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The Spirit Within; how spiritual folklore has influenced western classical music

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The Spirit Within; how spiritual folklore has influenced western classical music.

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Doctor of Philosophy in Music

by

Giovanni Piacentini

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Spirit Within; how spiritual folklore has influenced western classical music.

by

Giovanni Piacentini

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

Richard Danielpour, Committee Co-Chair

Ian Krouse, Committee Co-Chair

My dissertation monograph will be based on research about the way in which early spiritual music has been used by major composers of the western “classical” tradition. My research will focus on the way in which the “struggle” that the people of the southern United States, mostly the African American diaspora, have endured over the past two centuries has been immortalized in musical hymns and songs, and how this music has been interpreted,

appropriated and in some cases quoted by composers. I will investigate how works like *Porgy and Bess* by George Gershwin, *A Woman's Life* by Richard Danielpour and *A Child of Our Time* by Michael Tippett have used the material from spiritual African American music in very unique and different ways. I will also research works by contemporary composers that use early hymns or ancient musical "objects" as the foundational blocks of the work like *Folias* and *An Armenian Requiem* by Ian Krouse and *Folk Songs* by Luciano Berio.

This research will inform my own composition for guitar and orchestra which I will be writing simultaneously. As an example, one musical genre that has roots back to the days of slavery is gospel music. As slaves became Christians, a religion forced upon them, they began singing hymns later termed spirituals. These spirituals later evolved into gospel music. With the abolition of slavery, a new form of music began to emerge. Free blacks found themselves expressing their disappointment in a post-slavery society. This genre became known as the blues. I will investigate how the common thread that unites

these cries for justice and laments is then used by different composers as the main inspiration for the piece in the western classical tradition. Moreover, I will provide an ample analysis of carefully chosen works from the canon that have a spiritual or ancient hymn or song as their central idea. How successful were these works in delivering the message embedded in this found musical object? Did they use the original source and if so, how was it presented? Did the source music influence the overall dramatic arch of the work? Is the original music represented in a more abstract way where the composer "re-wrote" it in his or her own personal voice? Examples of African American spiritual hymns that I will research are: "Swing Low Sweet Chariot", and "Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child". Simultaneously, I will make reference to earlier examples of spiritual hymns as found objects with examples from J.S. Bach and Mozart among others.

My aim with this monograph is to gain a solid understanding of spiritual hymns in western music so that my own work can be a true musical crossbreeding that embodies my own personal heritage and multiculturalism.

The dissertation of Giovanni Piacentini is approved.

Eliot Fisk

Movses Pogossian

Richard Danielpour, Committee Co-Chair

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2021

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First I would like to thank my mentor and “musical father” Richard Danielpour. Ever since I received a phone call in New York City over 13 years ago to join his private studio, his guidance, mentorship, wisdom, generosity and patience has made a huge impact on my musical and personal life. He is the biggest reason why I came to UCLA and, against many odds, completed my musical education. To him I owe a debt of gratitude that is impossible to put in words and can be only be repaid with my diligent efforts to leave a legacy behind for future generations just like he has. I would like to thank Ian Krouse whose invaluable support, wisdom and generosity has made this project possible. Ian has gone above and beyond his duty to make sure the guitar concerto, (and all of my music) was up to par and his incredible musical knowledge and impeccable taste has at the same time amazed me and inspired me to try and write the best music that I possibly can.

Ever since I can remember, Eliot Fisk’s artistry has been an inspiration and motivation for me. He is one of the main reasons I became enamored of the guitar and its repertoire. I

do not believe in destiny, but I do find it absolutely mind blowing that our paths crossed in such a serendipitous way and that today we culminate our friendship and brotherhood with this marvelous collaboration. He is my musical brother (my *fratellone*) and I owe him a debt of gratitude beyond words.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My mother Pilar whose support and love has fueled and guided me throughout my life. None of my accomplishments would have been possible without the love she instilled in me from the very beginning. Gracias mama, te quiero! To my wife Keltse and my daughters Giuliana and Valeria who I love more than life. You are the reason I do everything I do, and the inspiration to be a better person every day.

VITA

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES, LOS ANGELES, CA, JUNE 2017 to Present
TEACHING FELLOW OF MUSIC THEORY AND AURAL SKILLS

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COMPOSER

- Attained commissions after Master's Degree completion to compose original pieces for both emerging and renowned soloists and ensembles across the NYC area.
- Partnered with the harp duo, "Duo Scorpio" in NYC, the Irish violin and viola duet "Collailm Duo", the concert series "Music of Reality" in Boston, and the "Mexiam" festival in San Francisco.
- Demonstrate musical expertise by continuously striving to create engaging and pleasing music for a diverse audience.
- Deliver professional performances of personally created works for solo guitar as well as ensembles featuring guitar. Premiered personal compositions like "Chiaroscuro" for solo guitar and "Six Preludes for Solo Guitar" at the Schoenberg Hall of UCLA.

VARIOUS 2004 to Present
EDITOR/ARRANGER/COPYIST

- Conceptualize, create, and produce numerous arrangements for various media, such as television, radio, and concert music. Scored multiple entertainment shows for "Canal 40" in Mexico City.
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- Conceived and initiated a successful music program for underprivileged kids ages 4-12 in the "Kibera Slum" in Nairobi, Kenya.
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- Evening division composition classes with Dr. Jonathan Dawe, The Juilliard School, 2011
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ASCAP
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Hand On Miami, in Miami FL., 2005.
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INTRODUCTION

Music in the best way to tell the story of "us". The way in which we create music says a lot about who we are, what binds us together and what we believe in. It has a visceral honesty that provides a deep insight into the sprit of a people. The "spiritual" music of the past is pregnant with meaning, yearning and hope. This is why many of the great composers of the West have adopted the melodies, harmonies and affects that were born out of spiritual beliefs. From Dvorak to Bernstein, from Gershwin to Krouse, from Berio to Danielpour, the *zeitgeist* embedded into spiritual music has been a fresh source of inspiration and a way to re-connect with what was considered a higher order. Spiritual music comes from a place of no-mind. A dimension where thoughts and mind forms are bypassed and awareness of the omnipresent consciousness (sometimes referred to as "God") is experienced. This experience does not necessarily require the belief in a certain deity or organized religion. It is the experience of the conscious mind of which everything else is a content of. It is a still and joyful place from which emanates an infinite creative force.

In this dissertation, I will focus mostly on the music produced by African slaves in America. In their case, it was extreme suffering that led them to this source through the inevitability of their situation. This excruciating pain and helplessness has only two solutions; death or surrender. The latter, has proven to be a source of deep, soulful music brimming with sadness and hope. It is the goal of this dissertation to explore how composers have adopted the music born out of this source and made it their own in very different ways. More over, I will provide an analysis of carefully chosen works from he canon that have a spiritual or ancient hymn or song as their central idea and/or inspiration. How successful were these works in delivering the message embedded in this found musical object? Did they use the original source and if so, how was it presented? Did the source music influence the overall dramatic arch of the work? Is the original music represented in a more abstract way where the composer "re-wrote" it in his or her own personal voice? Examples of African American spiritual hymns that I will research are: "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," and "*Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child.*" Simultaneously, I will make reference to earlier

examples of spiritual hymns as found objects with examples from J.S. Bach and Mozart among others. As a composer, I am especially interested in learning from these different adaptation methods so I can incorporate them into my own work.

My hope is that this research can provide not only a useful resource for composers to tap into incredibly good music, (that has been all but forgotten in some cases), but also as inspiration to use spiritual found objects in their own compositions by internalizing them and embodying their power.

Part 1 - HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SPIRITUAL MUSIC

CHAPTER ONE

The origins of spiritual music; The Islamic cultural heritage

The blues, brought into the world in the Deep South, invokes pictures of cotton fields, abused tenant farmers, chain groups, agony, and solitariness. At the point when one contemplates a music so implanted in provincial African American culture, Islam unquestionably doesn't ring a bell. However, it ought to on the grounds that probably the most profound underlying foundations of the blues developed not in the Mississippi Delta but rather a great many miles away, in the Islamic belt of West Africa.[1]

[1] Diouf, S. A. D. (n.d.). *What Africa gave the Blues*. Renovatio.Zaytuna.Edu. https://renovatio.zaytuna.edu/article/what-islam-gave-the-blues
I found most of my sources through Internet searches. I consulted the online UCLA Music Library website for books, databases such as ProQuest for dissertations and theses, and JSTOR for journal articles. I learned of other sources through word of mouth or was exposed to them through course content.

Islam had been known in West Africa since the eighth century, through contacts with Berber and Arab traders and pastors from the North. The religion began to spread in Senegal and Mali toward the start of the eleventh century, brought by local neighbors, researchers, and pastors. Its compass before long extended from the banks of the Senegal River in the West to the shores of Lake Chad in the East. Malian dealers and priests brought it to northern Nigeria in the fourteenth century.

The Muslim world, which at different occasions reached out from Portugal to China, was a worldwide commercial center of thoughts and products, and West Africa was an important hub for it. As in many other Muslim territories, Sufism, known as the magical side of Islam, spread broadly in West Africa. One of its particular highlights was—and still is—music. Seen as a way to bring an individual or a gathering nearer to God, music is an essential piece of Sufi life, following the directive of the *Hadith* "Enhance the Qur'an with your voices." Members of Sufi orders regularly evoke the Qur'an and strict psalms by singing. Prayers and supplications are another type of genre that is recited in an emotional way.

Another kind is the high craft of *tilāwah,* the recitation of the Qur'an performed by experts who adhere to exacting principles of elocution and inflection and usually perform unaccompanied. Even though Islamic customs don't think about the recitation of the Qur'an and the call to supplication as singing, both are always melodic in nature.

