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THE NEGRO'S CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN MUSIC

There is a growing recognition of the value of the Negro's contribution to America's music. In considering this contribution there is in this outline no endeavour scientifically to measure his musical ability; no effort to prove his musical talent as inferior or superior to that of the whites. Such measurements have been made. For example, Dean Carl E. Seashore of the State University of Iowa has written of Negro music from the scientific point of view. He calls attention to the fact that in the past there has not been available a scientific concept of the musical mind. Certain tests have recently been made, known as the "Seashore Measures of Musical Talent." These have been used for investigation by the University of North Carolina Institute for Research in the Social Sciences. Tests were given to over 3,500 persons, white and Negro, in the colleges and graded schools of North and South Carolina and Virginia. The results brought the investigator to conclusions which may briefly be summed up as follows: On the basis of my data, the Seashore Tests revealed no significant differences in the basic sensory musical capacities between whites and Negroes."

This outline seeks rather to direct attention to Negro music, and to the handicaps of the Negro singer or composer. The noted Negro poet, James Weldon Johnson, has pointed out the contrast between "the old immemorial stereotype that the Negro in America is nothing more than a beggar at the gate of the nation, waiting to be thrown the crumbs of civilization, that he is here only to receive; to be shaped into something new and unquestionably better"—and the new "awakening to the truth that the Negro is an active and important force in American life; that he is creator as well as a creature: that he has given as well as received and that he is the potential giver of larger and richer contributions."

Negro Spirituals

The Negro spirituals were an emotional escape during 240 years of slavery in America. They are, to use the words of Alain Locke, "the most characteristic product of the race genius as yet in America. But the very elements which make them uniquely expressive of the Negro make them at the same time, deeply representative of the soil that produced them. Thus, as unique spiritual products of American life, they become nationally as well as racially characteristic. It may not be readily conceded now that the song of the Negro is America's folk-song but if the spirituals are what we think them to be, a classic folk expression, then this is their ultimate destiny. Already they give evidence of this classic quality. Through their immediate and compelling universality of appeal, through their untarnishable beauty, they seem assured of the immortality of those great folk expressions that survive, not so much through being typical of a group or representative of a

period, as by virtue of being fundamentally and everlastingly human. This universality of the Spirituals looms more and more as they stand the test of time. They have outlived the particular generation and the peculiar conditions which produced them; they have survived in turn the contempt of the slave owners, the conventionalizations of formal religion, the repressions of Puritanism, the corruptions of sentimental balladry, and the neglect and disdain of second-generation respectability. They have escaped the lapsing conditions and the fragile vehicle of folk-art, and come firmly into the context of formal music. Only classics survive such things."

The slave songs have only recently come to be recognized as "artistically precious things." In a note worthy chapter on "Sorrow Songs" in The Souls of Black Folk, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois interprets the great Spirituals comparing them with the Psalms which were written out of the spiritual experience of the Jews. "The humble origin of these sorrow songs is too indelibly stamped upon them to be ignored or overlooked."

... They lack the grand style, but never the sblime effect. Their words are colloquial, but their mood is epic. They are primitive, but their emotional artistry is perfect. Indeed, spiritually evaluated, they are among the most genuine and outstanding expression of Christian mood and feeling, fit musically and emotionally, if not verbally, of standing with the few Latin hymns, the handful of Gregorian tunes and the rarest of German chorals as a not negligible element in the modicum of strictly religious music that the Christian centuries have produced."

Negro Composers and Musicians
Because of the handicaps of poverty and racial prejudice the Negro is frequently barred from the privileges of study and training which are prerequisite to artistic composition. In spite of these handicaps there are a number of well-known Negro composers and artists, and promise, particularly in the field of orchestration." Mr. Brown is a graduate of the music department of Fisk University and of the Horner Institute, Kansas City Conservatory. At present he is director of music in the Attucks High School, Indianapolis. Last year the Indiana Symphony Orchestra rendered his orchestral "Jubilee Characteristique."

Negro Singers

The best known Negro singer is undoubtedly Roland Hayes the tenor whose story has been repeatedly told. Mrs. Florence Cole-Talbert is a noted soprano. Harry T. Burleigh, baritone, is known both as a soloist and composer. For twenty years he has been a soloist in a white church in New York City. He has been called "a composer bp divine right."

For a musical program some of the following musical settings by Burleigh might be used: the Spiritual "Deep River;" "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors"—a setting of Walt Whitman's poem; a setting of Rupert Brooke's sonnet "The Soldier;" "The Young Warrior"—a setting of a song by James Weldon Johnson.

The romantic story of the Jubilee Singers has been retold by Professor Work in his Folk Song of the American Negro. In 1871, under the

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