opening of the song. A descending sixteenth-note quintuplet figure in the accompaniment responds to the startling text, “Kill him” in equally startling fashion. (See musical example 3.5)

Musical Example 3.5

The second half of the line is sung twice, the second time punctuated by yet another sixteenth-note pattern, this time using a repeating three-note construction. (see Musical Example 3.6)
Musical Example 3.6

In many regards, Gordon’s description of “Genius Child” can be viewed as a description of Langston Hughes himself. “Genius Child” in many regards is a poetic and musical depiction of Hughes’ solitary childhood years, difficult relationships with both his parents, and a never-ending stream of career challenges that often left him financially destitute and ostracized from the very people he sought to uplift. The strength of Langston Hughes’ art is that he responded to life’s challenges with his pen, giving us words that go far beyond race, creed, and socio-economic status to speak to the core of our humanity with beauty, honesty and simplicity.
CHAPTER FOUR

MADAM TO YOU AND THE FACE OF WAR: SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE ART SONGS OF ELIE SIEGMEISTER AND POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES

For centuries there has been a debate about the role of the arts in civilized society. There are countless examples of well-known artists of all disciplines who have used their art to bring awareness to the social ills of their time. For some artists, social commentary and political protest become the motivating force behind their life’s work. The life and music of Elie Siegmeister (1909-1991) strongly demonstrates this ideal. In developing his social and political world view, Siegmeister was inspired by the literary work of Langston Hughes leading to a sustained collaboration between the two artists.

Siegmeister, an often-neglected twentieth century Jewish-American composer, developed his compositional skill and artistic voice in the company and under the influence of several leading composers of the century. After completing his studies at Columbia College in 1927, Siegmeister studied with famed composer, conductor, and composition teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris for the next four years. Important figures in twentieth century American art song also studying with Boulanger during this time were Aaron Copland and Virgil Thompson. While Siegmeister did not enthusiastically embrace all aspects of Boulanger’s teaching, he was greatly influenced by her sense of precision, style, elegance, purity, form, and clarity. According to Siegmeister, Boulanger’s political and religious views became a recurring point of contention between student and teacher. Boulanger’s conservative Roman Catholic orthodoxy and Siegmeister’s agnosticism and leftist political interests were an antagonistic pairing.48 For Hughes and Siegmeister, their proletarian empathizing made them compatriots in an arts community that was often left leaning in its political ideology.

Siegmeister returned to the United States in 1932 and three years later enrolled at The Juilliard School to study conducting. Equally as important to his musical studies during the

period following his return from Paris were his co-curricular activities. Siegmeister was a member of the Young Composers Group and the Composers Collective of New York City. The Young Composers Group, led by Aaron Copland, gave him a sense of musical community after returning to the United States and gave voice to Siegmeister’s objection to the pervading French influence in American Music. Through his work with the Young Composers Group, Siegmeister also developed a fond appreciation for the work of Charles Ives and began to further cement his resistance of musical categorization. The diversity of compositional styles employed by Siegmeister throughout his career is evidence of this resistance.

The Composers Collective of New York City, later named the American Music League, was affiliated with the Worker Music League, an arm of the American Communist Party. The principle mission of the group was to find and create music that would provide aid in the workers’ struggle during the Great Depression. The Composers Collective published Workers’ Song Book No. 1 and 2, to which Siegmeister contributed “2 negro songs of protest” under the pseudonym L.E. Swift. The group’s embrace of folk music as a vehicle for organizing workers in their fight for better work conditions permanently formed in Siegmeister a social awareness that resulted in an inescapable populist subtext in his music. From that time forward, Siegmeister reconciles folk song and concert music in a way that absorbs his political ideology into his musical life, while emphasizing accessibility to amateurs and professionals alike.49 Siegmeister’s first collection, Negro Songs of Protest was an anthology of transcribed chain gang songs from Alabama. It is an early example of Siegmeister’s appropriation of folk idiom as a tool of social activism.

