

# Music of the African Diaspora: The Historical Reception of African American Concert Music

**Robert J. Miller**

Mentor: Dr. Ronald Zeigler, Director, Nyumburu Cultural Center  
University of Maryland, College Park

## Abstract

African American concert music (AACM) has made one of the largest contributions to the establishment and development of American music. Black composers (and musicians) of this genre played a vital role in achieving the goals of the Harlem Renaissance, which were racial vindication and “re-representation.” Leaders of the Renaissance believed that African American composers would bring these goals to fruition because composers would remove barriers in education, and they would replace the negative images of Black people with the genuine, positive picture. Today, however, AACM is seldom heard, performed or studied in performances, academia, and in recordings. The lack of knowledge of this genre is a problem because only part of history is being told. This study will use the historical method of inquiry, and it seeks to explore how AACM was initially received and why it is marginalized today. The researcher will locate primary sources that will be analyzed first hand to find meanings and relationships that can provide answers to the research questions.

## Introduction

Music of the African Diaspora is one of the most influential and unique styles of music in the world because it combines the racially exploitative experiences of peoples of African descent with the cultures of their enslavers. African American concert music is of particular interest because the experiences of Black culture are being conveyed through the means of European culture. The focus of this study is on the historical reception of African American concert music by both the black community and mainstream America. Through this historical study, the researcher hopes to explore how this genre, which made large contributions to American music, came to prominence in order to find out why this music is in a state of unpopularity and marginalization in today’s world of music.

## Problem Statement

When a reference to music by Black composers is made, it is usually assumed that the references are to jazz, gospel, spirituals, and blues (Keith, 2008). The lack of awareness of the large quantity of concert music by Black composers can, according to Keith (2008), be attributed to the lack of “exposure on recordings,

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the concert stage, [and/or] the educational musical curricula (2008, 71). The lack of knowledge about African American concert music (AACM) is a problem because as a large contributing force to American music, it should be preserved and practiced to achieve greater insight about American culture. If AACM is not adequately recorded in history, many will think African Americans did not make any important contributions to American music other than those genres in the popular styles (Keith 2008.)

The lack of knowledge about AACM is also, ironically, found in music academia. Sam Perlman's (of Grinnell College) 1989 study concluded that music of Black composers "has been ignored in the schools in the United States" (Wyatt, 1996, 241). The researcher of that study examined the music history books used in various music schools, and he was able to draw a conclusion based on the lack of basic information on black composers found in those books. As stated by Wyatt (1996), the lack of knowledge of AACM in academia is problematic for students and musicians are being limited inside of the "European circle," and are, therefore, not being given the "full story of musics that have played major roles" in contributing to the development of American culture (1996, 240). Consequently, many African American students, in addition to students of other backgrounds, elect not to enroll in traditional music classes because of the Eurocentric curricula (Lundquist & Sims, 1996). If students of a diverse background are not enrolling in music classes, than the "socio-cultural environment is negatively impacted" as institutions are only receiving the talented individuals from one cultural background. In addition, if the socio-cultural environment is negatively impacted, than the nation's overall health and vitality will diminish (ibid).

Studying the reception of concert music may be able to provide solutions for why this music is lesser known today; consequently, the gaps in performances and integration of Black music in academia as well as in the musical world may be ameliorated.

### **Significance of Inquiry**

Researching the initial reception of Black composers and musicians of the classical genre is important because it may be able to provide insight as to why this music is not adequately known today. History is often researched in order to provide information necessary for preventing and resolving future problems. Hence this research may be able to provide information to establish a reconstitution of AACM. Additionally, this study contributes to the history and development of American music. At the 2007 conference that commemorates the founding of the African American Art Song Alliance, several professionals in music conveyed that studying Black concert music is needed to have "a sense of completeness" in telling the American story (Thompson, 2007, 13.) Expansion of music to include Black concert musicians could provide as a role models to students for many of the composers endured hardships as doors did not open even when musicians proved their competency and potential for success (Thompson 2007; Southern, 1983).