Solid shuddering sounds, melisma (changing the note of a syllable while it is being sung), wavy inflections, prolonged notes, long stops between sentences, glissandos, and a specific nasality are trademark highlights of reciting and singing in the Islamic world. Or, on the other hand, as ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl portrayed it, "*Center Eastern singing is tense-sounding and has a brutal, guttural, nasal tone, with a certain flatness*."[2]

Professor and musicologist Gerhard Kubik believes that many of today's blues singers unconsciously echo these Arabic-Islamic patterns in their music. Kubik writes in "*Africa and the Blues*" that "*the vocal style of many blues singers using melisma, wavy intonation,*

[2] Bruno Nettl, "Music of the Middle East" in Bruno Nettl, ed., Excursions in World Music (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 58.

and so forth is a heritage of that large region of West Africa that had been in contact with the Arabic-Islamic world of the Maghreb since the seventh and eighth centuries."[3]

Obviously, music was among the social trades that occurred between North Africa and the western Sahel, characterized here as the space extending from Senegal/Gambia to northern Nigeria. Music in North Africa was particularly different to the music in the Middle East, having been affected by the native dark populaces living in the southern pieces of the Maghreb and later by non-Muslim survivors of the trans-Saharan slave exchange. Regularly utilized as performers, these subjugated West Africans carried their music and rhythms to North Africa. In western Sahel, particularly in the metropolitan zones, Muslims received, adjusted, and changed the Islamic melodic style. Much cross-treatment happened on the two sides of the desert.

[3] Gerhard Kubik, "Africa and the Blues" (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, c. 1999.

FIGURE 1.1.1, PICTURE OF A WEST AFRICAN "KORA".

In the Muslim areas of West Africa, the lower castes of expert performers connected to courts or affluent families fostered a collection of old tunes, prayer songs, and legends. They sang solo—or some of the time in gatherings—in a declamatory style, with wavy emphases, melisma, murmuring, tremolo or vibrato, and pounding or shaking impacts. This style is extremely old and it is still widely heard today in contemporary music. Proficient

vocalists perform on their own or are joined by artists playing string instruments, like lutes, one-string fiddles, the *kora* (a 21 string harp), and *balafons* (xylophones).

Professor Gerhard Kubik places this model into the bigger setting of music in the Islamic world:

"Stylistically, the music played in the west African savanna hinterland, such as, for example, on certain stringed instruments, especially the long-necked lutes (xalam, garaya, etc.) and one-stringed fiddles (goge, goje, riti, etc.), is characterized by the predominance of pentatonic tuning patterns, the absence of the concept of asymmetric time-line patterns, a relatively simple motional structure lacking complex polyrhythm but using subtle off-beat accents, and a declamatory vocal style with wavy intonation, melisma, raspy voices, heterophony, and so on. Some of these characteristics are, of course, shared with the broader realm of Islamic music."[4]

In any event, when this kind of music includes drums, it is unmistakably different from the music of the African coastal and forest zones. It is portrayed by a solid dependence on drums, ringers, clatters, polyrhythm, and call-and-response, and is found in the southern

[4] Kubik, "*Africa and the Blues"* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 63.

regions of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, and Nigeria, just as West Central Africa from Gabon to Congo and Angola.

FIGURE 1.1.2, PICTURE OF A "*GOGE*" OR "*GOJE*" FROM THE AFRICAN SAVANNAH.

CHAPTER TWO

The Journey of Spiritual Music in the United States.

As Danielle Fossely states in her book "Music On The Move", "*The music of the United States is the music of people in motion*"[5]. People from Africa arrived in North America continuously between 1619 and the 1850's. This influx was mostly the result of the slave trade which was the largest forced migration in history. The economy of the Colonies became largely dependent on the forced labor of the slaves and the social relations created by slavery shaped every aspect of society in the US, including of course, music making. However, the history of African American music is not easy to re-construct. This is mainly due to the fact that none of it was written down until the 1800's so we have had to rely on mostly eye witness accounts from white observers. A somewhat strange but fascinating fact

[5] FOSLER-LUSSIER, DANIELLE. *Music on the Move*. University of Michigan Press, 2020.

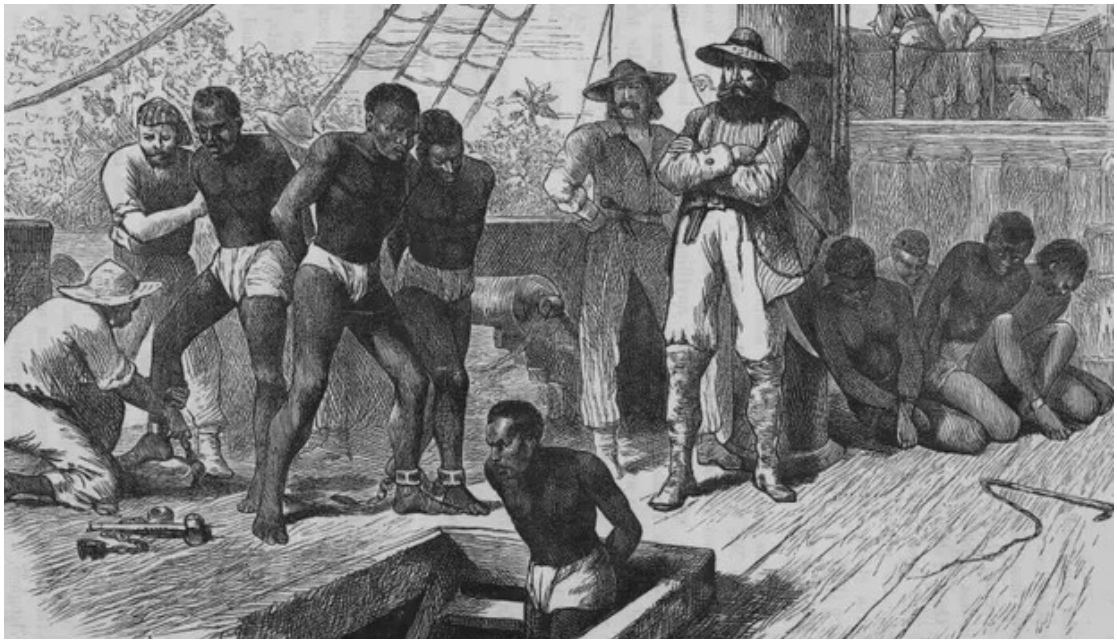

FIGURE 1.2.1, DRAWING DEPICTING A BOAT TRANSPORTING SLAVES FROM AFRICA TO THE NEW CONTINENT.

I learned during the my research, was that slave traders required Africans to bring their musical instruments with them. This was mostly for them to entertain the traders while on slave ships. Once in the United States, Africans continued to make music on both African and European instruments. Some of these instruments were crafted into what we know today as the blues and bluegrass instruments. For example, the banjo was a version of the long necked lutes played on the West Sudan Belt known as the "*Banjar*". One stringed instruments played with a slider against the string, (which gave birth to what we now know as blues slide guitar), were traditional in the music of central Africa. Another kind of instruments is the mouth bow, which is placed or strummed while held against the mouth.

This instrument, played in the Appalachian and Ozark regions of the United States, is part of the musical tradition of Angola, Namibia and southern east Africa and is most likely a predecessor of the blues harmonica. While it is clear that African slaves preserved their musical traditions, it is also true that they initiated new ones. The Blues is a perfect example. Developed in the mid 1800's, early blues music often described hard work and sorrow, but they were also about broken relationships, money problems and other topics. Most of the first Blues Songs are in the first person but not necessarily because the composer is talking about himself necessarily, but because the singer creates a speaking

FIG. 1.2.2, IMAGE OF A "*BANJAR".*

persona and a vivid situation with which the listener can identify.

The poetic form of the blues is a three-line verse; the first two lines have the same words and the third line is a conclusion with new lyrics:

Lord, I'm a hard workin' woman, and I work hard all the time

Lord, I'm a hard workin' woman, and I work hard all the time

But it seem like my baby, Lord, he is dissatisfied.

FIG. 1.2.3 MISSISSIPPI MATILDA POWELL'S "HARD WORKING WOMAN"

This is good example of a "12 bar blues". From various examples that trace back to those days, we can see that this form can be repeated, bent, broken or ignored as the musician wishes. This is what gives this style of music a very improvisatory feel. There is a very interesting aspect of this music which is that often the musical instrument drops out or simply keeps the beat while the singer sings one phrase, and then comes back in with more intensity after the phrase. This kind of musical back and forth is known as a pattern of call

and response. The example above, Mississippi Matilda Powell's "*Hard Workin' Woman*" is a prime example of this and one of the first that we know of.

But African American slaves didn't have much of an audience at first. During the early days of the colonial period and the new republic, the music of the newly arrived slaves was, for the most part, ignored. It was dismissed as savage sounds from primitive people. Thomas Jefferson, in his "Notes on the State of Virginia", writes that African Americans "*are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time, and they have been found capable of imagining a small catch (a type of round or canon at the unison). Whether they will be equal to the composition of a more extensive run of melody, or of complicated harmony, is yet to be proved*". [6] Jefferson was a musician himself as was common for a "gentleman" of the time, and he was an avid collector of musical instruments. He was an advocate for Native American music and, surprisingly, was very quiet when it came to

[6] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Paris: 1782), 257. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale.

African American music. Unfortunately, one can only attribute this silence to the fact that he didn't consider the latter "worthy".

A first hand account of what life, and music making in particular was like, in the plantations, can be found in William Bartram's travel log. In it we can find descriptions of several scenes. He writes: "*The slaves were mounted on the massive timber logs; the regular heavy strokes of their gleaming axes re-echoed in the deep forests; at the same time, contented and joyful, the sooty sons of Africa forgetting their bondage, in chorus sung the virtues and beneficence of their master.*"[7]

In this passage, we can see the description of men and women who seemed "contented and joyful" which can only mean that the strength of their faith in music was enough to suppress or eradicate the immense suffering and rage they must have felt in that situation. This

[7] William Bartram, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee country, the extensive territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy, and the country of the Chactaws* (Philadelphia: James and Johnson, 1792), 310.

speaks volumes about the power and the profundity of the music they were embodying and creating. The same power and profundity that Western classical composers sought to summon in their own works.

The meaning of Blues music; complaint, contentment or surrender?

Frederick Douglass was an escaped slave and abolitionist orator who lived from 1818 to 1895. He published his second biography in 1855 where the following excerpt can be found:

"*Slaves are generally expected to sing as well as to work. A silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers. "Make a noise, make a noise" and "bear a hand", are the words usually addressed to the slaves when there is silence amongst them…it was one means of letting the overseer know where they were, and that they were moving on with the work."* [8]

One can interpret from this passage that a possible incentive for singing was precisely to avoid potential punishment by the overseers. Could this obligation to make sound be

[8] Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom (New York: Miller, Ortun, and Mulligan, 1855), 97.

considered one source for blues music? I think so. There is always a silver lining to be found in excruciating circumstances and the fact that these unfortunate souls were actually forced to “make noise” could have played a crucial role in the birth of the blues.