In addition to Siegmeister’s devotion to folk culture and desire to express the needs of society, he also possessed a strong literary sensibility. Siegmeister’s second collection of songs, A Treasury of American Song included “A New Wind-a-Blown,” a setting of a text by Langston Hughes. The prominence of Langston Hughes’ writing in Siegmeister’s song compositions should in no way be considered a coincidental artistic partnership. In Langston Hughes, Siegmeister found not only a poet for his songs but also a kindred spirit in political and social activism. For Langston Hughes political and social activism was in his lineage. His great-uncle, John Mercer Langston, was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1888, among the first African Americans to be elected to Congress. His grandfather worked for the

49 ibid., 169.
abolitionist cause leading the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. His maternal grandmother, Mary Patterson, was among the first women of color to attend Oberlin College. She enrolled in 1857 several years before the ratification of the thirteenth amendment effectively ended slavery. Hughes credited his grandmother for instilling in him the sense of racial pride that would become central to his literary work. It can also be said that his views on race, developed under his grandmother’s care, are also partially responsible for drawing Hughes to the political left in his activism against racial discrimination and economic inequality during the Great Depression.

While Hughes and Siegmeister never officially joined the Communist Party, their leftist political ideologies became the foundation upon which they developed their respective artistic voices. They each drew inspiration from the idea that their work gave voice to the weakest citizens. Siegmeister believed that the greatest art came from the writer, painter, poet or composer who responded to his environment, people and traditions. Throughout Hughes’ work, pride in the diversity of African American identity is central but is in no way exclusionary. Hughes is quoted as saying: “My seeking has been to illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind.”

Hughes’ main concern was the uplift of his people whose strengths, resiliency, courage, and humor he wanted to record as a part of the broader American experience. His work gave insightful views of the lives of the working class in African American communities, confronted racial stereotypes, and protested social conditions, in an effort to expand African Americans image of themselves. The objection to the assimilation of African Americans into American society at the expense of their cultural heritage is similar in nature to Siegmeister and the Young Composers Group’s objection to the French influence permeating American music. In the same way that Hughes places particular emphasis on the blues as the basis for his poetry of racial pride, Siegmeister greatly values American folk music as inspiration for his overall output. The earliest known collaboration for Hughes and Siegmeister came in the early 1930s. The unpublished workers’ round, “Park Bench,” was composed during the period where Siegmeister was doing extensive work with the Composers Collective developing music to aid in the struggle for workers’ rights.

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50 Rampersad, _The Life of Langston Hughes_ 2:418.
The poems Siegmeister chose address in very direct language the personal relationships of the inner-city laboring class, the attitudes of the people involved in these relationships, and the degree of personal happiness they enjoyed. These themes are evident throughout Siegmeister and Hughes’ individual careers and become more compelling when they collaborate. Siegmeister set approximately fifty Langston Hughes poems in his career.\(^{53}\)

Beginning in September 1943, Langston Hughes began publishing a series of humorous poems titled *Madam To You: The Life and Times of Alberta K. Johnson*. Of the eighteen poems written by Hughes, twelve were included in Hughes’ poetry volume *One Way Ticket* in 1949. The spirit of the protagonist is encapsulated in the first poem of the published work, *Madam’s Past History*, which Siegmeister chose not to set:

My name is Johnson  
Madam Alberta K  
The Madam stands for business  
I’m smart that way

I had a  
HAIR DRESSING PARLOR  
Before the depression  
Till I had prices lower

Then I had a  
BARBECUE STAND  
Till I got mixed up  
With a no-good man.

Cause I had a insurance  
The WPA  
Said, We can't use you  
Wealthy that way.

I said,

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 176.
DON'T WORRY 'BOUT ME!
Just like the song,
You WPA folks take care of yourself--
And I'll get along.