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Studying AACM is worthy of attention because it not only “represents a body of works that is a part of American music,” but it also requires that educators examine how they present music to students of various backgrounds (Wyatt, 1996, 242). The music of Black composers also has value, which can be demonstrated through the many awards, commissions, prizes, and, at one time, frequent performances of the music. Lastly, it is important to study the history of this genre because the beliefs, ideas, and customs of a society are derived from its history (McDowell, 2002).

### **Purpose of Inquiry**

The purpose of this research is to explore how African American concert music was initially received by both the Black community and mainstream America during the twentieth century. The findings from this exploration will then be used to discover reasons for why AACM is not well known today. Because it may be assumed that AACM is synonymous to traditional European classical music, this proposal will briefly examine what distinguishes AACM from traditional European classical music. Furthermore, this research will show how this genre contributed to the struggle for racial vindication during the early half of the twentieth century. The following questions will be addressed by this inquiry:

1. How was African American concert music historical received:
  - 1a. by the Black community
  - 1b. by mainstream America
2. What accounts for the disparities in African American concert music?

### **Delimitations, Limitations, and Scope**

This research is not about the reception of jazz, blues, spirituals/gospel, or any other form of popular Black music; moreover, this research does not discuss Black composers of these popular genres. Although the time periods may overlap, this study is focuses on the Harlem Renaissance (1917-1940). There will be exceptions to this time frame as many of the composers and artists of Black art music did not start nor stop composing at the exactly when the Harlem Renaissance began or ended. Harlem Renaissance composers and performers of classical art music such as Harry T. Burleigh, Florence Price, Marian Anderson, William Dawson, etc. will be the focus of this research. The aforementioned composers and performers in addition to others were the most important figures as they helped realize goals of the Harlem Renaissance. This time period has been selected because it was the time when African American musicians and composers came to prominence and began creating a unique music. Expected limitations of this study include limiting the amount of African American composers and musicians discussed. The composers and musicians discussed will be confined to those who were most active and influential during the Harlem Renaissance. Even though there are more composers and musicians than those discussed in this research, the musicians chosen are representative of all Black concert composers during this time period.

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## Review of the Literature

The founders of the Harlem Renaissance felt that African Americans needed a way to ameliorate their image, which had been defiled by minstrelsy and caricature. The derogatory images displayed African Americans as either, lazy, docile, hyper-sexual, animalistic, sensual, or dense (Riggs, 1987). Locke (1925) wanted to move African Americans from the subject of “moral debate and historical controversy” to that of the “New Negro” (1925, 984). Realizing that to progress in America, the image of African Americans needed vindication, the leaders of the Renaissance called for visual, performing, and literary artists to create works that would glorify African Americans and their culture. The Washington Conservatory of music, the first institution created specifically to train Black classical musicians, was also established in seeking vindication, and it made large contributions to achieving this goal (Schmalenberger, 2004)

### *Racial Vindication*

***New Image: Nationalism, Elevation, and Imitation*** In the spirit of vindication and elevation of Black culture, many composers sought African American folk music (spirituals, blues, dance music) for inspiration and material in their compositions (Brown, 1990; Southern, 1983; Ryder, 1990). Literature by African American authors was also used in African American concert composers’ compositions, particularly art songs (Southern, 1983). By elevating Black folk music to higher forms, composers could convey that their heritage, which even was occasionally detested by Black people, was “an art of greater value” (Burgett, 1990, 29; as cited in Southern, 1983, 402). Because African American song and dance was the object of ridicule and parody, especially in minstrel shows, African American composers and musicians shied away at first from utilizing traditional folk music (Locke, 1936). It was not long, however, until this culture was embraced and used innumerable in compositions by African American composers and performed by musicians. Additionally, Locke (1936) believed that this “anemic hybrid” of African American folk music and classical art music must continually be fused together to create a “superior product” (1936, 112-130.) This “superior product” was thought to be the aspect that would usher in racial equality. Moreover, a solidified sense of racial consciousness would be achieved through this “superior product”, and, as a result, Black intellectuals with commonalities in their ideals and sense of purpose would be united (Brown, 1990). It was common thought among Harlem Renaissance thinkers that the myths and claims about African Americans could be obliterated through artistic achievement; moreover, once Black artists were established, “equality would emerge on all fronts” (Moon, 2006; Floyd, 1990, 2). Essentially, Black artists were meant to embody Dubois’ (1903) theory of the “Talented Tenth.” The “Talented Tenth” is the top 10 % of African Americans whose job is to “guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst” (Dubois, 1903). As such, the composers and musicians would gain a college education produce music that will uplift their race,

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and, therefore, guide the masses of African Americans away from racial destruction to racial prosperity.