Another interesting figure form an ethnomusicological point of view was Alan Lomax. He was a musicologist and folklorist who traveled the southern United States in search of rural music to record for the Library of Congress. During his travels, he spoke with and recorded African American artists and prisoners who told him about their life and music. Here is a recount of a conversation he heard between Memphis Slim and Big Bill Broonzy about their opinion of Blues Music:

“The thing about the Blues is,” Big Bill said, his voice ringing out with authority, ”it didn’t start in the North - in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, whatsoever it is- it didn’t start in the East, neither in the North- it started in the South, from what I’m thinking.”

FIG. 1.2.4, IMAGE OF BIG BILL BROONZY

"*And the think that has come to a showdown, that we really want to know why and how come, a man in the South have the blues,* " Bill went on. "*I worked on levee camps, extra gangs, road camps and rock camps and rock quarries and every place, and I hear guys singin' uh-hummmm that, and I want to get the thing plainly that the blues is something that's form the heart- I know that, and whosoever you hear fellow singing the blues- I always believed it was a really heart thing, from his heart, you know, and it was expressing his feeling about how he felt to the people.*" [9]

[9] Alan Lomax, The Land Where the Blues Began (New York: Dell Publishing, 1993), 460-461.

Lomax was able to capture the importance that the blues had for the African American community. It is this importance, a "life or death" importance, that seeps through the music and that made this music survive for so long. Even thought many African songs did disappear, the need to solidify oral tradition and improvisation as the only means for propagating and "recording" this music, strengthened the performers musical abilities and ears and honed their musicianship skills. For the most part, slaves were divided into two different categories depending on their activity. Some would sing religious songs at church while others would sing among their masters family members on special occasions like birthdays or Christmas. When they sang among themselves they would change and modify the songs. Mainly the lyrics would be changed as a form of rejection of white authority but also as a question of faith. The slaves were following the Old Testament instead of the New Testament identifying themselves with the Hebrew people. Moses became one of their symbols and was referred to in religious slave songs [10].

[10] John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980, 50.

The lyrics dealt with characters from the Old Testament (Daniel, Moses, David) who had to overcome great tribulations and with whom the slaves could easily identify. From the New Testament, the slaves most closely identified with Jesus Christ, who they knew would help them "hold on" until they gained their freedom. Although slaves often sang about Heaven, the River Jordan—and the hidden reference to underground railroad destination, the Ohio River—was regularly a subject of their songs.

Since the rhythm—once established—was key to their songs, the singers would add or delete syllables in words to make them fit the song. Pioneers of spiritual art songs often chose to use dialect, the manner slaves pronounced words, in their settings. Some examples are:

Heaven – Heav'n, Heb'n, Heb'm	River Jordan – Riber Jerd'n	mourner – mo'ner
Children – chillun, chil'n,	my – ma, m'	there – dere
for – fer	Morning – mornin'	more – mo'
the – de	religion – 'ligion	going to – gwine
Jubilee – Juberlee	and – 'n', an'	get – git

FIGURE 1.2.5. THE "DIALECT" IN WHICH SLAVES PRONOUNCED WORDS TO FIT THE RHYTHM OF THE SONGS.

They would also sing secular songs, children's songs and lullabies that contained images and metaphors. In many cases, the song would be about the master and/or his family or about the white community as a whole. They would mostly sing these songs after work while dancing and gathering and before returning to work. On special occasions, slaves were allowed to travel to other communities to interact with other slaves. Masters would use these permissions as excuses to show how "well" their slaves were being treated. Little did they know that these larger gatherings helped to gradually solidify a wealth of incredibly powerful music and tradition which would have probably otherwise gone extinct. However, the main topic of slave music was work since it constituted their main activity. Spirituals fall into three basic categories:

- Call and response – A "leader" begins a line, which is then followed by a choral response; often sung to a fast, rhythmic tempo ("*Ain't That Good News," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Go Down, Moses"*)

- Slow and melodic – Songs with sustained, expressive phrasing, generally slower tempo (“*Deep River,” “Balm in Gilead,” “Calvary”)*
- Fast and rhythmic – Songs that often tell a story in a faster, syncopated rhythm (“*Witness,” “Ev’ry Time I Feel the Spirit,” “Elijah Rock,” “Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho”*)

Work and music was actually encouraged by masters to foster productivity. There were some restrictions, however, like the use of percussion instruments such as drums. These were prohibited as they would potentially incite a revolt. The guitar and the banjo (the latter originally brought from Africa and called the *Banjar*) on the other hand were permitted and so it comes as no surprise that most of the blues music from that era is centered around those two instruments with a focus on the guitar. The type of song depended on the activity they were performing. Slaves working on the field had a different approach (and lyrics) to those working on railroads for instance. More importance was given to rhythm than to any other musical aspect (including lyrics). Through rhythm, slaves would pace their movement, collectively. This rhythm was used to hold coordinate movements and thus, be

more efficient. Much like the way the military uses songs and rhythms to promote team spirit.

The gradual rise of secular songs and the birth of the Blues.

After the Civil War, the United States entered the phase of urbanization, especially in the North. Work shifted from fields to factories and therefore, the religious songs about the harsh agricultural work was no longer as relevant. Simultaneously, there was another factor which was starting to influence music more and more; the mixture of white and African American music. Even though White music had already began to be influenced by African American style, the White influence on the latter is evident as we will see with Blues music. Actually, there was a mixture even within African American styles. Charles Kiel, in his "Urban Blues" writes; "The African American tradition represents not only a variety of mixtures between the European and African elements but a series of blending within itself"[11] It is well known that Blues music took many elements of Gospel (from the lyrics and the singers mostly) as a lot of the first blues musicians had their first contact with music

[11] Charles Kiel, Urban Blues (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 33.

through church. Here we see a sort of distancing from slavery in the sense that the music the slaves used to sing to get relief, through God, from the figure of the master, was not what African Americans wanted to listen to at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. The well known Big Bill Broonzy exemplifies this evolution. In Big Bill Blues, for instance, he tells of a time when people were bothered by his music: *"This ain't slavery no more, ' I was told, ' so why don't you learn to play something else? The way you play and sing about mules, cotton, corn, levee camps and gang songs. Them days, Big Bill, is gone for ever."*

Lord, my hair's a-rising, my flesh begins to crawl

Aw, my hair's a-rising, my flesh begin to crawl

I had a dream last night baby, another mule in my doggone stall

Now, there's some people said the Big Bill blues ain't bad

Now, some people said the Big Bill blues ain't bad

Lord, it must not have been them Big Bill blues they had

Lord, I wonder what's the matter, papa Bill can't get no mail

Lord, wonder what's the matter now, papa Bill can't get no mail

Lord, the post office must be on fire, the mailman must undoubtedly be in jail

I can't be a wagon, since you ain't gonna be a mule

Mmm, can't be a wagon mama, since you ain't gonna be a mule

I ain't gonna fix up your black tradition, I ain't gonna be your doggone fool "

FIG. 1.2.6, LYRICS TO "BIG BILL BLUES" BY BIG BILL BROONZY.

CHAPTER THREE

The Most Notable Uses of Spiritual Hymns in Western Classical Music.

Spirituality can mean many different things to many different people. Nevertheless, the definition has always something to do with some form of belief (or even faith) in a "higher" principle. I believe this was the case for J.S. Bach, whose music is the result of one of the highest and most well known integrations of spiritual hymns and strict western composition. Most of Bach's well known and highly respected masterpieces, (like the passions, cantatas and b minor mass), are very much infused with spiritual found objects. Of these works, a good example is the spiritual hymn "*O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*" which is the most widely used chorale (a short musicalization of a lutheran hymn) in the *St. Matthew Passion.*

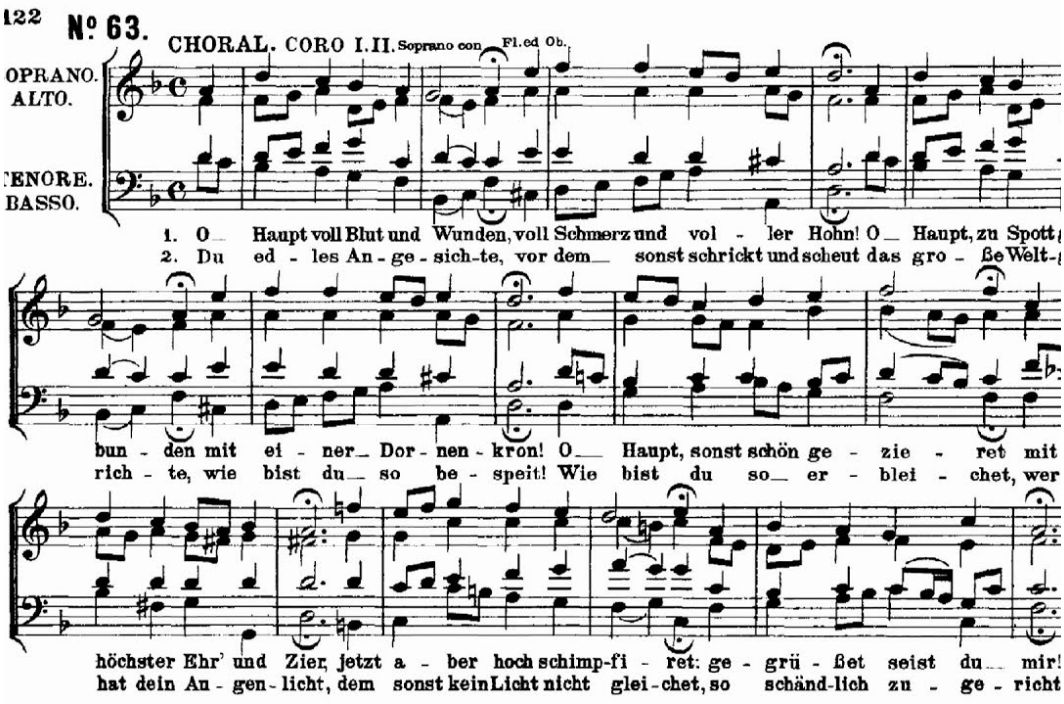

FIGURE 1.3.1, J.S. BACH *"O HAUPT VOLL BLUT UND WUNDEN"* CHORALE HARMONIZATION.