I do cooking,
Day's work, too!
Alberta K. Johnson--
Madam to you.⁵⁴

Siegmeister chose six other poems from the Madam To You series and an additional poem from the “Life is Fine” section of One Way Ticket to create the song cycle Madam To You in 1964. One Way Ticket represents a return to Hughes’ more traditional subject matter after his foray into the arena of lyric poetry with Fields of Wonder. It is important to note that during the year before Hughes began work on the Madam To You poems, he created the character Jesse B. Semple (later referred to as ‘Simple.’) Simple was a recurring satirical character originally conceived for a radio show but reconceived as a vehicle for Hughes’ to share his view on contemporary events. Simple appears in Hughes Chicago Defender column and speaks from a working class, African American, male perspective. The Alberta K. Johnson character only manifests itself in poetic form. Simple appears in prose form and becomes the central character of a novel and a Broadway musical later in Hughes’ career. Each character functions similarly in giving a human voice to life from the perspective of a Harlem resident. The situations Alberta K. Johnson’s character confronts, however, are confined to her immediate surroundings, while Simple’s commentary includes national and international issues. In both cases, each character approaches their challenging circumstances with a lightheartedness that often defies their circumstances making both endearing characters for readers and/or listeners.

The opening song, “Madam and the Census Man,” finds Madam Johnson taking a dignified stand for her identity against a government official who does not want to acknowledge the legitimacy of her name. Although the song begins in common time, Siegmeister establishes

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a triplet rhythm in the accompaniment, evoking a blues character that appears intermittently throughout the song. (See musical example 4.1)

Musical Example 4.1
When the Census Man speaks, the rhythm of the vocal line becomes square marking a clear delineation between the two characters. As the argument ensues the tempo accelerates and the harmony becomes increasingly more dissonant. The song ends with Alberta correcting the Census Man’s assumption that she is married. She says, “Furthermore, rub out That MRS., too. I’ll have you know, I’m Madam to you!” The rhythmic drive of the concluding measures and the final chord give the impression that the Census Man has made a rather abrupt and involuntary departure. (See musical example 4.2)
Musical Example 4.2

In the second song of the cycle, Siegmeister sets the interaction of Madam Johnson with Reverend Butler. From the first song to the second we see a contrast in the type of oppressor. The Census Man comes from outside of what Madam Johnson would consider her community while Reverend Butler is likely a known entity in her community. In “Madam and The Minister,” Alberta’s sharp-tongued, self-assured sass continues to be present in her speech. Siegmeister chooses to set the introduction and interludes in 7/8. (See musical example 4.3)
Musical Example 4.3

This irregular meter gives the impression that Madam Johnson is apprehensive about the Minister’s presence, insecure about having to answer questions in defense of her soul, and inwardly unsettled with the confrontation. The irregular meter is a fitting musical juxtaposition to the self-confidence inherent in Madam’s text. As is present in each selection, however, Madam Johnson always answers her oppressor’s questions with unequivocal audacity. “He said, Sister Have you backslid? I said, ‘it felt good if I did!’” The song ends in a rather melancholy mood as Madam Johnson expresses regret for having dismissed Reverend Butler’s questions so sharply, further amplifying the unsettled character expressed in the 7/8 meter earlier in the song. (See musical example 4.4)
Musical Example 4.4

