



KEYBOARD MUSIC OF BLACK COMPOSERS

A BIBLIOGRAPHY

Compiled by
AARON HORNE

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Foreword by T. J. Anderson



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Foreword

Aaron Horne is an important scholar, performer, and teacher who previously documented African-American contributions to music literature in his bibliographies, Woodwind Music of Black Composers (Greenwood Press, 1990) and String Music of Black Composers (Greenwood Press, 1991). Dominique-Rene de Lerma states that Mr. Horne provides new guidelines for invigorating the repertories and audiences for string music, and in his foreword Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. called the work a great tool for research scholars and an accomplishment that will serve in the continuing development of musical history. Aaron Horne now adds a significant chapter to understanding the creative output of composers of African descent with the current title.

The keyboard music listed in the present volume is a vital resource for those interested in the subject. The author identifies composers of African ancestry on four continents: Africa, North America, South America, and Europe. He also provides the reader with biographical statements on each artist. Included are solo compositions for keyboard instruments and works which include keyboards for up to twelve instruments, voice, band, strings, choir, brass, percussion, orchestra, electronic sounds, and jazz groups. Since the output is so enormous, it would be impossible to identify all the keyboard works of this group of composers. Mr. Horne recognizes the diversity and scope of the music and presents a representative compilation. A discography and bibliography enhance the usefulness of this work as a research tool.

For centuries, the thumb piano, also known as the mbira or kalimbe, has been played all over the continent of Africa. This plucked idiophone or percussion instrument may well represent civilization's first keyboard instrument. Its current popularity serves as living witness to the vitality of keyboard music in black cultures. Historically, the love of keyboard music has been an important factor in the musical achievement of many African-Americans. Booker T. Washington in Up From Slavery (Houghton Mifflin, 1928) tells the story of going to dinner in a small cabin where there were five persons and only one fork. In the corner of the room was an organ for

which the family took great pride in paying sixty dollars in monthly installments. In her book, The Music of Black Americans (W.W. Norton, 1983), Eileen Southern notes the acquisition after freedom of small organs for use in the home at the price of "fifty cents down and fifty cents per week for a lifetime." Rudi Blesh remarks that in the 1890s, sheet music appeared in the parlor on the square pianos or cabinet reed organs throughout America, in his book They All Played Ragtime (Oak Publications, 1966). One would have to assume that many black homes had similar taste.

In a recent article, "Ninnies, Pedants, Tyrants, and Other Academics" (N.Y. Times Book Review, May 5, 1991), Camille Paglia, in speaking of soul music, states that "Black artists are the American paradigm of vivid, vibrant personality, dramatic self-assertion, and spiritual magnitude of the individual voice." I believe the remarks are applicable to every aspect of African-American music and are reflected in African-American contributions to ragtime, blues, stride, gospel, boogie woogie, barrelhouse, all of which have links to the piano and organ. A similar analogy can be made to concert music by black composers.

Roberto Gerhard said in an essay, "The Composer and His Audience" (Twentieth Century Music, Orion Press, 1968), that communication is a function of language and that composers shape the sonic events in time. The gap between what black composers create and their listening audience is wide. Mr. Horne's guide should go a long way in adding cultural diversity to concert programs and aid in enlightening scholars and performers on music created by composers of African descent. The goal to establish and evaluate the works of these composers can only be fulfilled when we as a society are knowledgeable of this important literature and its place in our musical understanding.

T.J. Anderson

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Presser, Theodore, Presser Place, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

Ragtime Society, Weston, Ontario, Canada

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