Southern (1983) identifies Harry T. Burleigh, Robert N. Dett, Florence Price, Clarence White, Harold Brown, Harry Freeman, and William Dawson as the first group of Black nationalistic composers (1983, 266). A nationalistic composer, as Southern (1983) describes, “consciously turn[s] to the folk music of their people” for compositional inspiration (1983, 266.) It was from this genre that Renaissance thinkers’ placed their highest premium; they looked to this genre for the greatest achievements (Floyd, 1990, 12). Thinkers such as Alain Locke, Nathaniel Dett, William Grant Still, Roland Hayes, and James Johnson felt that racial vindication could not be achieved through the, albeit genuinely African American in nature, rural folk and urban popular musics; instead, they believed that setting folk music to classical forms and demonstrating a “mastery...of the modern orchestra” would usher in racial vindication (Spencer, 1997, 22; Burgett, 1990, 30). African American composers, according to composer Nathaniel Dett were expected to voice the soul of their race in addition to the spirit of America (as cited in Ryder, 1990, 58). Burgett (1990) argues that Locke believes the degree of value of a music increases if it can be utilized in music of a higher level (Locke, 1990). Dett (1928) believed that the spirituals will be of little value unless composers set it to sophisticated forms, such as operatic works and concert suites; the spirituals alone, continues Dett, are not suitable for any church service (as cited in Ryder, 1990, 59). Like other nationalistic composers, Dett’s goal was to preserve and uplift Black folk music.

Even though African American composers looked to their folk music for inspiration, they were not the only composers to take this avenue. It is evident that Czech composer Antonin Dvorak was inspired by the African American spirituals (Burgett, 1990). Dvorak, moreover, is noted as the figure who encouraged the development of an “American School” of composers who would utilize the Black folk music in their compositions (Southern, 1997). As racial interactions grew amongst Black and White musicians, characteristics of Black music disseminated into the White musical cultures of the upper classes (Floyd, 1990, 22). George Gerswhin and Paul Whiteman were among those White musicians who often socialized with Black musicians such as W.C. Handy and “Fats” Waller (ibid). While White musicians continued to incorporate African American musical characteristics into their music, many Black composers such as Still felt that these were mere replicas of the real thing (Spencer, 1997). Said Still (Spencer, 1997): “No matter how extravagant the claims made for white imitations, how pleasing they may be as music, or how much similarity there is in their external aspects, they are at best only imitations” (1997, 88). In other words, Still felt that White composers who were believed to have a mastery of Black music did not have this mastery as only an African American composer is capable of producing genuine African American music.

Because Black music contains “something” that is so fundamentally African American in nature, it cannot be created by anyone who is not African American (Spencer, 1997, 88). Wilson (1973) sheds light on what this “something” may be:

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“the black composer... is unique because, unlike his white counterpart, his cultural history has been plagued by an exploitive racism...” (Wilson, 1973, 33). Additionally, the music of Black composers lie “deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of [their] people” (Wilson, 1973, 34).

**Removing Barriers** In addition to elevating the music of African American music, racial vindication could also be achieved through the removal of barriers that existed. By removing these barriers through their successes, musicians were able to convey to mainstream America that, if given the opportunity, they could “sing, play and compose” successfully (Southern, 1983, 400). As previously stated, Floyd (1990) states that it was popular opinion that if Black artists removed barriers within the realm of concert music, than “equality would emerge on all fronts (Floyd, 1990, 2). Black artists aspiring to enter the world of concert music were often faced with racial indignity, even after receiving intense, conservatory caliber training; even though some barriers were removed, there were many others that arose to prevent the progress of Black composers and musicians (Keith, 2008).

