

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

**SPIRITUALS AND GOSPEL MUSIC  
PERFORMANCE PRACTICE:  
A DUAL CURRICULUM THAT  
BRIDGES THE CULTURAL DIVIDE**

Robert Lee Jefferson, DMA, 2010

Directed By:

Chair, Linda Mabbs, School of Music

This study explores methods in which the teaching of Gospel Music and Spirituals can be used as a conduit to bridge ethnic, cultural, and racial divides that are often found in American society. After working with various cultural and racial groups within religious and secular circles, the researcher has observed that individual cultures can have very distinct and *opposite* approaches to learning music, even in the United States, which some consider to be a cultural “melting pot.” More specifically, there are cultures that embrace the written or visual learning tradition, while others lean more heavily toward the aural or oral learning tradition. As a result, the perceived differences deriving from these two opposite learning traditions can often create both unconscious and conscious divisions among various cultural and ethnic groups. However, using teaching techniques and performance practices related to both Gospel Music and Spirituals (which use different although related learning

approaches), one can create an opportunity to bridge the gap between the aural and visual learning traditions and can create an environment ripe for intra-cultural and cross-cultural communication.

This dissertation studied two separate groups of individuals; one group from the visual cultural learning tradition and one group from the aural cultural learning tradition. Both groups were taught music through the process of either an aural or visual process (or in some cases, by a combination of both), and their behavioral responses were observed during rehearsals. The results of these observations are used to create an outline for curricular approaches to teaching groups from opposing learning traditions, utilizing the opportunity that this presents not only to bridge the divide which often exists between individuals from different learning traditions, but also to offer a way to address ethnic and cultural divides.

SPIRITUALS AND GOSPEL MUSIC PERFORMANCE PRACTICE: A DUAL  
CURRICULUM THAT BRIDGES THE CULTURAL DIVIDE

By

Robert Lee Jefferson

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Advisory Committee:  
Professor Linda Mabbs, Chair  
Professor Carmen Balthrop  
Professor Shelley Davis  
Professor François Loup  
Professor Janet Montgomery  
Professor Charles Rutherford

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## Preface

It has been said that “music is a universal language.” Based however, on many years of experience performing with and instructing individuals and musical ensembles from varied racial, ethnic and cultural learning traditions, I began to notice certain biases which exist within each group in their perceptions toward other groups. These biases and perceptions, or should I say, misperceptions, often caused divisions between the various groups.

Initially, I attributed these biases solely to ethnicity and race. Although it is my belief that ethnicity and racial association does play a role in one’s perception, especially considering that particular racial groups are often associated with certain musical styles or genres, I wanted to find out if there were other contributing factors as well.

Even though Gospel Music and Spirituals are related, each genre uses different teaching and learning approaches. It was observed that individuals within the various groups demonstrated signs of “comfort” or “uneasiness” depending on which of these genres they were presented, even though several of the groups were composed of individuals from the same ethnic or racial category. This observation appeared to support the possibility that one’s learning tradition, more specifically, the aural learning tradition as opposed to the visual learning tradition, may in fact play a role in one’s perception toward other individuals and groups.

How then could I devise a methodology to help eliminate and possibly dispel some of the misconceptions among the various groups? How could I devise a methodology to help promote a mutual understanding between groups and ultimately

help to bridge the various groups and encourage cross-cultural and intra-cultural communication?

# Dedication

To Mama

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all of those who encouraged me to continue through to the completion of this degree; Pensacola Helene, Reverend L. Stacy Cowan, Janet Hjelmgren, Robert L. Morris, Linda Mabbs, François Loup, Shelley Davis, my extended family and many, many others. To God be the glory for all the things He has done.



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Several terms and phrases in this study are used synonymously:

Aural/Oral cultural learning tradition

Visual/Written cultural learning tradition

Cultural learning tradition/Learning tradition

Gospel/Gospel Music

Rote/By-rote

Black/African American (American)

White/Caucasian (majority American)

Hispanic/Latino (American)

Asian/Korean (both Native Korean and Korean American)

Asian/Japanese (Native Japanese)

Asian (American and other than American)

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Gospel Music and Spirituals are two of the most widely recognized and performed musical genres in America. The influence of these genres can be heard on television, radio, in theatres, concert halls, and other venues nationwide. Although both are related, the learning approaches are quite different. As a result, certain groups tend to feel more at ease with the process of learning and performing one genre in preference over the other. It is the researcher's belief that part of this preference stems from the individual group's cultural learning tradition. The researcher devised studies and developed test groups in order to substantiate or refute this hypothesis. More importantly, the researcher wanted to find a way in which individuals from the visual cultural learning tradition *and* those from the aural cultural learning tradition could be united.

Individual cultures and sub-cultures can have distinct, even *opposite* approaches to learning music. The European musical tradition springs from written manuscripts, whereas the African tradition is an oral one.

...in the West the tendency was for this "written,"...music to become elitist and for a passive audience to be "confronted" with a performance, in Africa the cultural priorities and values demanded a communal musical form in which there was no real separation between "performer" and "audience": a participatory experience for everyone involved.<sup>1</sup>

Marimba Ani, goes on to describe the different approaches to musical expression in this way:

Perhaps there is no better form of artistic expression than that of music to demonstrate the particular dynamics of the European aesthetic...music was analyzed, dissected, "studied" and translated into the

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<sup>1</sup> Marimba Ani, *Yurugu; An Afrikan-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (Africa World Press, 1994), 213.

language of mathematics. It was written down, and then it could be “read” as one would read a mathematical equation...<sup>2</sup>

T. J. Anderson describes the difference in the Eastern versus Western cultural thought process:

The impact of Asian heritage is fundamentally expressed in an attitude of synthesis – in other words, thinking in terms of a *Gestalt* or whole; whereas most Anglos are concerned with analysis – thinking not of the whole but of the parts in a more or less scientific fashion.<sup>3</sup>

What better means to combine the Eastern and Western learning traditions than through the medium of music!

Why Gospel Music and Spirituals? Gospel Music tends to be an aural idiom and although Spirituals were originally learned aurally, they are now primarily learned and taught by music notation. But these two genres are still so closely related that they provide a commonality for those from the visual learning tradition *and* for those from the aural learning tradition.