But to better understand the wide use of this and other spiritual hymns as a basis for such an important work, maybe it's relevant to take a step back and ponder on the very reason for using ancient found objects steeped in spirituality in the first place. Could it be that old sacred texts are more linked to a higher divinity? This would maybe infuse the work with a more powerful ethos in the mind of the composer. Does the ancient script, as in the case of Bach's use of the Lutheran hymn, validate and elevate the work? Personally, I believe it's a bit of both. Bach, by harmonizing and orchestrating these well-known hymns was paying

homage to a tradition he respected and admired while at the same time laying a strong foundation for his own work. It could be said that basing his work on an ancient hymn was a gesture of humility and reverence for a human work which was somehow divinely inspired. The same reasons could potentially apply to other well known, yet utterly different uses of hymns in western music. To further analyze the use of spiritual music in a western classical music context, we can compare two very different approaches; the one used by Dvorak in *Symphony of a New World* and the other by Tippett in his oratorio *A Child of Our Time*" In Dvorak's case, he was more concerned with the "spirit" of these melodies as inspiration for the new work:

". . . inspiration for truly national music might be derived from the Negro melodies or Indian chants. I was led to take this view partly by the fact that the so-called plantation songs are indeed the most striking and appealing melodies that have yet been found on this side of the water, but largely by the observation that this seems to be recognized, though often unconsciously, by most Americans. . . . The most potent as well as most beautiful among them, according to my estimation, are certain of the so-called plantation melodies

and slave songs, all of which are distinguished by unusual and subtle harmonies, the like of which I have found in no other songs but those of old Scotland and Ireland".

He listened to what the spirituals were evoking, in this particular case the very well known "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," and in what way and then wrote music based on that aesthetic or "Spirit".

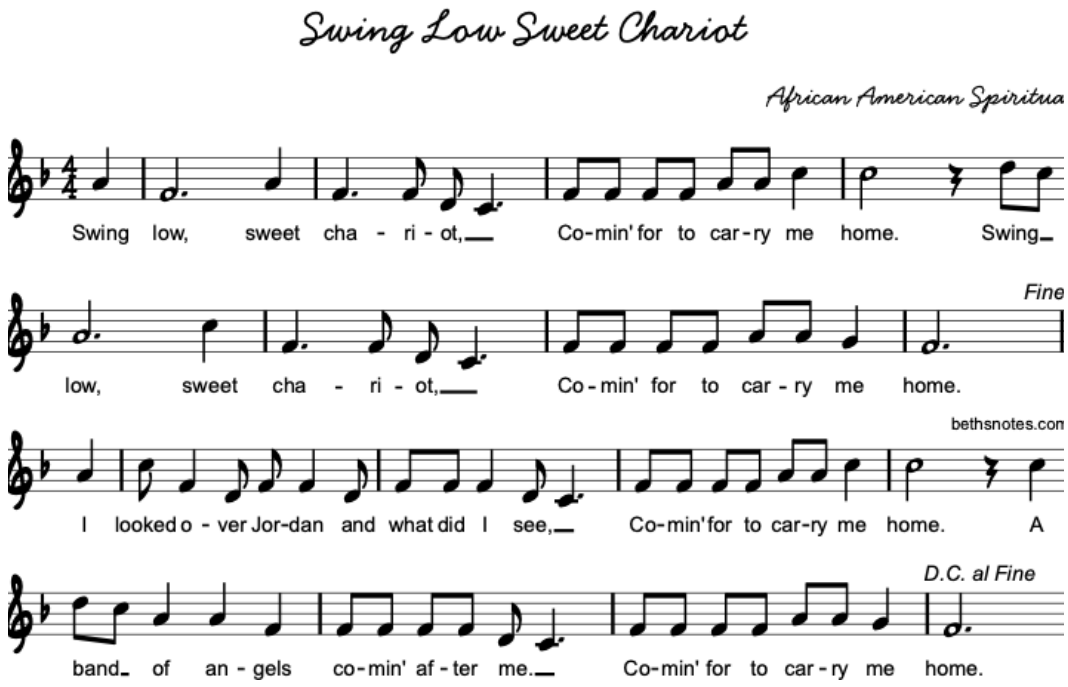

FIGURE 1.3.2, MUSIC TO *"SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT"*.

Tippett, on the other hand, made veritable *arrangements* of the existing melodies. He presented them in such a way that the original melody and harmony were clearly distinguishable but nevertheless added his own interpretation in the form of an arrangement.

Bach's way of adapting lutheran hymns for his many cantatas and other works was not all that different. He took the original hymn melody and used it as the c*antus firmus* to which he would add his own harmonizations or "arrangements". However, in Bach's case, he also incorporated the "Dvorak element" of composing the work in the sprit of the original hymn. The music that Bach composed was very much about the feelings evoked by the original text and music and not a mere arrangement of them. In the case of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* we encounter a different approach altogether. Tippett wished to punctuate his work with an equivalent to the congregation chorales which recur in Bach's Passions but instead of using lutheran hymns he chose five well known African American Spirituals; *"*Steal Away", "Nobody Knows the Trouble I see, Lord", "Go Down Moses," O, By and By" and "Deep River".

The reason for this innovation, was, in Tippett's opinion, because these songs reflect the summary of the five sections of the piece perfectly. Kenneth Gloag writes; "*As well as constructing the pathway through the dramatic narrative, the five spirituals also combine to*

provide moments of focus and repose ... giving shape to both the musical and literary dimensions of the work". Tippett explains his decision to use these spirituals as follows : "*At the phrase "A trumpet sounds within-a my soul" I was blessed with an immediate intuition that I was being moved by this phrase in some way beyond what this musical phrase warranted. That I could test in performance the fact that the Negro spiritual presented no expressional barriers anywhere in Europe. Nor, maybe, anywhere in the world*." (Poland, 1994). In summary, the difference in approach between Dvorak, Bach and Tippett are in the way the original source,(in all three cases a Spiritual hymn), is embedded in the new work. The first is more "in spirit", while the second is a lot more direct.

To impose value judgements on these two vastly distinct approaches to making music inspired by spirituals is useless. There is already the element of subjectivity in art that makes the right or wrong dichotomy trivial. In my opinion, which is the only valid way of criticizing such artistic expression, it is more valuable to really adopt and internalize a spiritual music composition to the point where the composer is able to write new music that

is imbued with its original magic. This is a very difficult thing to achieve and we are faced with the problem of taking a work of art that is already powerful, heartfelt and real (as most of these melodies and texts have survived hundreds of years), and make it, in some way, our own. In other words, to avert the risk of making an already tried and true composition worse, we take its "spirit" and, in our own unique way, present it to the world.

What J.S. Bach did with his cantatas which were all based on old lutheran hymns, is in some ways more difficult than to write a new composition "in the spirit" of the original work. Take the cantata BWV 93 "*Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten*". The original hymn was composed by Georg Neumark in 1641 and Bach takes this simple but beautiful melody and re-works it into an even more astonishing adaptation of the original. He harmonizes, (adds chords to the melody), transposes, (presents the melody in different keys), augments and diminishes, (makes the melody rhythmically longer and/or shorter), and inverts the original melody, (turns the intervals upside down), in such a tasteful, profound way while still retaining the "spirit" of the lutheran text. This is a much more difficult achievement

that takes a great deal of compositional expertise and sophistication to properly execute. In short, Bach took an already perfectly beautiful and powerful song and, well, made it better. Not everyone can do this. It is in some ways easier to internalize the original work so much that we are able to re-express it (as opposed to re-writing it) using our own language.

In Mozart's case, he was brought up in a very strict Catholic family. Hi father was a man of faith and made sure Mozart was indoctrinated accordingly. However, Mozart's relationship with the church was ambivalent. His numerous sacred works, with few exceptions, were mandatory tasks while he was employed by the Archbishop of Salzburg. Mozart's letters do not, as a rule, provide any reliable information about his convictions; all too often, he disguised his true convictions in order to please his father. Mozart's music, however, occasionally opens up a deeper dimension and lets us feel genuine "traces of transcendence" when he expresses his true self in his music. Even his ambivalent attitude towards death is reconciled in his music. These "traces of transcendence" were enough to evoke that divine quality that only spiritual inspiration can provide and resulted in works of sublime emotional and heavenly glow like the *Ave Verum Corpus*, the *Solemn Vespers* and, of

course, the *Requiem*. His approach was more of a distant one where he drew inspiration from these transcendent moments instead of a previously existing piece of music or literature.

The story of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* is an interesting one because it deals with the problem of arrangement and adaptation of spiritual music. The opera is based upon the novel *Porgy* by DuBose Heyward. Published in 1925, the novel was first adapted for the stage in 1927 by the author's wife, Dorothy Heyward. The play, in turn, inspired George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, which he called "*an American folk opera*." DuBose Heyward collaborated with Ira Gershwin to craft the libretto for *Porgy and Bess*, even spending time together in Charleston, South Carolina, to research African American communities and their music. The opera is set in Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1920s, and it portrays a group of African Americans and their loves, losses, and challenges. The chorus plays a particularly important role in this opera, responding to and commenting on the action through song. This is a historically accurate depiction of the music of the time as an homage to the "call

and response" tradition of spiritual music. A vital aspect of Gershwin's music is its usage of styles borrowed from the African American spiritual which he upholds as a highly esteemed musical form. His use of this music is a true homage to the African American heritage and has been used as a means of demonstrating black American cultural achievement as well as responding to the long history of racial oppression in America.

While composing *Porgy and Bess*, George Gershwin spent five weeks in the Sea Islands of South Carolina, where he learned about the local *Gullah* culture, attended prayer meetings, and studied the inhabitants' performance of spirituals.

FIGURE 1.3.3. TRADITIONAL GULLAH CHOIR FROM THE SEA ISLANDS OF SOUTH CAROLINA.