Within the realm of concert music, Black vocalists led the way in removing racial barriers as they were met with less discrimination than instrumentalists (Southern, 1983). Many performed repertoire that included art songs by Black concert composers. Roland Hayes and Marian Anderson were among the first vocalists to break through the color barrier. Singer Paul Robeson, found the opportunity of reaching an audience abroad advantageous in speaking about injustices African Americans faced in the Southern United States (Keith 2008, 64; Southern, 1983).

Black concert pianists were not as successful as their counterparts in vocal music, partly because of their inability to acquire sound, professional management (Keith, 2008). However, Black pianists still had some successes; Carl Diton was the first Black pianist to conduct a transcontinental tour of the United States, and Helen Hagan was the first Black pianist to earn a music degree from Yale (Southern, 1983). Additionally, Andre Watts and Nerrine Barrett were able to establish a sustainable income as concert pianists (Keith, 2008). Black instrumentalists, conductors had similar experiences to the pianists (Keith, 2008).

**Education** Black artists of the Harlem Renaissance, where thought to embody Dubois’ idea of the group of people who would uplift and progress African Americans. Education is a key component to identifying those who belong in the “Talented Tenth” (Dubois, 1903). That said, it cannot go unnoticed that the vast majority, if not all, of prominent Black concert composers attained a higher education degree. Becoming a classical musician is difficult, and many programs that offer opportunities for developing and producing classical musicians are often found in predominantly White institutions (Banks, 2007). Even though Black musicians were barred from the activities of opera companies and symphony orchestras, they were generally able to gain admission into music schools (Southern, 1971). Composers such as Florence Price, Harry Burleigh, and Nathaniel Dett were able to attend conservatories such as New England Conservatory, National Conservatory of Music, and Oberlin Conservatory, respectively. Locke (1936) notes that it is not

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by accident that institutions such as the ones listed were the places in which the majority of Black composers and musicians received their training for these were the most liberal institutions (Locke, 1936). It should be understood, however, that these reputable institutions did not admit African Americans solely on the basis of race; Black musicians “received consideration according to their talent, which was often beyond average” (ibid).

This section would not be complete without mentioning the Washington Conservatory of music, established by Harriet Gibbs Marshall. The Washington Conservatory was the first conservatory established and largest institution created specifically to provide classical training and performances to Black people (Schmalenberger, 2004). Marshall’s primary goals of establishing the Conservatory were in line with the Renaissance thinkers even though she built the school years before the movement. Marshall sought the vindication of African Americans’ rights as citizens, and Marshall wanted to prove that African Americans were capable of producing great, serious art. Marshall’s vision was based on the concept of racial uplift, and she designed her program accordingly often modifying the curriculum based on political, social, and cultural upheavals (Schmalenberger, 2004.)

***Audience and Reception*** Perhaps the most perplexing aspect of Black concert music is the audience. To whom were Black concert musicians performing for? This question may be asked because, assuming that reader has a general knowledge of Black popular music and European classical, the reader understands that a certain standard of audience etiquette exists in the two styles of music that comprise AACM. While the audience of European classical music is expected to be a passive spectator, the audience of Black popular music such as jazz or rap is expected to participate in the overall performance. Schmalenberger (2004) states that it should be a surprise that many Black people embraced this music as the high Black intellectual classes supported the idea of racial uplift through culture (2004). In addition, among the Black elite, patronage was a socializing initiative. When the Washington Conservatory was established, it was pronounced proudly in the *Negro Music Journal*, the only journal at the time dedicated to Black music and arts (Schmalenberger, 2004). While the general behavior of Black concert music is similar to its European counterpart, Black composers wanted to appeal to Black audiences in addition to White audiences. Many times, Marian Anderson or Roland Hayes reduced the prices of their tickets, and they sung spirituals to connect with their audience (Southern, 1983). Additionally, Marshall often held free concerts at the Washington Conservatory for members of the local Black community (Schmalenberger, 2004).