“Mama and Daughter” is the only song in the cycle that does not come from the Madam To You series of poems. In this song mother and daughter are discussing the impending arrival of the daughter’s new boyfriend. The song concludes with Mama’s recollection of her own desertion by the girl’s father. It is unclear whether Alberta K. Johnson is supposed to be mother or daughter in this song. This vagueness affords the singer an interpretive opportunity. “Madam and the Rent Man,” “Madam and the Fortune Teller,” “Madam and the Number Runner,” and “Madam and the Wrong Visitor,” the concluding selections of the cycle, continue in the same fashion as the previous songs. In each of these rhythmically and harmonically challenging pieces, Madam Johnson is compelled to respond to the forces of societal oppression in her daily existence both from within her community and from outsiders. Her defensive posture is characterized by unconventional shifts in tonality, complex meter changes, and considerable use of jazz harmonies (9th and 11th chords). Madam To You requires a singer of considerable expressive skill to capture the various moods of Madam Johnson. Additionally, Siegmeister’s wide melodic scope and abundant variation of dynamics and articulation used to express the fluctuation of mood in the text necessitate a singer of significant technical skill.
Siegmeister and Hughes’ collaborative political activism continued years later in response to America’s involvement in the Vietnam War and the death of Martin Luther King Jr. Siegmeister’s song cycle *The Face of War* was completed in 1967, the year of Hughes’ death. Siegmeister makes the following juxtaposition of purpose regarding *Madam To You* and *The Face of War* in the liner notes of the recording *American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award Record: Music of Elie Siegmeister* (Composer Recordings, Inc., CRI SD 416, ©1979):

>If *Madam To You* is a celebration of life, *The Face of War* is an outcry, sometimes in harsh, almost atonal musical terms, against needless, horrible death on the battlefield. I’d like to think of these songs as in some small measure an American counterpart of a cycle I have always deeply admired: Moussorgsky’s *Songs and Dances of Death.*

*The Face of War* was first performed in 1968 by William Warfield on a program titled “Composers and Musicians for Peace: A Tribute to MLK.” *The Face of War* included spoken excerpts from the Martin Luther King JR’s *I Have a Dream* speech and poetry of Langston Hughes. Siegmeister organized this anti-war concert at Carnegie Hall in May of 1968. Notable composers who also participated in this effort were George Crumb and Aaron Copland.

The poetry for *The Face of War* is from Hughes’ collection of poems published posthumously in 1967, *The Panther and the Lash.* The collection as a whole was Hughes’ well-crafted, artistic response to the turmoil of the time. The title of this collection is likely an acknowledgement of the founding of the Black Panther Party in the previous year. The civil rights movement was reaching its zenith and similarly to earlier parts of the century various modes of thinking governed how the African American community was responding to social upheaval. While not directly involving himself in the civil rights movement, Langston Hughes continually lent his literary voice to the cause with commentary in his *Chicago Defender* column as well as essays and poems on the topic. Ever the object of criticism from every circle, Hughes endured scathing criticism for his seeming indifference to the civil rights movement.

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56 Roderick George, “An Annotated bibliography of Song Settings for Voice and Piano by American Composers of the Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes” (D.M. diss, Florida State University, 2000), 58.
His writing shows that this criticism is completely unfounded. While he empathized with the Black Power and the Black Arts movement he was uneasy about the militant nature of its work. For Hughes, his choice to respond only with his written word was a part of a continual attempt to avoid aligning himself with any political ideology. His own work in the 1930s on behalf of the political left and his poetry that espoused revolutionary aims nearly cost him his career as a writer, damaged his relationship with the NAACP leadership, and saw him subpoenaed before Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Committee on Investigations in 1953. At this juncture of Hughes’ life, he was a more politically calculating artist. He wrote privately in 1964, “Politics can be the graveyard of the poet. And only poetry can be his resurrection.”

Siegmeister chose five of the seven poems in Hughes’ collection. The dedication, “Written as a memorial to Langston Hughes,” appears on the manuscript found in the Library of Congress. The published copy however, does not bear the same dedication. The first song in the cycle, “Official Notice,” is the third in Hughes’ work of the same title and is a parent’s response to the notification that their child has been killed in battle. The atmosphere of the song is established in the accompaniment. The dynamic range in the accompaniment only goes above piano once, giving the song a hushed, somber, contained underpinning as the parent attempts to deal with unspeakable grief. The lack of a definite key, the disjunctive nature of the vocal line, and the complete independence of melody and accompaniment reflect the unsettled emotions of the parent. (See musical example 4.5)