A great example of Gershwin's brilliant use of African American traditional music is the aria "Lay Down Body". In it, each line of the text alternates between a solo singer and the full group, an excellent example of "call and response" structure. The text for the full group remains the same throughout ("*Lay down a little while*"). The singers employ many blue notes (on the third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees; note the particularly expressive bending on the fifth scale degree), but the range is narrow, and all pitches in the melody are drawn from a small collection of notes. The performers keep time by stomping along to the beat. Although simple, the text expresses a desire for rest for a body worn down by hardship.

Another great example is "Oh Doctor Jesus" where the solo voice proceeds in a rhythmically free, speech-like style, accompanied only by a sustained chord. At the ends of Serena's phrases, other voices enter in a call and response style. Their lines repeat some melodic material and also include spoken interjections. The melody uses a number of blue notes (on the third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees); the singer also uses additional bending

FIGURE 1.3.4 GEORGE GERSHWIN WITH THE CAST OF PORGY AND BESS.

of pitch for expressive purposes. The text is a prayerful entreaty for healing and delivery from hardship.

Another great example of use of folklore in western concert music, is Luciano Berio's song cycle *Folk Songs*. Composed in 1964, it consists of arrangements of folk music from various countries and other songs. As mentioned earlier, there are several ways in which a composer can "embed" folk and spiritual found objects in his or her own way. In this piece,

we see an example of a mix between arrangement and true re-composition. In Berio's own words :

"*I have given the songs a new rhythmic and harmonic interpretation: in a way, I have recomposed them. The instrumental part has an important function: it is meant to underline and comment on the expressive and cultural roots of each song. Such roots signify not only the ethnic origins of the songs but also the history of the authentic uses that have been made of them".*

Berio goes on to address the issue of authenticity when melding together these two worlds by stating:

"I have a utopian dream, though I know it cannot be realized: I would like to create a unity between folk music and our music — a real, perceptible, understandable conduit between ancient, popular music-making which is so close to everyday work and music."

The problem of "authenticity" in contemporary music

When dealing with the way in which any composer "uses" music or text from the past, we encounter the problem of authenticity. How true to the source is the music? Why does this even matter? Does a "purer" approach to the material make the music more "authentic"? All

these questions arise when we look for ways to incorporate ancient folklore into new modern compositions. Like Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro writes in her wonderful article on authenticity[12] ;

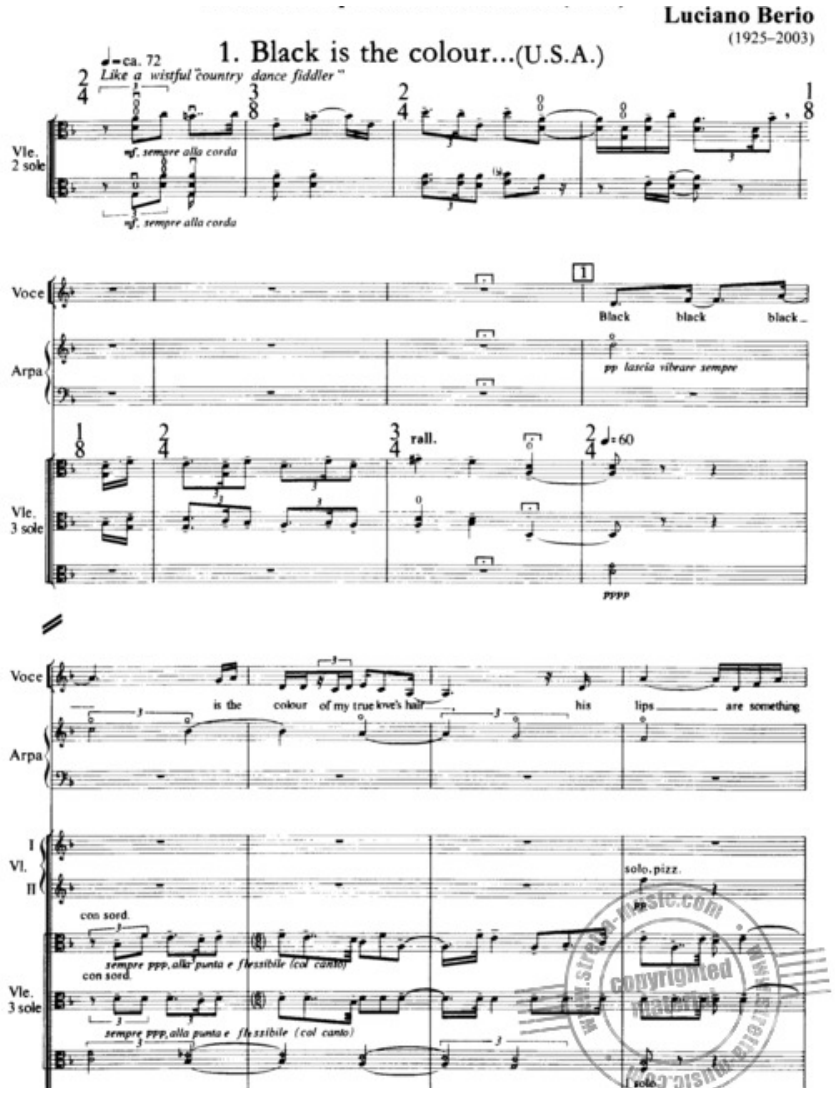

FIGURE 1.3.5, LUCIANO BERIO'S "BLACK IS THE COLOR" FORM HIS "FOLK SONGS"

[12] Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, and Omri Ruah Midbar. "Outdoing Authenticity: Three Postmodern Models of Adapting Folkloric Materials in Current Spiritual Music." *Journal of Folklore Research* 54, no. 3 (2017)

In the postmodern condition, individuals are flooded with images, symbols, and content from various traditions and cultural contexts. How does tradition change in its postmodern uses? How does folklore fill the contemporary need for "authenticity"? This article presents three models of adapting folkloric materials, reflecting different ways of coping with issues such as identity, community, tradition, multiculturalism, and the desire to fill some of the emptiness experienced by individuals in the complex cultural context of the postmodern condition characterizing contemporary Western culture. The first model seeks to experience authenticity through a restoration of, or return to, "tradition." The second one, shaped in the context of World Music, springs from a spirituality that yearns for an "authentic" experience as manifested through a tradition that belongs to the culture of the Other. The third model, which we term "remix spirituality," seeks to generate an ecstatic experience in an ultra-postmodern manner.

A good method of understanding how the modern world has embraced spirituality is to study the New Age movement. In her article, Shapiro notes how spirituality has made a return to "center stage" because it emphasizes self-actualization as well as criticism of established institutions like mainstream religious traditions. As we will see in the case studies, these are all traits of the contemporary music composed that resulted form the marriage of folk spirituality and western musical tradition. She writes; *"The eclectic*

character of contemporary spirituality reflects the postmodern superficial-eclectic spirit in which individuals 'use, recycle, combine and adapt existing religious ideas and practices' and create private religions focused on the Self, known as Self Religions".

I believe the three models described in her article, are a great way of categorizing the different approaches used to adopt music and text of the past. In the following case studies, I exemplify three very different approached to dealing with the issue of authenticity and how to present spiritual music and text in a modern and westernized way.

Part 2 - The Music Case Studies

CHAPTER ONE

Michael Tippett's "A Child of Our Time"

Michael Tippett is considered one of the most important British composers of the 20th century along with Benjamin Britten. His ability grew gradually as he dismissed most of his early works and didn't publish anything until his 30's. Up until the mid-to-late 1950s, his music was melodious in character. He then switched to a more astringent and avant-garde style. New influences, including those of jazz and blues after his first visit to America in 1965, turned out to be progressively clear in his pieces. Among these, stands *A Child of Our Time* which is, without a doubt, his most well known work.

Before the outbreak of the second world war, Tippett's compositional endeavors were overpowered by personal turmoil. Filled with uncertainty and disarray about his homosexuality and his value as an artist, he found the answer in a course of Jungian

psychology with the psychotherapist John Layard. Through a lengthy course of treatment, Layard gave Tippett a way to dissect and decipher his fantasies. Tippett's biographer Ian Kemp depicts this experience as "*the significant defining moment in [his] life*"13, both sincerely and imaginatively. His specific revelation from dream examination was "*the Jungian 'shadow' and 'light' in the singular mind ... the requirement for the person to acknowledge his separated nature and benefit from its clashing demands*"[14]. This carried him to terms with his homosexuality and he partook in a few same-sex encounters. This was clearly a turning point in his artistic output and may have influenced his decision to investigate and immerse himself in spiritual music. There are countless examples of artists who, in order to find either an alternative answer to their suffering or find repose, turn to spirituality. As a result, the work of art is a sort of offering to a higher being or energy which helps bring peace and order to an otherwise chaotic and meaningless existence.

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[13] Kemp, Ian. 1984. Tippett, the composer and his music. London: Eulenburg Books.

[14] Kemp, Ian. Pp. 36-37

This oratorio is no exception. The catalyst for this work was the murder of a German diplomat by a 17-year-old Jewish refugee in Paris. This murder triggered *Kristallnacht* (Crystal Night), a coordinated attack on Jews and their property throughout Nazi Germany on 9–10 November 1938.

Having found his subject, Tippett approached none other than T. S. Eliot, whom he had met recently through a mutual friend to see if he would be interested in writing the libretto. Musicologists say that, given Eliot's anti-semitism, he would have been the wrong choice but Tippett's admiration for Eliot, whom he called his "*spiritual and artistic mentor*", felt that his contribution to the work would be crucial. Eliot replied that he would consider it if Tippett provided him with a "precise scheme of musical sections and an exact indication of the numbers and kinds of words for each stage". When Tippett produced his detailed draft, Eliot asked Tippett to write his own libretto, stating that his poetry would either distract attention from the music, or be "*swallowed up by it*".Tippett always wrote his own libretti after this.

This work epitomizes Tippett's melodic style, a style born out of his practical knowledge gained from his earlier years as choir director at Morley College where he worked mostly with amateur singers. He was very attracted to folk and traditional music; in this particular work, he chose African American spirituals, using well knows "tunes" as the chorale breaks for the ensemble in the same way Bach used Lutheran chorales - which

everybody in attendance knew - as moments of reflection and contemplation on the action that has just taken place.