Although Gospel Music can be notated, it is primarily learned aurally. Martin and Morris Music, Inc. was the primary source of *written* manuscripts pertaining to the Gospel Music genre. Martin and Morris Music has gone out of business, and these scores are no longer available commercially, though some libraries still have extensive collections. As is the case in Baroque performance practice, the scores published by Martin and Morris provide only the outline of the songs and assume that performers know the stylistic practices of interpreting and performing the music correctly.

One of the major problems found when trying to bring the various cultural groups together in a musical ensemble is the discomfort caused by the lack of familiarity with the differing cultural learning traditions, specifically between the visual learning tradition

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>3</sup> T.J. Anderson, *Racial and Ethnic Directions in American Music* (The College Music Society, 1982), 5.

and the aural learning tradition. A premise of this study is to show that although certain learning traditions are more prevalent among specific cultures; music genres are not culturally exclusive, nor should they be. In this study, alternatives and ideas for overcoming the obstacles presented by combining the two learning traditions will be explored.

The following chapters will identify characteristics of the aural and visual cultural learning traditions. These chapters will also explore ways in which to unite individuals from these two learning traditions by offering a methodology and curriculum to assist in the endeavor.

Chapter two will give a brief history of the development of Spirituals and Gospel Music; including the origins and performance practices of each genre. In chapter three, various visual and aural learning traditions will be identified and the impact that these traditions play upon the learner will be analyzed. Chapter four will bring to light and expound on the personal testimonies of various individuals as they were exposed to new learning traditions. Methodology and curriculum using Spirituals and Gospel Music to promote cross-cultural and intra-cultural communication will be discussed in Chapter five. And finally, Chapter six will conclude with implications and possible outcomes of applying the results of this study in a practical way as part of a standard curriculum and in the larger society; using Gospel Music and Spirituals as a dual curriculum to bridge the cultural divide.

## Chapter 2: History and Performance Practices of Spirituals and Gospel Music

To understand the rationale behind using Gospel and Spirituals as a tool to bridge the visual and aural cultural learning traditions, it is important that one has at least a basic knowledge of the origins and performance practices of these two genres. Although they are related in their “lineage,” Spirituals and Gospel Music have diverged into two separate and distinct forms. Each genre has its own unique performance practices. The methods by which they are now taught and learned are unique to each style.

### **Origin and Performance Practices of Spirituals**

Spirituals evolved from the experiences of the Negro slave, with the texts reflecting the experience of African slavery in America. Although the texts are extremely important, this study will focus on the *methodology* of learning this remarkable music.

The Spirituals or “slave songs” of African Americans have been a subject for study and speculation since the mid-nineteenth century. Although references to the music appear in writings as early as the seventeenth century, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they are generally incidental to descriptions of plantation life as depicted by white Americans or European visitors to America.<sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup>

Touring singers from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, brought Spirituals, or “jubilees” as they were often called, to worldwide attention during the 1870s.<sup>6</sup> Although the Spirituals were

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Creswell, *The Journal of Nicholas Creswell, 1774-1777* (New York: The Dial Press, 1924).

<sup>5</sup> Frances A. Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation, 1838-1839* (New York: Alfred Knoph, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> J.B.T. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers with Their Songs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877).

generally religious in nature, during this same period and continuing through the heyday of minstrelsy (1875-1900),

Negro music was portrayed by Blacks and whites as virtually synonymous with entertainment...minstrelsy in America had begun early in the century and had been designed to exploit and ridicule Blacks through the singing of "Ethiopian songs" by whites in blackface who also danced and told "Jim Crow" jokes.<sup>7</sup>

Antonin Dvořák's visit to the United States in 1892 helped to underscore the artistic values he believed inherent in the songs. Dvořák, already recognized as a nationalist composer in Europe, made the following statement to the press shortly before the premiere of his *Symphony No. 5 in E minor, opus 95* (1893), subtitled *From the New World*:

I am convinced that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called Negro melodies. These can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition, to be developed in the United States. These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American. They are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them. In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music.<sup>8</sup>

Dvořák's words reflected his interest in the body of songs as a whole for a source of musical material available to composers. Moreover, he pronounced the music indigenous. Later he said: "I tried only to write in the spirit of those national American melodies."<sup>9</sup>

The extent to which these remarks affected subsequent composition is uncertain. The *Symphony No. 5* was not the first art work using themes derived from African-American melodies, but it received critical acclaim which superseded that of its predecessors.

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<sup>7</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1944), 989.

<sup>8</sup> John Tasker Howard and George Bellows, *A Short History of Music in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1957), 165.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

In 1904, the Black-British composer and conductor, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912), made his first visit to the United States. The first concert of his 1904 tour was in Washington, D.C., where he appeared with the United States Marine Band.<sup>10</sup> The following year he wrote his piano transcriptions, *Twenty-four Negro Melodies, Op. 59*. Coleridge-Taylor wrote program notes for the composition which read, “What Brahms has done for the Hungarian folk music, Dvořák for the Bohemian, and Grieg for the Norwegian, I have tried to do for these Negro Melodies.”<sup>11</sup> Coleridge-Taylor went on to pen numerous works which used African-American thematic material.

During the 30 years that followed, Black-American composers, Harry T. Burleigh (a student of Dvořák), R. Nathaniel Dett, William Grant Still, and William Dawson, also achieved acclaim for their works which employed African-American thematic material, primarily Spirituals, within their compositions. These learned professors of music decided to collect these Spiritual melodies and notate them. This undertaking was not only beneficial in terms of teaching this special music but was also highly instrumental in preserving the musical culture of a displaced people.

It is important to note that although Spirituals were initially learned aurally, in the cotton fields, on the plantations, and in the Black churches of the south, this extraordinary music is now primarily learned and taught using written notation, thus making it accessible to those who are more comfortable in the visual learning tradition. “As every careful researcher in music knows, the matter of who reads, and what, is of far-reaching

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<sup>10</sup> William J. Zick, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor* (Ann Arbor, MI: African Heritage in Classical Music, 2009, accessed 3 March 2009); available from <http://chevalierdesaintgeorges.homestead.com/Song.html>; Internet.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



importance equal to who hears, and what.”<sup>12</sup> But the reverse is also true, the matter of who hears is of far-reaching importance and *equal* to who reads, and what.