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Musical Example 4.5

“Listen Here, Joe” is Siegmeister’s title of the second song coming from the first line of the poem. Hughes title “Without Benefit of Declaration” is not used. This poem represents Hughes most direct criticism the United States’ involvement in the undeclared Vietnam War. The speaker describes to a young man what he will face in the war zone. The uncertainty of the war experience is characterized in the rhythmic complexity and brisk tempo of the song. The meter never remains the same for more than three of the forty-eight measures in the song with the exception of the concluding five measures. At times, the meter changes every measure. (See musical example 4.6)
After a rather graphic depiction of what the soldier will face, the song closes with a relaxation of the tempo and a salutation to the soldier’s mother, “Mama, don’t cry.”

“Peace,” the third song in the cycle is a somber elegy to deceased soldiers. According to the poem, the distinction between winners and losers in war is a hollow one to the deceased. The poem reflects Hughes’ reverence for all of humanity. Siegmeister’s chordal accompaniment and sparse rhythm avoids accent, obscures the meter, and creates a very staid atmosphere, aptly reflecting the spirit of the poem. (See musical example 4.7)

Musical Example 4.7

“Peace” is the calmest song in the cycle and provides the listener aural rest from the rather tumultuous nature of the cycle as a whole.

“The Dove” is Siegmeister’s and Hughes’ depiction of a deserted war zone. Hughes uses no punctuation in the poem. Siegmeister reflects this seeming lack of literary structure by choosing to avoid any sense of a tonal center. The accompaniment is a series of augmented and diminished octaves covering a wide range of the piano. (See musical example 4.8)
Musical Example 4.8

The sparse accompaniment supports a melodic line that is equally wide, covering an octave and a fifth. Siegmeister’s interpretation of Hughes’ poem goes much further in its musical depiction of the gruesome nature of a deserted battleground than Hughes’ more metaphoric language, “…and here is old Picasso and the dove and dreams as fragile as pottery with dove in white on clay dark brown as earth is brown from our old battle ground…”

“War,” the concluding song of the cycle, returns generally to the musical character of the first song, but poetically speaks to a more universal audience. Siegmeister employs jagged rhythmic structure and vocal line, changing meter, and explosive dynamics to communicate Hughes’ text. For this reason “War” is arguably the most challenging song of the cycle. The musical complexity is an apt illustration of the cruel brutality of war. The one danger of the nature of Siegmeister’s complex musical structure is the possible loss of Hughes’ powerful text in the musical melee:

The face of war is my face.
The face of war is your face

*What color*

*Is the face*

*Of war?*

Brown, black, white –

*Your* face and my face.

Death is the broom
I take in my hands
To sweep the world

Clean

I sweep and I sweep
Then mop and I mop.
I dip my broom in blood,
My mop in blood –
And blame you for this,
Because you are there
Enemy.
It’s hard to blame me,
Because I am here –
So I kill you.
And you kill me.
My name,
Like your name,
Is war.  

For both Hughes and Siegmeister the power of their art lies in their ability to represent the most vulnerable citizens in society with dignity and challenge existing power structures for the betterment of humankind. In the face of considerable criticism, they still managed to stay true to the purpose of their art. Madam To You and The Face of War mark the intersection of both composer’s and poet’s commitment to art of social significance founded upon uniquely American themes, blues, jazz and folk idiom. Siegmeister’s music takes that which is uniquely American and imbues it with the structure, grandeur and artistic merit of classical music without robbing the work of its colloquial nuance, accessibility to audiences, and socio-political message.

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CONCLUSION

Since the death of Langston Hughes forty-five years ago, interest in his life and works has produced a wealth of scholarly activity on various aspects of his career. From Arnold Rampersad’s two-volume biography, *The Life of Langston Hughes* published in 1986 and other biographical treatments of Hughes’ life to more recent writing on specific recurring themes in his writing, for example, Scott Jonathan’s *Socialist Joy in the Writing of Langston Hughes* published in 2006 and Jason Miller’s *Langston Hughes and American Lynching Culture* published in 2011, Hughes is still a vibrant presence in our national consciousness. These works along with the eleven-volume series *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes* have moved Langston Hughes from the more narrow confines of African American Studies departments where serious inquiry into his life and works began in the 1970s when those areas of study were created, to the intellectual mainstream.