He delighted in traditional musical techniques in this work. All through *A Child of Our Time*, one can hear conventional counterpoint and imitative vocal writing, triadic harmonies, and repetition. He also utilizes traditional oratorio and drama techniques,

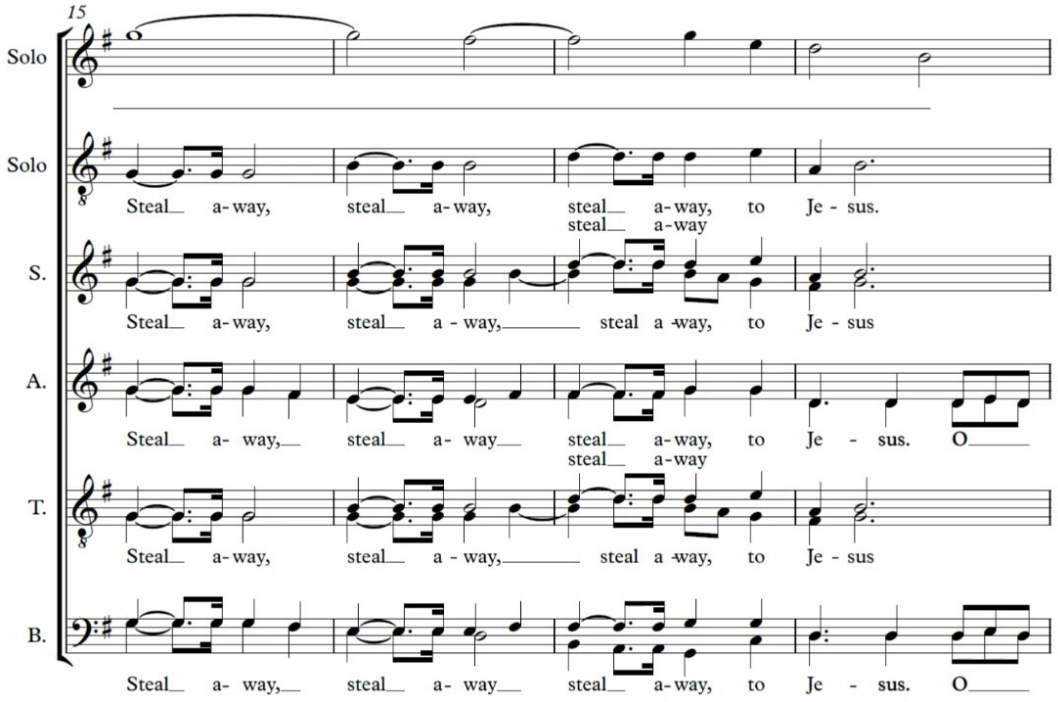

FIGURE 2.1.1, TIPPETT'S ARRANGEMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL "STEAL AWAY"

including the recitatives, the aria, ensembles including duets and trios, as well as the constant presence of the orchestra throughout the whole work.

A Child of Our Time is presented in three sections, each part relating to a specific segment of the news story headline which brought forth the oratorio.Tippett utilized both Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's Passions as formal models: he subbed Negro spirituals for what might have been the conventional Lutheran chorales in a Bach work, for instance. As indicated by Tippett himself, these spirituals, (which Tippett changed to be more pleasingly static than the first spirituals), fill in as snapshots of rest and reflection between different segments in the oratorio.

According to Tippett, he borrowed the three-section large scale design of Handel's *Messiah* as a model for his oratorio: "*Part I deals with the general state of oppression our time; Part II presents… the story of a young man's attempt to seek justice… and the catastrophic consequences; while Part III considers the moral to be drawn, if any.*"

Without a doubt, the initial segment readies the scene, as the "darkness" is uncovered. Evil has grasped the land ("massacres in the East, lynchings in the West," among the numerous disasters), and the tenor soloist (who represents the Jewish kid) is gloomy: "how can I grow to a man's stature?". The first segment closes with the spiritual "Take Away to Jesus*",* (This spiritual is also a reference to stealing away, as in escaping from captivity.)

The persecutors and abused are trapped in a whirlpool of disdain, into which the second segment of the oratorio plunges head-first. The substitute - the offspring within recent memory - is distinguished. By utilizing the African American spiritual as his inspiration for the music, and the European Jew as his motivation for the lyrics, Tippett has to make sure he exemplified "scapegoatism" in two of its most deplorable appearances in history.

In the wake of arriving at the limit, the little fellow (the tenor) snaps and kills his "dull sibling": "*his other self ascents in him, satanic and ruinous. He shoots the authority…* " The subsequent segment closes with the theme reviewing the narrative of the Israelites' subjugation in Egypt ("Go Down, Moses″), a song which represented the comparative destiny of African Americans.

In the last segment, Tippett endeavors to figure out the appalling savagery, the affliction, and the hardship that has recently happened. The writer's message is clear: recrimination and retribution are not the appropriate response. As indicated by Tippett, we should initially look for empathy for our kindred people and figure out how to embrace even the obscurity that lies on pause inside us all of us.

So what was behind Tippett’s use of spiritual music in a more modern setting? Was he trying to evoke a supernatural feeling in the listener? Was he trying to re-create a modern

day oratorio in the style of Bach and/or Handel? Was he appropriating the spiritual "*Zeitgeist*" of the African American tradition to add emotive power to his work? All of these possibilities are worthy of study, but the bottom line is that in using the exact spiritual songs in their original form (they were arranged and orchestrated by Tippett but were otherwise performed in their original versions), I believe Tippett inadvertently created a dualism within his piece. This dualism ends up blurring the overall message he is trying to convey by creating an imbalance between the incredible power of the spiritual songs in contrast with his own original composition. In my opinion, the work would've been stronger if Tippett had found a way to convey the power of the spiritual in his own way by drawing from his own inspiration.

CHAPTER TWO

Ian Krouse's *An Armenian Requiem*

This monumental work was written to mark the centenary of the Armenian genocide of 1915. *An Armenian Requiem* is a large-scale sacred work whose structure is based around the liturgical chants of the requiem services of the traditional Armenian Mass. The fact that it is not based on the model of the Latin Mass is already a point of departure from the traditional form. Instead, much like Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, Ian Krouse uses poems as interludes, and his work –" *a poignant meditation on loss couched in a marriage of Western and Armenian forms – offers both conciliation and hope.*"[15]

The work is divided into fifteen sections, (or movements), arranged in two parts. Part 1 begins with a prelude followed by the formal strength of Creation. Then we get a bitter lullaby entitled "Naze's Lullaby". From listening to this soulful and yearning song, we can immediately begin to draw a parallel between this piece and the African American Spirituals. I would go as far as to say that this is spiritual song or lament which uses traditional folk instruments giving it an even more poignant geographical and historical

[15] Lawrence Vittes, Gramophone Magazine review, July 2019.

undertone. Following this lullaby, Krouse gives us a very beautiful choral work with sparse instrumentation which also sounds very much like a spiritual melody. In fact, the chorus is singing about the heavenly "*Creator of All Beings*". This religious invocation is reminiscent of both Bach's treatment of the lutheran chorals and also the interweaving of the New Testament material in old Negro Spirituals.

The second part opens with a heartfelt aria with text from the Book of Lamentations featuring chromatic but also pentatonic writing very much in the style of the traditional spiritual harmonic and melodic language. This opening, with some slight changes and with an English text, could have very well fit into the African American spiritual repertoire. This great movement is followed by eight short tracks of a gentler, more conciliatory nature; the last, Krouse's response to Daniel Varoujan's '*Blessing of the Land*', has a shining *Mahleresque* quality.

An interesting parallel that could be drawn between this work and the African American spiritual tradition, is the fact that it rebels against a tyrannical dictatorship. During the 20th century, musical practices with any religious connotations were forbidden in Armenia by the communist Soviet Union. The fact that this is a "Requiem" could be seen as a political statement against oppression and tyranny much like the diaspora faced in the southern United States up to fairly recently. Furthermore, this requiem was also premiered on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide as a testament of the atrocities endured the Armenian People. This kind of gesture raises

FIGURE 2.2.1 PAINTING OF "KOMITAS" COMPOSING AT THE PIANO.

awareness about the atrocities that human beings are capable of not only enduring but also overcoming and coming out stronger and wiser on the "other side". We could say that this work also embodies the human "spirit" present in all works that seek to pay homage to the fortitude and resilient nature of humanity. Conductor and arts educator Vatsche Barsoumian writes;

" *The overall structure seeks to marry the religious, ritual and spiritual component of a requiem with a depiction of the story, spirit and hope of the Armenian people.It was a personal goal to frame a requiem that does not dwell on mourning, nor call for acts of vengeance. Rather, it is an appeal to the Creator and the listener to renew their faith in goodness, to rise above vindictiveness and aspire towards universal brotherhood"*.

I believe this statement sums up the true scope of spiritual music. This “rising above” the hatred and suffering is the true goal and inspiration for all spiritual music regardless of its origin.

This requiem exemplifies a trait that is common to the use of spiritual music in western classical structures; the elongation and augmentation of otherwise more succinct music that occupies minimal space. This “grand expressiveness” is attributed to much larger scale musical forms such as oratorios, symphonies and, of course, requiems. In *An Armenian Requiem,* Krouse is able to blend this short chant tradition (much like the folk music of Komitas), and expand it with the use of traditional western forms such as passacaglias, fugues and ternary forms.

In the movement “We Priests and People” we can hear a plain chant that is essentially the same format as a traditional African American spiritual chant. We can think of “Deep River” or even “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child”, and compare it to the heartfelt and quite simple melody (consisting mostly of the first tetrachord of a major scale) which comprises Krouse’s piece. The difference is that, in the latter, Krouse incorporates slightly dissonant pitches (like the flat 6th degree) in the choir accompaniment to give it a darker and more middle eastern sonic quality. This contrast with the simple melodic theme is what gives this piece its unique character. We also encounter the “call and response” quality found in spiritual music of the South.