Spirituals may be performed either by groups or as solo pieces, and they may be performed a cappella or employ instrumental accompaniment. However, in their “purist” form, Spirituals would be performed without the use of instrumental accompaniment. In contemporary Spiritual compositions, the solo lines, as well as the choral parts, are strictly notated with only minimal use of ornamentation. This is one of the primary differences between the genres of Spirituals and Gospel Music. Although Spirituals are now strictly notated, they still retain many of the aspects of the African oral tradition, thus making them equally accessible to those more accustomed to the aural learning tradition.

In Spirituals, the performance practice known as “call and response” is often used where a lead singer intones a melodic statement followed by a response from the group. This practice was common among African-American slaves and used in the same manner as one would communicate in verbal conversation. Made up of two distinct phrases, in the first phrase, one individual would ask a question or make a statement and the group would answer or make a direct response in the second phrase. This practice was passed down through the years and across the continents from Africa to North America and, through the Spiritual, carried over into the genre of Gospel Music. Ortiz Walton states:

Contrasted with the music-for-the-elite philosophy prevalent in the West, African music retained its functional and collective characteristics. The element of improvisation was developed rather than abandoned, and it found its way into Black music in this country. Similarly, the unifying element of audience participation was also retained.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> T.J. Anderson, *Racial and Ethnic Directions in American Music* (The College Music Society, 1982), 44.

<sup>13</sup> Ortiz Walton, *A Comparative Analysis of the African and Western Aesthetic* (In *The Black Aesthetic*, Addison Gayle, Jr. (ed), Doubleday, 1972), 159.

Frances Hall Johnson, one of the champions in the performance and composition of Spirituals, often used the element of “call and response” in his arrangements. Born in Athens, Georgia on March 12, 1888, his early musical influence is credited to his grandmother, a former slave who exposed him to Spirituals. He graduated from Allen University and continued his studies at the University of Pennsylvania, The Juilliard School and the University of Southern California. He began his professional career as a violinist performing with the conductor James Reese Europe and his orchestra. He later turned to choral music, specializing in the performance of Spirituals. He stated that he wanted to:

show how the American Negro slaves – in 250 years of constant practice, self-developed under pressure but equipped with their inborn sense of rhythm and drama (plus their new religion) – created, propagated and illuminated an art-form which was, and still is, unique in the world of music.<sup>14</sup>

During slavery and beyond, language and words used by African Americans often had double meanings or secret codes. In Hall Johnson’s piece entitled, “*Run Li’l Chllun!*” the term, “devil” and “Satan” are terms referring not only to the mystical devil found in scripture but also describe the slave master as well as the evil and corrupt condition of slavery. This song can be best understood as a metaphor of the Nat Turner Rebellion.

Prompted by a vision, a slave by the name of Nat Turner declared:

I heard a loud noise in the heavens. And the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent...I should arise and prepare myself and slay my enemies with their own weapons.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hall Johnson, “Notes on the Negro Spiritual” (*Readings in Black American Music*, comp. and ed. Eileen Southern, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. W. W. Norton, 1983), 277.

<sup>15</sup> Rick Groleau and others, *Africans in America: Brotherly Love* (Arlington, VA: PBS Online, 1998, accessed 23 February 2009); available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3p1518.html>; Internet.

During the Nat Turner uprising of 1831, Nat Turner, along with more than 40 other slaves, rebelled against the repression of slavery in South Hampton County, Virginia and stabbed, shot, and clubbed at least 55 White people to death including his slave master and his master's entire family. In response, the state executed 55 Blacks and banished many more.

However, no one could have anticipated the horrific backlash caused by this uprising. In the hysterical climate that followed the rebellion, close to 200 Black people, many of whom had nothing to do with the rebellion, were murdered by White mobs. In addition, slaves as far away as North Carolina were accused of having a connection with the insurrection and subsequently tried and hanged.<sup>16</sup> Sadly these types of events occurred even following emancipation, the "Rosewood Massacre" of 1923, being only one example.<sup>17</sup>

Hall Johnson's *Run Li'l Chillun!* portrays such an event and utilizes the cry of the caller, using the performance practice of "call and response." The caller urgently implores the flock to, "run, run for your lives li'l chillun, the devils' gone loose in the land!"

The performance practice of Spirituals cannot be articulated any more precisely than the actual words of Frances Hall Johnson. In the preface of his collection, *Thirty Spirituals Arranged for Voice and Piano*, Johnson stated:

True enough, this music was transmitted to us through humble channels, but its source is that of all great art everywhere—the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Sherry DuPree, *Remembering Rosewood* (Gainesville, FL: Displays for Schools, 1997, accessed 11 February 2010); available from <http://www.displaysforschools.com/history.html>; Internet.

unquenchable, divinely human longing for a perfect realization of life. It traverses every shade of emotion without spilling over in any direction. Its most tragic utterances are without pessimism, and its lightest, brightest moments have nothing to do with frivolity. In its darkest expressions there is always a hope, and in its gayest measures a constant reminder. Born out of the heart-cries of a captive people who still did not forget how to laugh, this music covers an amazing range of mood. Nevertheless, it is always serious music and should be performed seriously, in the spirit of its original conception.<sup>18</sup>

### **Origin and Performance Practice of Gospel Music**

Gospel Music came into existence at the end of the nineteenth century, first becoming popular in the early 1920's. Unlike Spirituals, whose origin is in the cotton fields of the South, Gospel songs grew out of the urbanized cities of the North. While Chicago is considered to be the birth place of Gospel Music, Philadelphia and Memphis were also endemic to the genre's development.<sup>19</sup> African-American pastor and composer, Dr. Charles A. Tindley (1851-1933), was one of the earliest composers of hymns and Gospel Music. His composition, "I'll Overcome Someday," is credited to be the basis for the United States Civil Rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome."<sup>20</sup>

Early Gospel Music is basically the sacred counterpart of the Blues, another great musical genre growing out of the African-American experience. Thomas A. Dorsey, commonly referred to as the father of Gospel Music, was born in Georgia in 1899. Dorsey was initially a leading Blues piano player known by the name "Georgia Tom."<sup>21</sup> Following Dorsey's conversion to Christianity, he began composing songs in the hymn style of Dr. Charles A. Tindley.

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<sup>18</sup> Hall Johnson, *Thirty Spirituals: Arranged for Voice and Piano* (New York: G. Schirmer; dist., Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1949), 5.

