



Our project is designed to empower and encourage voice students and teachers of all races to embrace the historically rich, serious vocal music of classically trained African-American composers. We propose ways in which studio voice teachers can help overcome barriers to integrating art songs and spirituals by African-American composers into the canon of solo concert repertoire, as well as enable voice students from all racial backgrounds to forge a more visceral understanding of the range of African-American experiences, both contemporary and historical.

PURPOSE

QUESTIONS

- What do we need to do as educators in order to enable singers from all racial backgrounds to become more comfortable performing this repertoire?
- What are the barriers that singers from all racial backgrounds face when performing art songs and spirituals by African-American composers?
- How do students and teachers confront their preconceptions when learning any piece of music, e.g., a female student singing a song from a man's perspective? Specifically, how can that process be applied to learning art songs and spirituals?
- How is a singer's outlook on racial dynamics affected by studying and performing these pieces?



Activities Include

- Lecture-recitals that trace the development of song composition by composers of African descent, with invited participation by your voice department's faculty
- Master classes to help your voice students gain experience and insights into the performance of this repertoire
- Discussion groups with students and faculty on how the act of teaching, learning and performing these pieces affected their attitudes and perceptions

Materials Provided

- A graded list of suggested songs and spiritual arrangements to help teachers and students in choosing repertoire for the master class
- A bibliography of song anthologies, recordings, websites, books and articles for use in further research and preparation
- Volumes I and II of the *Anthology of Art Songs by Black American Composers*, compiled by Dr. Willis Patterson

Summary

Our nation's history of slavery and racism, embodied for performers in the legacy of 19th-century minstrel shows, challenge many singers of non-African descent when approaching the performance of African-American spirituals and art songs. The study and performance of these songs across racial backgrounds open the door for greater understanding and reconciliation of the past. There is no better place to attempt this task than in colleges and universities, where teachers can guide and students can explore, pushing beyond the boundaries of their cultural preconceptions. We look forward to working with your music faculty and students and making a significant contribution to this conversation and experience at your institution.



Additional Resources

Articles

- Dunn-Powell, Rosephanye, "The African-American Spiritual: Preparation and Performance Considerations." *Journal of Singing*, May/June 2005. Volume 61, No. 5, pp. 469-475.
- Helton, Caroline and Stephens, Emery, "Singing Down the Barriers: Encouraging Singers of All Racial Backgrounds to Perform Music by African-American Composers" (2007). <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/musicfrp/2>
- Patterson, Willis. "The African-American Art Song: A Musical Means for Special Teaching and Learning." *Black Music Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2, *Educational Philosophy and Pedagogy* (Autumn 1996), pp. 303-310.

Books

- Baker, David N., Lida M. Belt, and Herman C. Hudson, eds. *The Black Composer Speaks*. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978.
- Banfield, William. *Landscapes in Color: Conversations with Black American Composers*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1998.
- Boatner, Edward. *The Story of the Spirituals: Thirty Spirituals and Their Origins*. Melville, NY: Belwin Mills, 1973.

For more information

Please contact Dr. Emery Stephens for further information about the **Beyond Race** project.

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Faculty

Drs. Emery Stephens and Caroline Helton have made numerous presentations based on their research at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference in Washington, D.C., in November, 2006, as well as at the inaugural African-American Art Song Alliance Conference at the University of California-Irvine in February, 2007. They have also appeared on “Front Row Center,” public radio station WDET’s weekly cultural events program. In addition to their performances and presentations, they were highlighted in a collaborative article, “Singing Down the Barriers: Encouraging Singers of All Racial Backgrounds to Perform Music by African American Composers,” published by Jossey-Bass for one of its academic journals, Scholarship of Multicultural Teaching and Learning.



Dr. Stephens



Dr. Helton

Dr. Stephens is an Assistant Professor of Voice in the College of Fine, Performing & Communication Arts at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

Dr Helton is an Assistant Professor of Music (Voice) at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance in Ann Arbor, Michigan.



Quotes From University Voice Students

I was glad to have the opportunity to perform this repertoire with permission, because I've only ever seen black singers perform it and I've always wanted to be able to.

With spirituals the motives are pure. Spirituals weren't written for money. Spirituals embody distilled emotional experience; they wanted their voices to be heard.

It's much easier for a student to connect with a spiritual or art song by African-American composers than an Italian song.

This music is powerful because the music is still here, still meaningful and not removed from our cultural experience.

Everyone can relate. Music is about the universality of experience.

“Singing outside the box” breaks cultural barriers and makes it much easier to connect to others. Performing makes you learn way more than just reading about it; it makes the experience much stronger.

I thought that, since I'm African-American my connection would be automatic, but my insight came through real performance.

The main idea is to get ideas or emotions across no matter what your race.



BEYOND RACE

African-American Art Songs and Spirituals

An
Interdisciplinary Project
for
Students and Teachers
from
All Racial Backgrounds