6. QAHANAYQ

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD (We Priests and People)

St. Nerces Shnorhali (1102-1173)

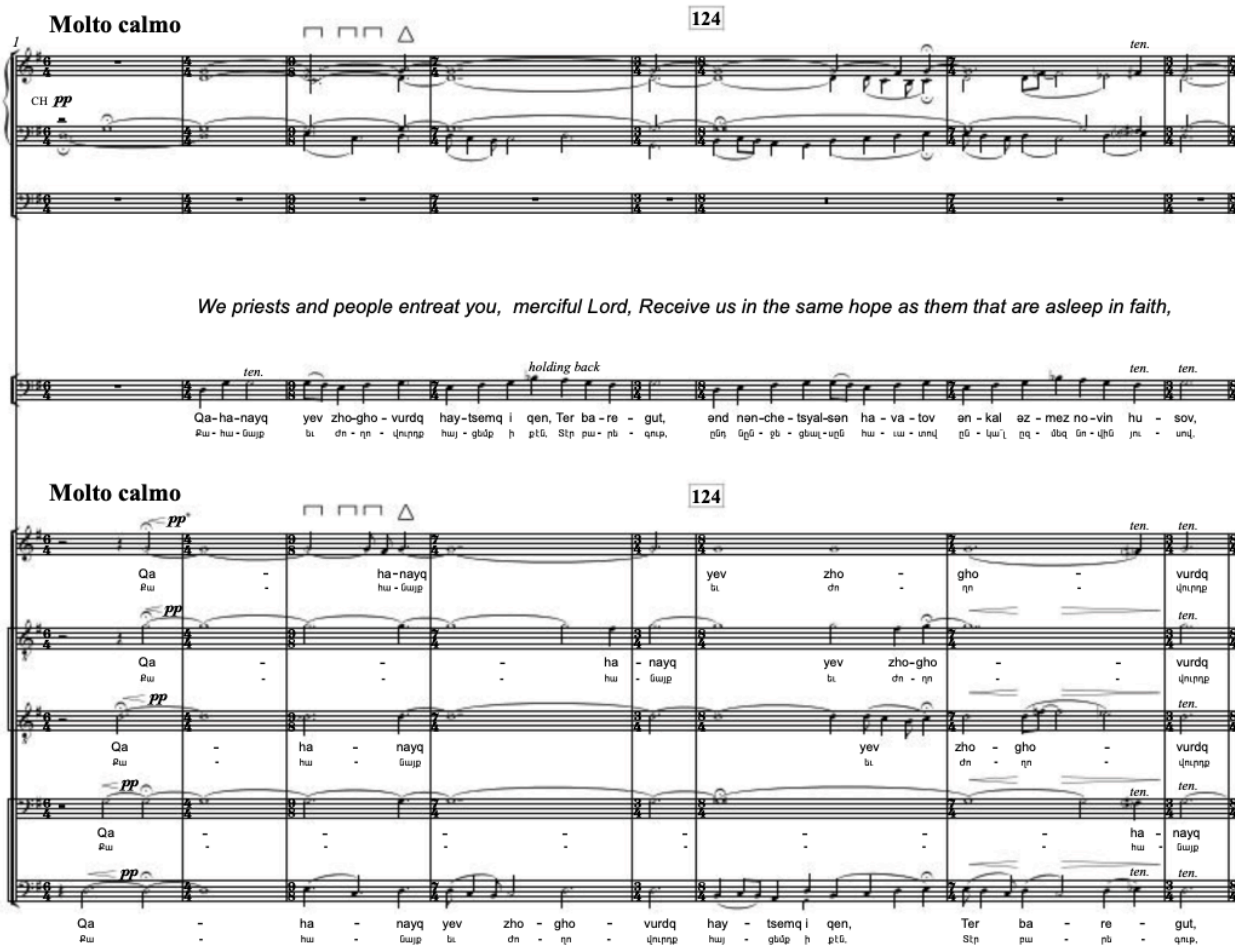

FIGURE 2.2.2, IAN KROUSE'S "*WE PRIESTS AND PEOPLE*" FROM "*AN ARMENIAN REQUIEM*".

CHAPTER THREE

Richard Danielpour's "A Woman's Life"

A song cycle dedicated to Angela Brown, A Woman's Life was originally written for soprano and orchestra and was later reduced for soprano and piano. The cycle tracks the life of a woman from childhood to old age and is set to poetry by Dr. Maya Angelou. The composition together with the poetry, create a vibrantly sensual and lucid narrative. The voice of a little girl opens the piece which then gradually guides the listener through an exploration of themes associated with adolescent girls and how they mature into a woman who explores her cultural identity and her "role" in society. In the end, we see a mature woman who has lived a fulfilling life full of love and also loss. The piece flows seamlessly from one stage of the woman's life to another and is a thorough depiction of the different stages a woman goes through and their own unique obstacles. Angela Brown, for whom the work was created, stated that this is not necessarily a portrait of a single character, but a work that captures the different phases in the cycle of womanhood and may represent all women. She goes on to state that in her performances of the work, she seeks to represent different female characters, each at a different stage of life.[16]

[16] Angela Brown, Telephone interview by Carline Waugh, April 15, 2015

The choice made by Danielpour to set Dr. Angelou's text, is already in some ways a direct nod to the spiritual tradition of the South. Take for instance the very opening text "*Little Girl Speakings"*:

Ain't nobody better'n my Daddy

You keep yo' quauter,

I ain't yo' daughter,

Ain't nobody better'n my Daddy.

Ain't nothing prettier'n my dollie,

Heard what I said,

Don't pat her head,

Ain't nothing prettier'n my dollie.

No lady cookinger than my Mommy,

Smell that pie,

See I don't lie,

No lady cookinger than my Mommy.

*quauter - a quarter of a dollar.

*cookinger - a good cook.

We can appreciate the innocence of the girl by the words she uses (and invents) and we can also infer that this girl comes form a rural setting. Much like in our analysis of blues structure and form, we can appreciate how Danielpour uses a 12 bar introduction which consists of slowly ascending and descending chord progression creating a dream like atmosphere. When the soprano enters, it is marked "*with the simplicity of a child*" and the melody spells out a G major pentatonic which adds to the simple child like blues tune that a child of that circumstance may have very well improvised on the spot.

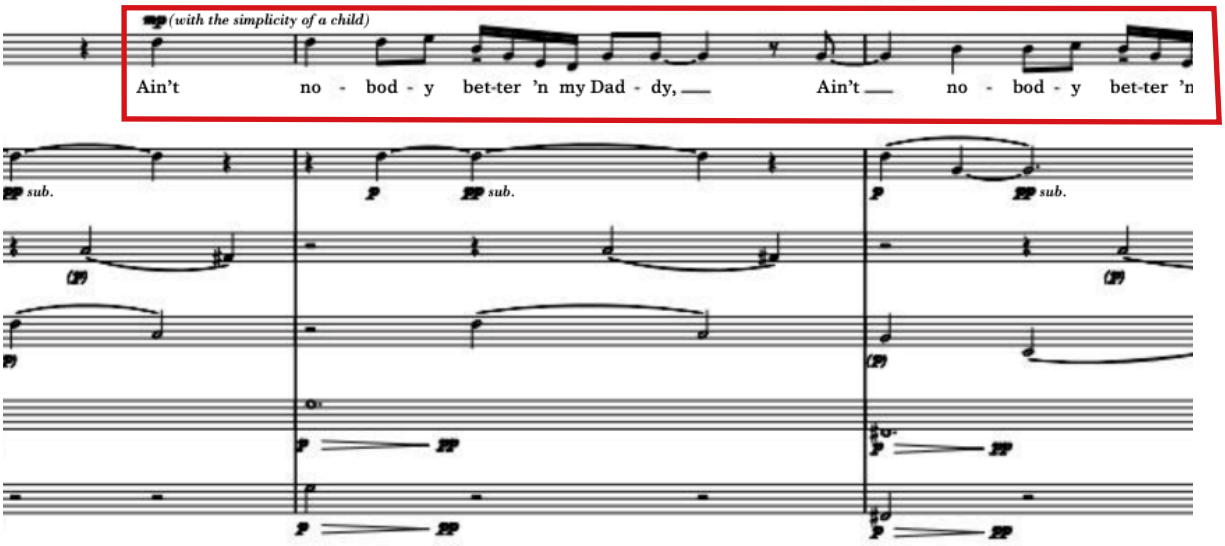

FIGURE 2.3.1 OPENING MELODY OF "A WOMAN'S LIFE" OUTLINING A G MAJOR PENTATONIC SCALE.

In the second movement, Danielpour introduces melodic syncopation and a sort of polyrhythmic feel. This is a similar type of "sophistication" that we encountered in Krouse's