<sup>19</sup>Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> Think Quest, *Maryland's African-American Heritage: Charles A. Tindley* (Think Quest, accessed 23 February 2009; available from <http://library.thinkquest.org/10854/tindley.html>; Internet.

<sup>21</sup> Sheila Curran Bernard, *This Far by Faith: Thomas Dorsey* (Arlington, VA: PBS Online, 2003, accessed 23 February 2009); available from [http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/thomas\\_dorsey.html](http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/thomas_dorsey.html); Internet.

Dorsey's early compositions had little of the emotional feeling that his later songs possessed. In 1932, after the death of his first wife and child, Dorsey wrote what would become one of his most famous songs entitled, *Take My Hand, Precious Lord*. The song, *Peace in the Valley*, which is often attributed to Elvis Presley, is also among Dorsey's more than 500 compositions.

The emotional similarities of Gospel and Spirituals are astounding. Yet, it is interesting to note that Spiritual texts such as the one found in *Soon I Will be Done with the Trouble of the World*, often stress the longing for the otherworldly, hoping to escape and find happiness on the other side, while Gospel texts, on the other hand, tend to seek help *from* the otherworldly to assist in *this* life.

Other differences between the two genres stem from the method by which they are taught and learned. Spirituals tend to lean toward the visual approach and Gospel Music toward the aural approach. The written notation found in Spirituals takes precedence and is adhered to closely with only minimal "ornamentation" if any. However, in Gospel Music, the written page, if a written page is provided at all, is used only as a guide and does not take precedence over individual musical interpretation. Just as in Blues, "ornamentation" (also known as improvisation) is highly encouraged. Although Gospel Music can be performed a cappella, instrumental accompaniment not only enhances but is an essential element in its performance.

The practice of "call and response" is also found in Gospel Music, the tradition having been passed on from the Spiritual. Although the concept of "call and response" is basically the same in both, in Gospel Music, the lead singer is encouraged to interpret the solo part "freely" whereas the solo singer adheres more closely to the written notation in

Spirituals. Additionally, the use of three-part choral harmony; soprano, alto and tenor, is characteristic of Gospel Music. Spirituals are set to the traditional four-part choral harmony with the added bass voice.

## Chapter 3: Identifying and Analyzing Aural and Visual Learning Traditions

### **Different Cultural Approaches to Learning**

Several things may cause divisions between people. Among them are: ignorance, economics, race, gender, cultural values, religion, education, politics, language, perception, and identity.<sup>22</sup> Items from the preceding list can affect one's musical taste or preference and that "taste" or preference can generate an overall perception of a culture or ethnic group. Music is often associated with a culture or group, and people often associate musical genres with racial identification.<sup>23</sup> The thesis of this dissertation however, is not a study of cultural perceptions as it relates to musical genres and biases (this is the topic for another study entirely), but an investigation into the different cultural approaches to learning as it relates to music – more specifically, the aural and visual approaches to learning and ways in which these two approaches can be brought together.

The visual learning tradition is not superior or inferior to the aural cultural learning tradition. Based on the experience of the researcher as well as others from similar backgrounds as the researcher, children who have the good fortune of simultaneously learning music by rote and learning to read music notation often deem both learning traditions to be of equal importance.

Although both the visual and aural traditions exist within numerous cultural and ethnic groups, certain groups tend to lean toward one learning tradition over the other.

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<sup>22</sup>Bob Rometo, "Creating Unity and Causing Miracles." Lecture at the National Conductor's Summit: The John F. Kennedy Center, 6 September 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

European culture (Western society) leans heavily toward the visual learning tradition, thus the aural tradition has often been deemed inferior.

The two hemispheres [of the brain] are now known as “left” and “right.” The left hemisphere is thought to function in a verbal, analytical mode, while the right hemisphere is nonverbal, global, or “synthetic,” spatial, complex, and intuitive. Clearly just as the latter was previously known as the “minor” function, it has consistently and systematically, even – one could say – institutionally, been devalued in European civilization/culture. It is rarely even recognized as being a source of “intelligence.” It is neither “tested for” nor encouraged. Intelligence in European society has been identified with the cognitive mode that is generated and controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain.<sup>24</sup>

### **A Pilot Study**

For the body is not one member, but many...if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing?...But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.<sup>25</sup>

The researcher devised a study to observe the effects (if any) in which the Western societal culture places on the visual learning tradition over the aural learning tradition.

The researcher created a song:

- which used “non-sense” syllables. In this case “da, da, da”
- that was written in four parts; soprano, alto, tenor, bass
- where each vocal part had a different “melodic line” and rhythm
- that contained melodic lines and rhythms which were no more than two measures in length

The test groups consisted of:

- individuals from the ages of adolescence and up
- groups from various ethnic and racial backgrounds (African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Caucasian)
- male and female

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<sup>24</sup> Marimba Ani, *Yurugu; An Afrikan-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (Africa World Press, 1994), 77-78.

<sup>25</sup> American Bible Society; *Holy Bible* [King James Version] I Cor. 12:14, 17-18 (The American Bible Society, 1999).



- groups of individuals from varied musical backgrounds, including all classical musicians, all jazz musicians, and “mixed genre” groups with gospel, classical and jazz backgrounds
- groups which had the ability to read musical notation

Group composition included a:

- 7-member Vocal Jazz group (mixed ethnic and racial group)
- 25-member professional concert choir (majority Caucasian)
- 30-member high school choir (mixed ethnic and racial group)
- 30-member college choir (majority Caucasian)
- 20-member group composed of music educators (majority African American)
- 50-member group composed of music educators from various musical and ethnic backgrounds from across the country (conducted at a Music Educator’s National Conference).

(Note: groups were not “tested” at the same time or location.)

Process (Part 1): Teaching by rote

1. The groups were first divided into sections: soprano, alto, tenor, bass.
2. Each group was then taught its melodic part by rote using the nonsense syllable, “da” and was not allowed to sing the part more than three times.
3. After each section had been introduced to its particular voice part, words were added which corresponded to their particular voice part.
4. The singers were not allowed to sing their melodic lines with words more than three times.
5. The entire group was then instructed to sing together as an ensemble. This was done three times, all by rote.

Keep in mind that by this time, the members of each group had sung their individual parts at least 9 times; three times using “non-sense” syllables, three times using words, and three times with the ensemble. Therefore, by this time they were very familiar with their parts and were singing quite well as an ensemble. It is also important to note that during

the rote section of the study, the group was looking outward; the singers focused their attention on the conductor-researcher and on others around them.