In musical circles, scholarship in the last fifteen years has brought new attention to specific works using Hughes’ poetry. For example, Jamie Michelle Reimer focuses her attention on the musical works of Robert Owens using poetry from the Hughes collection *Fields of Wonder* in her 2008 dissertation of the same title. Cayce Brecheen Benton focuses exclusively on the Ricky Ian Gordon song cycle *Genius Child* and its use of poetry published at various times in Hughes’ career with her 2001 dissertation, “A Study of Musical Settings of Langston Hughes Poetry in Ricky Ian Gordon’s *Genius Child.*” Roderick George’s treatise in 2000 *An Annotated Bibliography of Song Settings for Voice and Piano by American Composers of the Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes*, giving a more complete listing of song settings using Hughes’ texts. Based on the research for this project however, comprehensive approaches to chronicling Langston Hughes’ contribution to American music culture as a whole have not been undertaken. This treatise begins that process by laying out in broad terms the various genres of music to which Hughes made contribution and then examining song cycles that represent the major features of his poetic writing, the relationship composers had with Hughes’ personally and his poetry, and the musical interpretations that came from that relationship.

Langston Hughes is a unique figure through which the hybridized cultural foundation inherent in American music generally and American art song more specifically can be appraised. With the influence of blues and jazz in Langston Hughes’ poetry, he is an important link between
those popular forms that have their foundation in the African American community and the classical composers inspired by his verse to compose art song. While it would be easy and in several cases fitting to categorize settings of Langston Hughes’ poetry as African American art song, the categorization can mistakenly rob these poems and the songs they inspired of the universal appreciation they deserve and inadvertently discourage performers of all cultural backgrounds from exploring this repertoire. Margaret Bonds, Ricky Ian Gordon, Robert Owens, and Elie Siegmeister, being of various races, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses are the embodiment of Hughes poetic purpose, speaking on behalf of those whose voices might be easily marginalized and giving dignity to their experiences.
APPENDIX A

MARGARET BONDS SETTINGS OF LANGSTON HUGHES TEXTS

Art Songs
April Rain Song
Be a Little Savage With Me
Cowboy From South Parkway
Cue 10
Freedom Land
I’ll Make You Savvy
Joy
Love’s Runnin’ Riot
The Negro Speaks of Rivers
Night Time
No Good Man
Park Bench
Playing with Fire
Silent Love

Songs of the Seasons
Poem d’Automne
Winter-moon
Young Love in Spring
Summer Storm

Three Dream Portraits
Minstrel Man
Dream Variation
I, Too

Vocal Duets
African Dance
Joy
Choral Music

*Ballad of a Brown King*
- Of the Three Wise Men
- They Brought Fine Gifts
- Sing Alleluia
- Mary Had a Baby
- Now When Jesus Was Born
- Could He Have Been an Ethiope?
- Oh, Sing of the King Who Was Tall and Brown
- That Was A Christmas Long Ago
- Alleluia

Fields of Wonder
Freedom Land
I, Too
Joy

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

*Simon Bore The Cross*
- Jesus in the Garden
- He Is a Good Man
- The Trial
- Who Is That Man?
- Don’t You Know Mary?
- Simon and Jesus
- Crucifixion
- The Resurrection

Musical Theater

*Tropics After Dark*
- Chocolate Carmencita
- Cowboy from South Parkway
- I’ll Make You Savvy Somehow
- Lonely Little Maiden by the Sea
- Market Day in Marinique
- Pretty Flower of the Tropics
- Sweet Nothings in Spanish
- Voo Doo Man
- The Way We Dance in Chicago/Harlem
- When the Sun Goes Down in Rhumba Land