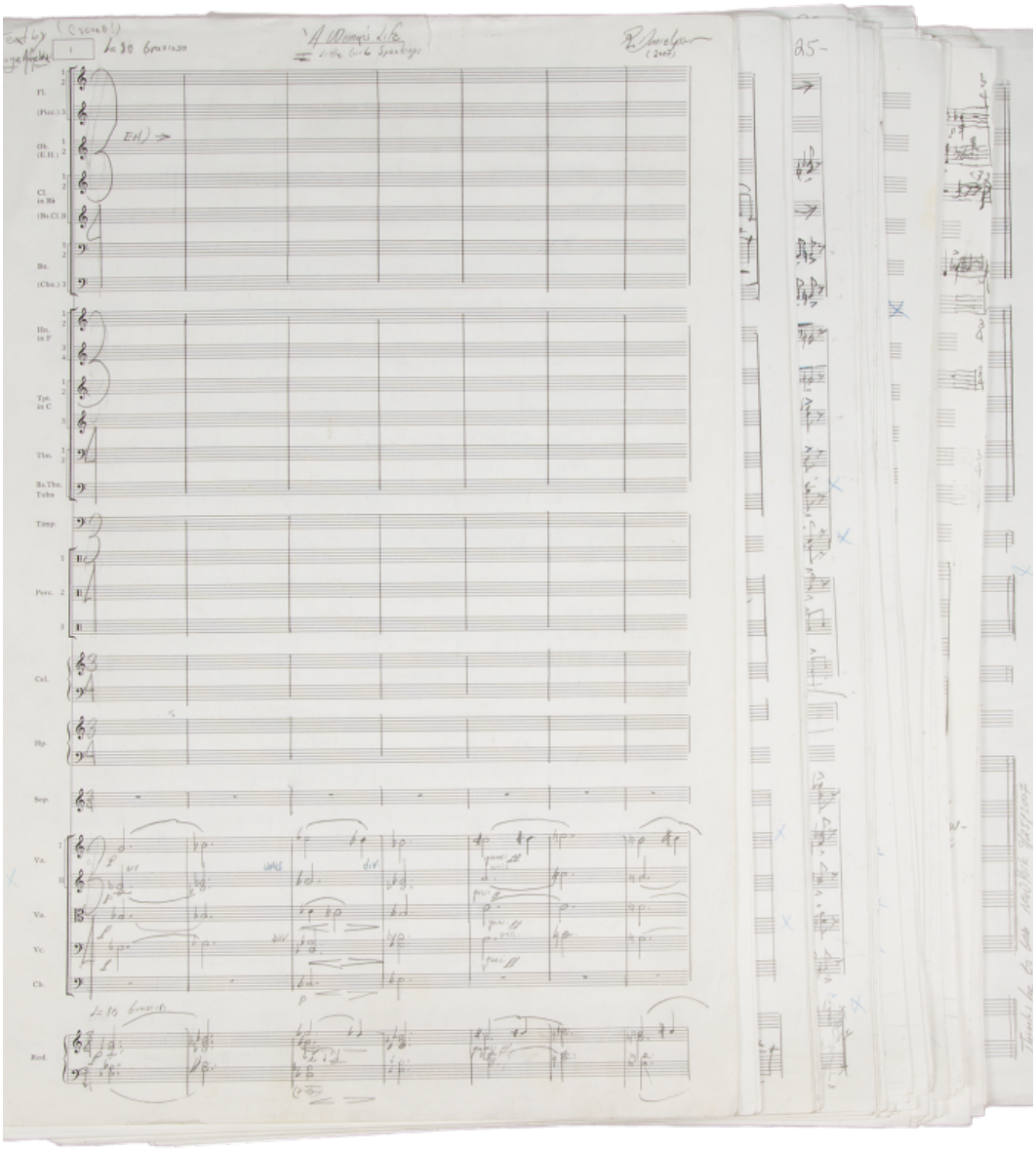

FIGURE 2.3.2, MANUSCRIPT OF DANIELPOUR'S "A WOMAN'S LIFE"

requiem which is one of the ways in which modern music "enlarges" and enhances what would otherwise be a simple folk spiritual "tune".

“They Went Home”, the third movement, opens with harmony reminiscent of Gershwin or Joplin but Danielpour “modernizes” it by adding some interesting jazzy chord tensions like 11th’s and 13th’s. He brilliantly is able to keep the old spiritual feel while framing it in a more contemporary harmonic language.

The fourth movement “Come be my Baby” is Danielpour’s way of depicting a “swing” piece within his own musical vision. The influence of African American music is probably most apparent in this movement. The orchestration, along with some rhythmic displacement, adds interest and, again, modernizes this wonderfully light and somewhat humorous movement.

“Let’s Majeste”, the fifth movement is the least “spiritual like” of all movements and is a true example of the composers more usual harmonic and melodic writing. The following “ My life has turned to Blue” however, has a very interesting arc form where the beginning is very sparse and slowly builds up to a type of “new blues” section which ends the movement. This last section plays with the pentatonic scale, (and especially the “blue note”) by adding some chromatic moments which turn it into an octatonic and diminished scales briefly before returning to the blues.

In the final movement of the cycle, “Many and More”, the woman expresses her longing for intimacy and companionship. Essentially, the woman acknowledges that while many can offer intimacy, few will offer a lasting companionship and only one can offer a deep love that she longs for. With the use of ascending and descending scalar motion, Danielpour ends the work in an elegiac way as a kind of prayer not unlike the spiritual traditions of the past. The process of incorporating the spiritual element in this piece, is more like the way in which Bach or Mozart would have done. In order to write such profoundly spiritual music, one must first embody the pain and suffering from which such deeply heart felt music would’ve come out of. Instead of directly using previous material, Danielpour evokes the feeling of the main character and thus creates a powerful yet authentic and unique spiritual music of his own.

Part 3 - Practical application of the research

CHAPTER ONE

My own approach to using spiritual found objects

After studying the brilliant works exemplified in this thesis, I began to ponder about my own take on this extremely powerful compositional tool and about how I would use it. Not being a religious person and knowing that this did not represent any problem whatsoever when looking for "divine inspiration", I embarked on a quest to write my own version of music born out of this spiritual "ethos". Like every other human being who has ever lived, I have experienced great joy and also great pain. I have been exposed to the limits of either side of the spectrum and have finally learned to balance the two and find solace somewhere in the middle. I have also learned the importance of exposure to either side and, most importantly, that the feeling is very much alike. Being shocked at this finding, I looked to see if there was any scientific research to back this uninformed conclusion of mine. There is. Apparently using sophisticated brain-scanning and a carefully controlled way of inducing muscle pain, research has shown that the brain's dopamine system is highly active while

someone experiences pain and that this response varies between individuals in a way that relates directly to how the pain makes them feel. This could be directly related to the "divine" inspiration credited numerous times with the birth of important historical musical masterpieces. Furthermore, it's been recently discovered that dopamine has been linked to pain response in humans. Not satisfied with this explanation, I researched further and learned that the link between pleasure and pain is deeply rooted in our biology. For a start, all pain causes the central nervous system to release endorphins – proteins which act to block pain and work in a similar way to opiates such as morphine to induce feelings of euphoria. This would explain why, when signing about a deeply painful past experience like a genocide for instance, we "like" to re-live and embody at least a fraction of the pain felt by the victims. Maybe, this helps validate the creation of the musical work in some ways. This is also why you "hear the pain" in a soul or blues singer or why you get goose bumps and can empathize with the victims of a horrible atrocity though a musical requiem.

This is what I sought to do with my own guitar concerto. In the second movement especially, I opened myself up to feel and evoke what the heroic civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo and her family must have felt after she sacrificed her life so bravely for a cause that didn't affect her directly. Her actions were the embodiment of selflessness, compassion and sacrifice. I knew that trying to look for ways to musically depict these admirable traits was futile and that the result would be artificial sounding music that is "trying" to be something else. Instead, learning mostly form the research stemming from this dissertation, I opted to "feel" Viola's pain and put myself, (as much as possible), in her situation. This feeling would be what would generate the momentum and would guide the stylistic and aesthetic decisions of the composition. It is as if I put myself on auto pilot and let my musical decisions be guided by the feeling of embodying her incredibly valiant actions and their sad but hopeful outcome. As composers, we know that it is very difficult to be critics of our own work. In my case, I have the capacity to objectively listen to my music and immediately discern the parts I like from those I don't. Needless to say, the latter are way

more numerous than the former but I've come to terms with this and have relinquished my ego to make room for what I consider to be honest and good music.

One the other hand, I also use a more direct and practical approach similar to that of Dvorak in the first movement of my piece. The way in which I pay homage to the spiritual musical tradition of the Southern United States is by adapting (and adopting) the melody for "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" as the first movement main theme. I begin by presenting the melody in short snippets to "tease" the listener and build up expectation until the guitar finally makes a grand entrance and plays it in full. This type of manipulation of spiritual found objects was learned from many different examples of the past and is not unlike the way in which Krouse morphed the original chants in the style of *Komitas* into elongated and more sophisticated versions.

I then proceed to apply different "operators" like augmentation, transposition, dovetailing and others to keep the common melodic thread throughout. An argument could be made that at some point the original tune is indiscernible and therefore its influence on the piece is somehow rendered pointless. However, I believe that if the original melodic quote is

recognizable to some extent at different points in the piece, it is enough to justify its use. This is also somewhat arbitrary. As I mentioned before, whether or not we write spiritual music that actually includes the original musical pitches from which it is derived, the true importance lies in wether it carries the message and power.

CHAPTER TWO

Conclusion

The history of humanity and the history of music are intrinsically connected. We can readily agree that the history of humans on this earth has been, for the most part, fraught with suffering on many levels. One can go as far as to assert that this suffering "across the board" is responsible in some way for the incessant human need for meaning, faith and a belief that there is something greater that may contain the promise of alleviating this suffering. Since the dawn of humanity, music has provided a link or bridge between this harsh reality and the higher power or purpose from whom we all seek relief. I believe spirituality is a term often used to denote this search for a "reason" and, ultimately, for a solution to the complex and often difficult circumstance that us humans endure during our time on earth. I don't mean to sound pessimistic or portray humanity as "victimized" in any way. One need only briefly look at any historical era for irrefutable proof that most, if not

all, human beings have had suffering play a big part in their existence. Spiritual music, therefore, could be thought of as an offering and a prayer for the intercedance of a higher power on our behalf. Wether it is through a sophisticated and elegant chorale harmonization, a rugged and visceral person singing her heart out or a full orchestra and chorus performing a recount of a tragedy they overcame, spiritual music is a form of healing. The way in which many composers have used music inspired by this search for a higher meaning, has been wildly different both stylistically and in terms of remaining authentic to the original. Many have come up with their own spiritual music while others have opted to make versions and/or adaptations of music of the past. Regardless, I believe the goal is the same; for the spiritual music to serve as a divine healing bridge between this flawed dimension we are born into and a higher one. As a promise for a brighter tomorrow. As a distraction from our suffering. Furthermore, a spiritual "found object" such as Lutheran chorale or a north African prayer, have organically found a vessel for their message in music. To quote Dvorak once again as he showed great preoccupation with this subject throughout his life:

"Of course, as I have indicated before, it is possible for certain composers to project their spirit into that of another race and country. Verdi partially succeeded in striking Oriental chords in his Aida, while Bizet was able to produce so thoroughly Spanish strains and measures as those of Carmen. Thus inspiration can be drawn from the depths as well as from the heights".[17]

It is no surprise that chant has played such a fundamental role in virtually all religions since their inception. Humans found out early on that the elements that comprise music such as rhythm, pitch and dynamics, are the most efficient and memorable way to pray. The longing, nostalgia and agony as well as the joy, euphoria and aliveness of a text is amplified and "brought to life" by enveloping it with music. This is spiritual music.

[17] Antonin Dvorák, Music in America. (February 1895), pp. 429-34.

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