#### Process (Part 2): Teaching using musical notation

1. Handouts of written musical notation of the melodic lines that had previously been sung by rote were then given to each group member. These handouts consisted of the musical notation only, and did not include the words or nonsense syllables.

2. After being given time to look over the handouts, they were then asked to sing once again *as a group* using the nonsense syllable “da.”

What happened next was quite striking: the singers at once became fixated on the written score. It can be argued that they were simply trying to sight-read the music, and this may be true to some extent. However, to see if they would “recover” to the level of ensemble singing that had taken place previously when singing by rote, they were instructed to sing the written notation once again.

But even after they realized that they were already familiar with the melody that appeared on the page, they *still* remained “tethered” to *their own* individual written part. Their sense of listening to one another seemed to shut off and they were no longer singing *together* as an ensemble. They became isolated by their attention to the written part rather than listening to the group as a whole. The *Gestalt* principle was almost completely abandoned.

#### Process (Part 3): Self discovery

1. The groups were then asked to sing once again as an ensemble using the nonsense syllable “da.”

2. While the group was singing, individual members were assigned the task of observing those around them. (No one was asked to look around and observe those around them during the “by rote” section of this study because the participants were already looking outward and engaged with those around them.)

These individuals realized that when they looked around at the group, the tops of each member’s head was the most prominent feature, not their faces as when the group was singing together by rote. The majority of them were looking down at the written page even though they already had the melodic lines practically memorized.

At the completion of the exercise participants from every group expressed amazement at how easily they had become “self-absorbed” and fixated on the written page. Indeed, members of several of the groups literally “threw” their written manuscripts in the air out of embarrassment and disgust upon discovering that they were themselves “guilty” of becoming disengaged from those around them. The same or similar results took place with each of the six study groups. Following the exercise, the room was “ripe” for discussion pertaining to the outcome of what had just taken place.

Again, the main purpose of the preceding exercise was to examine the hypothesis and present an *identifiable* example that certain cultural approaches to learning can take precedence over another, specifically, the visual over the aural. Although both are of equal importance, one can be elevated above the other based on an individual or group’s “pre-conceived” way of learning. The beliefs derived from a group’s “pre-conceived” way of learning can unconsciously cut them off and separate them from those of other learning traditions, races or ethnic groups. Coming to this realization is the key to bridging the cultural divide. Based on the identifiable outcomes of this exercise, the

researcher was able to develop a foundational methodology using Gospel Music and Spirituals to bridge those from the aural cultural learning tradition with those from the visual cultural learning tradition.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis: Personal Discussion Pertaining to the Visual and Aural Cultural Learning Traditions

To help in identifying characteristics of visual and aural learning, the researcher felt it necessary to hear personal testimonies from those who participated in the Pilot Study conducted in Chapter 3. No specific “test” questions were given to each group; instead, each group was asked to respond to what had taken place during the exercise. Notes were taken in order to see if there would be similar responses from each group although the specific groups were not related in location or group composition.

### **Personal Discussion**

Upon completion of the exercise outlined in Chapter 3, several participants in one group literally “threw” their written manuscripts in the air. When asked why, one educator explained that she felt she had been “caught” doing exactly what she instructed her students *not* to do which is, hide their faces in the score as opposed to looking up and outwardly *expressing* the music. Another participant found it amazing to note how the members of the group seemed to stop listening to those around them after the written manuscript was placed in front of them.

The unifying comments from each of these groups emphasized how the visual aspect of the exercise seemed to take precedence over the aural once the group received the written score. As a result, participants stated that they listened less to those around them than during the rote section of the exercise.

After listening to their personal stories, and compiling notes, and realizing that the introduction of notated music tended to create isolation among the singers, another exercise was designed to see if Gospel Music and Spirituals could be used as a tool to

cultivate intra-cultural understanding and self awareness in order to promote cross-cultural communication.

This exercise involved teaching *selected* Spirituals and Gospel songs.

The groups consisted of:

- adults from the ages of adolescence and up
- groups from various ethnic and racial backgrounds
- male and female
- groups of individuals from varied musical backgrounds
- groups in which some members had the ability to read musical notation while others did not
- groups in which some members were from the visual cultural learning tradition and some were from the aural cultural learning tradition

Group composition included:

- a 20-member amateur adult choir that was all African American; backgrounds primarily from the visual cultural learning tradition (Group A)
- a 45-member amateur adult choir that was majority African American; backgrounds primarily from the aural cultural learning tradition (Group B)
- a 20-member amateur adult choir that was all Caucasian; backgrounds primarily from the visual cultural learning tradition (Group C)
- a 30-member amateur adult choir that was majority Caucasian; backgrounds from both the visual and aural learning traditions (Group D)
- a 25-member mixed ethnic and racial high-school choir, Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, Asian; backgrounds from both aural and visual cultural learning traditions (Group E)
- a 25-member mixed ethnic and racial amateur adult choir, Hispanic, Caucasian, African American; backgrounds from both the aural and visual cultural learning traditions (Group F)
- an 8-member mixed ethnic and racial professional vocal ensemble, African American, Caucasian, Asian, Hispanic; backgrounds from both the aural and visual cultural learning traditions, various musical backgrounds (Group G)
- a 15-member amateur Korean men's chorus (Group H)
- a 30-member amateur Japanese choir (Group I)

Particular attention was given to:

- each group's response to how the singers learned the Spiritual as compared to how they learned the Gospel song
- social interaction within the group; level of comfort or discomfort exhibited by "body language"
- social interaction within the group; level of comfort or discomfort exhibited by verbal responses and conversational comment

(Note: Groups were not "tested" at the same time or location.)

Questions asked of each group:

1. How did your experience learning the Spiritual differ from that of learning the Gospel song?
2. How did your visual or aural learning tradition affect your approach to learning the Gospel song or Spiritual?

The questions were presented orally in order to encourage verbal communication and interaction between the participants. Responses were notated in a journal.

### **Process and Comparative Analysis**

- **Groups A and B** were composed of mostly African Americans and were first introduced to a Spiritual using written notation and then a Gospel song taught by rote.