### ***Aesthetics***

AACM contains “something” that separates it from other styles and genres of music. At the mention of a AACM, one may be compelled to erroneously deem it the same as Euro-Western classical, but with an African American composer. Although AACM utilizes European mediums, it is still Black music nonetheless for it contains many fundamental qualities of Black music. Additionally, the Black composer is bound to bring his or her experiences to their compositions as it

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is inseparable (Wilson, 1973). The qualities that separate Black music from other genres are “call-and-response organizational procedures, dominance a percussive approach to music, and off-beat phrasing of melodic accents;” moreover, group participation, poly-rhythms, dance rhythms and its relationship to dance and bodily movement also help create a working definition of Black music (Floyd, 1990, 83, Gates et. al, 2004, 6; Levine, 1977, 6). The ensuing sections will briefly discuss some of the characteristics that distinguish Black concert music from European classical music.

### ***Characteristics of Black Concert Music***

***Call and Response and Communal Solidarity*** Probably one of the most distinctive characteristics of Black music is call and response. Call and response is “overriding antiphony” (Levine, [1977] 2007, 6). In other words, it is “an alternation of solo passages and choral refrains or of two different choral passages” (as cited in Farrah, 2007, 20). Several forms of call and response exist: “solo call-group response, solo call-solo response, and group call-group response (Farrah, 2007). For instance, in a solo call-group response, a leader of a church congregation may sing a line of hymn unaccompanied, and then, the congregation will sing a proceeding line to “answer” the leaders line. Call and response is a feature of African American music that resembles the music found in West Africa (Levine, 1977). Call and response creates a collectiveness between the caller and responders as it requires participation from both parties.

***Blue Notes and Modal Mixture*** Blue notes are altered (usually lowered) degrees of a scale, almost always the third, fifth or seventh (Southern, 1997; Farrah, 2007). There has been general disagreement among scholars about what degrees of a scale have to be altered in order for it to be considered a blue note (Farrah, 2007). While scholars such as Gunther Schuller, David Baker, and Jeff Titon may establish their own working definitions of blues scales, it is generally the third, fifth, and seventh degrees that are changed. Like blue notes, modal mixtures contain some ambiguity as they incorporate both major and minor scales (Farrah, 2007). Much of Black music simultaneously incorporates major and minor scales. Furthermore, the pentatonic scale is one of the most prominent scales in Black music (Floyd, 1990). The prevalence of the pentatonic scale can be attributed to its prevalence in the Black spiritual (Stewart, 1998).

***Elisions, Rhythm and Syncopation*** The result of the ending of a musical phrase serving a dual purpose of the ending of one idea and the beginning of the is an elision (Farrah, 2007). In other words, an elision is a beginning and ending of two musical phrases. An “off-beat phrasing of melodic accents” is characteristic of the rhythm found in African American music (Brown, 1990, 83). By “off-beat,” Brown means that the accents, or strong beats, found in African American music are generally on the second and fourth beats, which is different from the accents on the first and third beats found in most musics. This is called syncopation; normal strong beats are deprived of emphasis as normal weak beats are accentuated (Farrah, 2007).

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## **Method of Historical Inquiry**

This research will utilize the method historical inquiry. This process involves searching for sources of information, critically evaluating the same, and synthesizing and exposing the results of the research and criticism (Garraghan 1940). McDowell (2002) states that there are a variety of activities that are used by the researcher; these include “selecting, evaluating and interpreting historical evidence, through to communicating these findings” (2002, 11). The historical researcher usually establishes a chronology and then the researcher analyzes and interprets these events in order to formulate some meaning from it. Historical method, in other words, is a body of principles and rules that are designed to aid a researcher in gathering sources of history, critically appraising those sources, and presenting a synthesis of the results. Historical research attempts to, through systematic enquiry, separate truth from fictionalized accounts about the past (McDowell, 2002). The researcher, therefore, will find sources such as original scores, letters, etc., that demonstrate the diversity in the Black community that is often overlooked. Many historians when conducting historical research focus on the lower economic class of African Americans, and thus ignoring the substantial, albeit small, middle and upper classes.