Incidental Music for Stage Plays

*Shakespeare in Harlem*
*Troubled Island*

*Don’t You Wanna Be Free*
APPENDIX B

RICKY IAN GORDON SETTINGS OF LANGSTON HUGHES TEXTS

Genius Child

Winter Moon
Genius Child
Kid in the Park
To Be Somebody
Troubled Woman
Strange Hurt
Borderline
Prayer
My People
Genius Child

Only Heaven

Angel Wings
Daybreak in Alabama
Delinquent
Demand
Dream
Dream Variations
Drum
Harlem Night Song
In Time of Silver Rain
Late Last Night
Night: Four Songs
Litany
Luck
Port Town
Song for a Dark Girl
Stars
When Sue Wears Red
APPENDIX C

ROBERT OWENS SETTINGS OF LANGSTON HUGHES TEXTS

Tearless
Vagabonds
Luck
Exits
Walls
Chippy
Dancers
Grief
Prayer

Silver Rain
In Time of Silver Rain
Fulfillment
Night Song
Silence
Carolina Cabin
Songs
Sleep

Desire
Desire
Dream
Juliet
Man

Heart on the Wall
Heart
Remembrance
Havana Dreams
Girl
For Dead Mines
Borderline
Border Line
Night: Four Songs
Dustbowl
Burden
One
Beale Street
Gifts
Circles
Grave Yard
Convent
Poppy Flower
Gypsy Melodies
Montmartre
Fragments
Desert
The End

Mortal Storm
A House In Taos
Little Song
Jaime
Faithful One
Genius Child
APPENDIX D

ELIE SIEGMEISTER SETTINGS OF
LANGSTON HUGHES TEXTS

Refugee Road
A New Wind a-Blowin’

Two Songs of the City
  Childhood memories
  Chalk Marks on the Sidewalk

Madam To You
  Madam and the Census Man
  Madam and the Minister
  Mama and Daughter
  Madam and the Rent Man
  Madam and the Fortune Teller
  Madam and the Number Runner
  Madam and the Wrong Visitor

The Face of War
  Official Notice
  Listen Here, Joe
  Peace
  The Dove
  War

Three Minute Songs
  Motto
  Hope
  Question

Ways of Love
  Fired
  Ballad of Adam and Eve
  Life is Fine

Four Langston Hughes Songs
  Daybreak in Alabama
  Ballad of the Gypsy
  Hard Daddy
  Sister
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Albert Rudolph Lee, Jr., a native of New Haven, CT holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Connecticut and a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from The Juilliard School. His operatic roles include the title role in Britten’s *Albert Herring*, Alfredo in Verdi’s *La Traviata*, Tamino in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, Count Almaviva in Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Nemorino in Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’Amore*, Rinuccio in Puccini’s *Gianni Schicchi*, and Ferrando in Mozart’s *Cosi Fan Tutte*. Equally at home in concert repertoire, Mr. Lee’s oratorio repertoire includes solos in Bach’s *Mass in B-minor*, Adolphus Hailstork’s *Done Made My Vow*, Handel’s *Messiah*, Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, the Mozart *Requiem* and *Coronation Mass*, the Rossini *Stabat Mater*, and the Verdi *Requiem*. He has appeared with the Opera Theater of Saint Louis, Palm Beach Opera, Opera Theater of Pittsburgh, Berkshire Opera Company, Kentucky Opera, Connecticut Concert Opera, the Philadelphia Orchestra, Saint Luke’s Chamber Orchestra, the Missouri Symphony, the New Haven Chorale, the Collegiate Chorale of New York City, the Tallahassee Community Choir, Caramoor International Music Festival, and the Aspen Music Festival.

Mr. Lee holds memberships in Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honor Society and the National Association of Teachers of Singing. He currently serves as a graduate teaching assistant in applied voice and as adjunct professor of music at Troy University.