**Group A:** This group, with a background primarily in the visual learning tradition, displayed minimal signs of discomfort after initially being introduced to the notated Spiritual. However, when the Gospel song was taught to them by rote, there were observable signs of discomfort displayed both by body language and verbal comments. They were obviously less familiar with learning songs by rote and had "nothing tangible" in front of them to see. But, based on their comments and perhaps because of their racial background that focuses on the aural tradition, this group was not opposed to the idea of learning a song by rote.

It was the researcher's perception that this group, being African American, did not want to give the impression that they were unfamiliar with a genre that was culturally identifiable as "their own." This perception was based on the comments by members of the group; "when I was a child we sang Gospel Music in my Aunt 'so and so's' church." Another response was, "It's been quite a while since I've sung Gospel Music but we used to sing it when I was growing up."

**Group B:** This group's background was primarily from the aural learning tradition. The singers displayed a great deal of discomfort after initially being introduced to the notated Spiritual because they were less familiar with reading musical notation. However, when introduced to the Gospel song which they learned by rote, it could be observed both by body language and verbal comments that the group was much more at ease.

- **Groups C and D** were mostly Caucasian and the procedure was reversed. They were first introduced to a Gospel song taught by rote, followed by a Spiritual taught by written notation.

**Group C:** This group's background was primarily from the visual learning tradition. The members of this group displayed a great deal of discomfort after initially being introduced to the Gospel song which was taught by rote. Not only were they less familiar with learning songs aurally, there was nothing "tangible" in front of them to see. Additionally they had nothing "tangible" to grasp from their *life experience* relating to Gospel Music. The level of discomfort within this group was so great that many were almost completely opposed to learning a song of *any kind* by rote. However, when introduced to the notated Spiritual, it could be observed both by body language and verbal comments that the group was much more comfortable, and the anxiety of those opposed to learning a song by rote disappeared.



**Group D:** This group's background was from both the visual and aural learning traditions. The members of this group displayed some discomfort after initially being introduced to the Gospel song. Like **Group C**, this group was less familiar with learning songs aurally and they had nothing "tangible" in front of them to see. But, they were less opposed to learning a song by rote than **Group C**, possibly because some of them had prior experience singing Gospel songs. When introduced to the notated Spiritual, the comfort level of the group greatly increased. It was the researcher's perception that at this point, many seemed to "clasp" on to the written manuscript as if it were a "security blanket" and became engrossed within the written score. The researcher removed the scores from the hands of various participants in order to encourage other members of the group to relax and stay engaged with those around them. Several participants actually resisted losing their "security blanket." They were also "afraid" of being instructed to add body movement and clapping while singing (although body movement was not introduced to them by the researcher).

- **Groups E, F, and G** were first introduced to a Spiritual taught by written notation followed by a Gospel song taught by rote.

**Group E:** This group was a mixed ethnic and racial high-school choir with a background from both the aural and visual learning traditions. This group displayed some discomfort after initially being introduced to the Spiritual. This discomfort stemmed primarily from the students' level of expertise in reading musical notation. Those who were more comfortable with reading musical notation showed less signs of discomfort. Those who were less comfortable with reading musical notation listened to those around them in order to learn the part aurally. There was not much interaction between the aural

and visual learners. The aural learners did not seek help from those who were more familiar with reading musical notation and the students who could read notation did not offer help to those less familiar with reading musical notation. Instead, they simply sang louder in order to be heard by those having difficulty. When taught the Gospel song by rote, it could be observed both by body language and verbal comments that the comfort level of the entire group increased. They were all eager to learn a song by rote and were totally comfortable with the process. They were also eager to clap and add body movement (even though the researcher did not instruct them to add body movement or to clap).

**Group F:** This group was a mixed ethnic and racial amateur adult choir with backgrounds from both the aural and visual cultural learning traditions. Upon being initially introduced to a Spiritual followed by a Gospel song, as with **Group E**, those who were more comfortable with reading musical notation showed less signs of discomfort. Unlike the high school students however, those who were less comfortable with reading musical notation did not listen more to those around them, instead they voiced their discomfort because they were not able to read music. When taught the Gospel song by rote, the comfort level of those from the aural learning tradition increased. Those in this group who leaned more toward the aural tradition began to sing louder and were eager to clap and display body movement in contrast to those who were from the visual tradition. These actions only seemed to heighten the level of discomfort by those less familiar with the aural learning tradition.

Comments by this group prompted the researcher to rethink the process of introducing the Spiritual first to mixed groups of this type. The body language and verbal

comments produced feelings of uneasiness *in the researcher* and a sense that many individuals from both traditions would not return for another session. At a future session with a different group made up of approximately the same composition as **Group F**, the researcher introduced a Gospel song *first* followed by a Spiritual with totally different results. These results and processes are explained in further detail in Chapter 5.

**Group G:** This group was a mixed ethnic and racial *professional* vocal ensemble with backgrounds from both the aural and visual learning traditions and various musical backgrounds. The comfort level of the group was based more on the difficulty of the piece. Though all members of the group had knowledge and experience reading musical notation, those who were more adept in this area demonstrated less discomfort but all readily adapted to the task at hand. When introduced to the Gospel song by rote, those from the aural cultural learning tradition flowed easily into this section of the exercise as well. However, those from the visual learning tradition demonstrated some discomfort with this section of the exercise both through their body language and verbally.

When the researcher questioned participants in **Group G** about their experience he learned that the singers who came from a background where both learning traditions, the aural and visual, were developed and encouraged simultaneously felt that neither genre was considered more or less difficult based on whether the piece was learned by rote or using musical notation; rather, the “comfort” level was based upon the difficulty of the music.

A singer who leaned more toward the aural tradition had less difficulty improvising when singing the Gospel song. However her comfort level lessened when learning the

Spiritual by written notation and she admitted to “not being as sharp in her music reading skills as others in the group.”

Some of the comments from those coming from the visual cultural learning tradition were: “I felt like I was able to rely on my instincts more by singing Gospel. I felt like I was able to let myself go.” Other comments were, “...singing Gospel Music by rote requires a certain amount of trust in the leader but especially in yourself. You don’t have the music in front of you to guide you.”