## **Research Design and Methods**

The historical method of inquiry will be used. The researcher will collect textual data from primary sources such as letters, original manuscripts, and newspaper articles. The researcher will then analyze the data and look for relationships and meaning. The historical method of inquiry is used to explore the outcomes of historical events in hopes of finding solutions and preventive measures to the problems of today. Likewise, the researcher will examine the historical events surround African American concert music’s initial reception in order to find solutions for bringing this music to prominence.

## ***Role of the Researcher***

The role of the researcher is to be actively engaged in locating primary sources and external evidence. The researcher will seek and gather primary sources. Because this research will use the historical inquiry method, the genuine validity of the primary sources is of paramount importance, therefore, the researcher will also be active in establishing the authenticity of the evidence (Garraghan, 1940). This will be achieved through various methods such as analysis of vocabulary usage and the style of writing (ibid). The researcher will survey a wide range of repertoire, however, it will be at his discretion and judgement as to what musical pieces are representative of the African American concert music genre. In this proposal, the researcher relied on how authors of secondary sources have interpreted the data from primary sources; in conducting the research, however, the researcher will analyze the primary source.

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### ***Data Collecting Strategies and Data Sources***

As previously stated, the researcher will search and identify primary sources for this research. The researcher will utilize the University of Maryland's Research Port as a starting point in locating sources. The researcher will also request to interview select faculty members from various post-secondary educational institutions, especially those who have experienced African American concert music as part of their upbringing. Furthermore, the research will utilize archives at various universities and academic institutions as they contain a plethora of original documents such as letters and scores. The Library of Congress will also be utilized in gaining access to original documents and periodicals.

### ***Strategies for Data Analysis***

In keeping with the historical method, chronology will be used as a basis for analysis of the data. Once a set of occurrences of African American composers' performances, educational achievements, and compositions has been collected, the researcher will then analyze the data in accordance to the historical method. The researcher will identify, if any, the relationships between the time periods and the performances, for instance, or events in the composers life to the style of composition he or she has written. In other words, the researcher will find meaning in the chain of events to explore what may have encouraged the composer to compose a certain way and why would the audience react to it the way they did. Once this is achieved, the findings will then be analyzed in context of the treatment of African American concert music today. A desired outcome will be that the findings of the historical reception of this genre will provide some answers to the relationship the genre has in today's society.

### **Ethical Considerations**

When dealing with faculty members, the researcher will not conduct interviews without informed consent. Furthermore, the researcher will not require that the interviewee submits any information that he or she is not willing to give. The interviewee will have the utmost confidentiality if he or she so chooses. Additionally, the interviewees will be given the opportunity to view the finished research paper before it is finalized, therefore giving them ample opportunity to modify or request omission of their interview.

### **Findings from the Literature**

#### ***How was African American concert music historically received by the Black community?***

According to the literature, which includes works by Samuel Floyd, Hildred Roach, and Eileen Southern, the Black community embraced the idea of a Black classical music. After decades of degrading images from minstrel shows and caricatures on commercial products, African Americans were likened to the idea

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of a cultural art form that elevated their status in America. Nathaniel Dett, who directed one of the earliest concerts of art arrangements of spirituals, felt that it was “gratifying to the black community” to see a director of African descent; moreover, the African Americans in the audience felt that they were “steppin’ on higher ground,” that is to say, their culture and heritage were being moved in the direction of progress (Spencer, 1997). Composers and musicians became “racial symbols” as their successes, which were “vicariously shared” by other members of the black community, became markers of racial progress (Southern, 1983, 400). Marian Anderson broke one of the color barriers as she was the first black artist to sing with the Metropolitan Opera, a major opera company in the United States (ibid). William Grant Still is often referenced in this matter as he was the first African American to have a work premiered by a major symphony orchestra, the first African American to conduct a major symphony orchestra, and the first African American to have a work premiered by a major opera company (Spencer, 1997; Southern, 1983). The firsts of composers and musicians were generally widely reported by black newspapers as these musicians were measures of racial progress (Spencer, 1997). The Black community was often prideful in that these images of themselves were being presented domestically and abroad. In many instances, the Black community provided support for the development of composers and musicians. Marian Anderson, for instance, was encouraged by her family and church to pursue a career in professional music; this is made evident by the large trust established for her, by her church community, to pursue extended vocal music studies (ibid, 402). While the literature for this proposal shows that the black community overwhelmingly supported their black composers and musicians, the researcher will examine how members of the black popular musics such as jazz and blues viewed their art music counterparts. The researcher will also examine black newspapers such as *New York Amsterdam News* and *Negro Music Newspaper* to find firsthand information on how the black community perceived their composers and musicians in the art medium.