- **Group H** (amateur Men’s Chorus; all Asian [Korean]), was first introduced to a Spiritual (written notation) followed by a Gospel song (by rote)
- **Group I** (amateur choir; all Asian [Japanese]), was first introduced to a Gospel song (by rote) followed by a Spiritual (written notation)

It was observed that these two groups (both Korean and Japanese), had little difficulty approaching either the Spirituals or Gospel songs. The groups seemed to be comfortable with the fact that one genre was taught by rote and the other was taught using written notation. They also seemed to understand that the genres were different and therefore should be performed as such but there was no “resistance” in performing either genre in a stylistically correct manner. Participants were eager to learn both styles with very little signs of discomfort. The main difficulty for everyone involved, was the language barrier, sometimes being required to speak through an interpreter.

Observing the response of the Asian groups prompted many other questions by the researcher such as: Was it common to teach and use both the visual and aural learning traditions within this culture? Did the lack of resistance stem from not having preconceived ideas regarding Gospel Music and Spirituals? Was it the experience of living in a different culture (than the United States) that allowed them to be so adaptive, to be open to something new? The researcher raised these questions to the Asian groups.

The main response from the Korean group was that it was a common practice to learn songs *both* by rote and by written notation in their culture. The Japanese translator explained that the Japanese do not have preconceived ideas about either Spirituals *or* Gospel Music. They are both perceived as something new and different and they are therefore eager to learn music from another culture.

Although many Asian cultures can be quite homogeneous when it comes to social norms and conformity, the Korean and Japanese groups were extremely willing to assimilate both styles. This was in stark contrast to the American groups who displayed acceptance or resistance based perhaps upon their particular cultural learning tradition.

It is interesting and enlightening to review the comments from members of these various groups:

Several participants from the visual learning tradition stated that learning from another learning tradition was almost considered a “mortal” sin. For example, learning to play anything by “ear” or improvise was taboo. While studying music as a child, their music instructor would actually report this “offense” to their parents if they were “caught” improvising or making up anything that was not on the written page, even if they were not playing a classical piece of music. Those in the group from the visual cultural learning tradition had to be given “permission” and had to be reassured that it was OK to play by “ear.” Several expressed fear that they would lose their ability to read music if they began playing by ear.

On the other hand, several from the aural cultural tradition expressed a fear of losing their “natural” ability to play by ear if they learned musical notation and were placed in a visual cultural environment for any length of time. Others acknowledged the fact that

they knew how to sing songs well before they could ever read musical notation but felt that upon entering formal education, the visual learning tradition began to take precedence over their “natural” aural learning abilities and that they began to lose confidence in their “natural” aural abilities.

Whether brought on by parental or societal pressures, could the fears and preconceived ideas of those from the aural and visual learning traditions have an influence on their life perceptions in regard to cultural and racial integration? Delving deeper into the culture of these two groups may provide a greater understanding of those from the visual and aural learning traditions. With this greater understanding one may find methods for bridging them and promoting cross-cultural and intra-cultural communication between groups.

## Chapter 5: Methodology and Curriculum Using Spirituals and Gospel Music to Promote Cross-Cultural and Intra-Cultural Communication

The socio-emotional and cognitive resources that learners bring are situated in and influenced by cultural processes that do reflect experiences based on ethnicity, race and socio-economic status.<sup>26</sup>

When culturally-rooted resources that derive from a group's particular learning tradition are used, learning becomes an enjoyment rather than a "chore" learning is enhanced and discomfort is diminished.<sup>27</sup> In other words, "start with what they know." Finding common ground among groups of individuals from varied cultural learning traditions helps to establish a positive atmosphere for learning. This chapter will introduce methodologies to be used to design a dual curriculum for *Spirituals and Gospel Music Performance Practice*.

### **Introducing individuals from the aural learning tradition to the visual learning tradition**

Spirituals and Gospel can be used to introduce those from the aural cultural learning tradition to the visual learning tradition. The process of making music educators as well as students feel more comfortable when they are confronted with the opportunity to cross over to an unfamiliar learning tradition should be as "painless" and as natural as possible.

The following steps may be used to introduce those from the aural cultural learning tradition to the visual learning tradition:

1. The culturally rooted resources that derive from a group's particular learning tradition must be identified. [Start with what they know.]

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<sup>26</sup> Carol D. Lee, from Lecture; *Every Shut Eye Ain't Sleep: Learning as multi-dimensional cultural processes* (Evanston, IL: Professor of Learning Sciences and African American Studies: Northwestern University, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

- a. *Both* groups identify with the ability to listen and sing by rote.
2. Use a beginning level Spiritual that is not well known such as *Run Li'l Chillun!* by Hall Johnson.<sup>28</sup> [I suggest using this particular Spiritual because it was written by a leading composer in the genre and because it is repetitive enough for the novice. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find because it is no longer in print. However, it is still available by many retail distributors. If this particular piece is unattainable, you may use a piece such as, *Steady Soldier*, written by Diedre Robinson, (Washington, D.C.: Robinson Music, 1986).]
3. The Spiritual should be taught by rote first. *Do Not* try to teach this song using written notation initially.
4. After the singers have learned their particular part by rote, introduce them to the written manuscript.
5. Point out the way in which the rhythms they have been singing correspond to the written page.
6. Point out the way in which the melodic lines have a distinctive contour; when the notes go up, the pitch also goes up in the same manner as when singing the melodic lines by rote.
7. Teach the solo, “call and response” part by rote.
  - a. Use the same method with the lead vocalist as with the group. Once the melody is learned by rote, point out the similarities in the written manuscript.
8. Finally, when this piece has been mastered, introduce the group to another beginning Spiritual, but use a combination of teaching by rote and teaching by written notation.

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<sup>28</sup> Hall Johnson, *Run Li'l Chillun!* (New York: Robbins Music Corporation, 1941).



[Using a combination, by rote and by note, continues to draw from the group's culturally-rooted resources while building upon and reinforcing the new cultural learning tradition to which the group has now been exposed.]

Notice that Spirituals as opposed to Gospel Music is the suggested genre to introduce groups from the aural cultural learning tradition to the visual learning tradition. *The ultimate goal is to bring together those from the aural cultural learning tradition and those from the visual cultural learning tradition.*

### **Introducing individuals from the visual learning tradition to the aural learning tradition**

The following steps are suggested to introduce those from the visual cultural learning tradition to the aural tradition:

1. The culturally rooted resources that derive from a group's particular learning tradition must be identified. [Start with what they know.]

- a. *Both* groups identify with the ability to listen and sing by rote.