### ***How was African American concert music received by mainstream America?***

The reactions in mainstream America have significant variations as there were a number of people who approved or disapproved of African American concert music. On the one hand, many White Americans did not embrace the idea of Black art music as they were accustomed to the stereotypes often portrayed in minstrel shows. White audience members of Nathaniel Dett’s 1915 concert were disappointed because they felt the concert was not genuine (Spencer, 1997). These audience members expected to see the spirituals accompanied by “swaying, hand-clapping, and foot-patting” as they have seen in American popular culture (ibid, 39). Thus, one of the problems in mainstream American accepting African American art music was that they were accustomed to the White interpretation of Black life and not the opposite (ibid).

Other reasons exist for the disdain of mainstream American towards African American art music. Racism, of course, played a vital role in shaping much of America’s attitudes towards this genre of music that was aimed at preserving and

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elevating Black culture. Many White Americans did not favor those black composers who, instead of composing within the idioms of spirituals and jazz, aspired to higher compositional goals (ibid). Said Southern (1997), “established white impresarios simply were not interested” in black concert artists (1997, 285). Consequently, many black artists were unable to gain good professional management (ibid).

On the other hand, African American concert music was embraced by American society. This is evident through the many organizations that established awards and prizes specifically for black composers and musicians. For example, the Rodman Wanamaker contest was created to perpetuate black composers in the classical tradition as the Harmon Foundation gave awards for both black composers and musicians (Southern, 1983). Fellowships and commissions were awarded to black composers who demonstrated mastery in the classical tradition. William Grant Still received the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1934 and 1938, the Rosenwald Fellowship in 1939-40, a commission from Columbia Broadcasting System in 1936 to, and one in 1939 for the World Music Fair in New York (Spencer, 1997). Many other musicians and composers received fellowships, scholarships, commissions, prizes, and awards in order to foster the genre of AACM.

## Conclusions

Based on the preliminary research of African American concert music, several conclusions have been drawn that give insight for why this influential genre has become marginalized within academia and the performance arena. First, this music came to prominence at a time where there were many negative images and stereotypes of Black Americans. Art music of African Americans was used as a tool to achieve racial equality, and it was successful in perpetuating racial progress. Today, however, there has been significant racial progress since the Harlem Renaissance even though racial disparities still exist. The lack of knowledge about art music of African Americans may be attributed to the significant social upheavals and amelioration. Because the conditions for African Americans in the United States have undergone significant changes, the function of African American concert music as an avenue for racial vindication no longer exists. However, that is not to say that the necessity for this music should cease to exist. It is part of American history, and as such, it has contributed to shaping the ideals and beliefs of American society. The function of a music should change as society changes, therefore, African American art music should be used to instill a sense of pride in Black culture. The events of many Black composers and musicians can serve to inspire anyone in this society, and this music should be preserved for it demonstrates the beginnings of American culture. In addition, it gives a better understanding of American culture today.

The reason vocalists were faced with the least discrimination can be attributed to minstrelsy. As minstrel actors mocked and ridiculed African Americans, they often used the prominence of song and dance in Black culture as the object of their mockery. Therefore, it was expected for African Americans to be good singers,

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therefore, they were able to gain easier access in the vocal concert music field. However, vocalists were expected to perform the musical selections of the minstrel repertoire, not of the European art songs. Like the instrumentalists, they were not expected to be serious musicians because they were thought to be inferior beings incapable of producing serious art.

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