2. Use a beginning level Gospel song such as *I Need You to Survive* by Hezekiah Walker.<sup>29</sup>

[ I suggest this song because it is easily accessible on recordings as well as the internet. The message is universal and the melodic line basic for the novice who is learning to sing Gospel Music.]

- a. Teach *only* the melodic line by rote. *Do Not* teach parts at this time.

[It is imperative to introduce only the melody at first. The observations found in this study have shown that those from the visual cultural learning tradition tend to feel very “exposed” without having a visual sheet or manuscript to hold. Some would say, maybe

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<sup>29</sup> *I Need You to Survive* [Lyrics] (St Lyrics, 2009, accessed 27 April 2009); available from <http://www.stlyrics.com/songs/h/hezekiahwalker19500/ineedyoutosurvive525539.html>; Internet.

you should give them the words while teaching them this songs by rote. I disagree. The goal is to encourage the group to rely solely on the instructor, and even more importantly, to “regain” a sense of connection with the process of learning by rote. They must regain the trust in their natural ability to learn by listening and imitating.]

3. Recite the words first and have the group repeat; only one section at a time.

4. Recite and sing two sections at a time and have the group repeat until the entire song is completed.

a. Point out to the singers that they have just learned an entire song by rote. Also point out that not only have they learned the notes to the song, but they have also learned to sing the melodic line, the rhythm (syncopation), and the style simultaneously.

5. When the entire song is learned, proceed to another song but come back to this song at the end of the session to keep the song “fresh” in their minds before leaving the rehearsal.

6. When the first piece has been mastered, the group should be introduced to another beginning level Gospel song such as *Perfect Praise*, also known by the title, *How Excellent* by Walt Whitman and the Soul Children of Chicago.<sup>[30]</sup> <sup>[31]</sup>

7. Give the group the written text to the song. *Perfect Praise* is easily accessible to the novice who is learning Gospel Music. Two-thirds of the song is in unison, and therefore can easily be built upon following the song, *I Need You to Survive*. The other one-third of the song is in parts which are also easily accessible to the novice. (Note that Gospel Music is primarily sung using three-part harmony.) There is typically no bass

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<sup>30</sup> Walt Whitman’s Soul Children of Chicago, *Walt Whitman’s Soul Children of Chicago* (Chicago, IL: WWSCC, 2009, accessed 27 April 2009); available from <http://www.soulchildrenchicago.com/>; Internet.

<sup>31</sup> *How Excellent is Thy Name* [Video] (Technorati, 2009, accessed 27 April, 2009); available from <http://technorati.com/videos/youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D3w1S5xbeSO0>; Internet.

part. However, for those who are new to teaching and learning this style of music, this song can easily be adapted to four-part harmony by having the basses sing in unison with the tenors, one octave lower. It is suggested that you give the group the written text to the song, unlike the Hezekiah Walker piece. It is a common practice among those who are from the aural tradition to use a written text, albeit not the written musical notation. This written text gives those from the visual tradition something tangible to hold on to while at the same time, not become “fixated” on the written notation; they are able to use their culturally-rooted resources found in their visual culture while still being encouraged to use their natural aural ability.

8. Teach the group the unison sections first.

9. Finally, teach the group the last section of the song beginning with the tenors and basses, followed by the altos, and lastly, add the sopranos.

By this time the group will automatically respond in a positive way because the aesthetic effect of this song is almost immediate. This particular piece is widely known among Gospel Music circles and where it is not known, the power of the text combined with the harmonic structure produces a sound commonly associated with Gospel, allowing the group to feel a sense of accomplishment in newly-acquired abilities.

Notice that Gospel as opposed to Spirituals is the suggested genre to introduce groups from the visual cultural learning tradition to the aural learning tradition.

Because Spirituals are now primarily learned visually, introducing those from the visual tradition to Spirituals only reinforces their visual learning tradition. Experience indicates that it is sometimes much more difficult to teach groups from the visual cultural learning tradition the correct stylistic practices involved in singing Spirituals *after*

introducing them first to Spirituals as opposed to Gospel. By teaching them a Gospel song followed by a Spiritual, they are often more open to the idea of expressing themselves *through* the written manuscript as opposed to approaching the Spiritual from an “analytical” point of view. *Again, the ultimate goal is to bring together those from the aural cultural learning tradition and those from the visual cultural learning tradition.*

### **Using Gospel Music and Spirituals to promote cross-cultural and intra-cultural communication**

How can Gospel Music and Spirituals be used to promote cross-cultural communication? By introducing Gospel Music *and* Spirituals simultaneously in an environment that embodies individuals from both the aural and the visual learning traditions, a “leveling ground” is created. In an environment that embodies individuals from both the aural and the visual learning traditions, introducing Gospel Music and Spirituals simultaneously enables both groups to draw upon culturally rooted resources that derive from each group’s particular learning tradition. One must first find a commonality between the two learning traditions. *The main culturally-rooted resource found in both learning traditions is the ability to listen and sing by rote.* Use this common thread as a bridge to unite the groups.

A process using the following steps may be used to promote cross-cultural communication:

1. Begin the session with a moderate tempo Gospel song. *Do Not* begin the session with a written Spiritual.

In order to make this curriculum successful in multicultural groups, one *must* start with the aural learning tradition first, and that is Gospel. One *must not* begin the session with notated Spirituals. There are several reasons behind this statement.

When children first learn to talk, they do so by listening first then by repeating. At the most basic stage of learning, a child is able to identify an apple visually and is also able to say the word “apple” after being taught the word by rote well before learning to read. Just as a child uses his or her natural aural abilities to learn to speak, the same applies to music. Children can usually say or rather *sing* their ABC’s well before they begin school. In effect, they learn to speak and sing melodic lines simultaneously. “Among the ways that adults teach language to children are infant-directed speech, recasting, echoing, expanding, and labeling.”<sup>32</sup> Likewise, after a song is learned by rote, students can rely on their aural experience to help them relate to notation. They are able to match sounds with symbols.

In many music educational systems, students are often taught the notes first. This is contrary to our natural way of learning according to Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998). In Suzuki’s theory of language acquisition, a child naturally learns to speak before learning to read.

Don’t start to read [musical notation] until the student is ready...If you read too soon, you play only notes, and not the musical ideas the composer wished to convey to the audience...<sup>33</sup>

The researcher became extremely uncomfortable after initially introducing a Spiritual followed by a Gospel song to **Group F**, the amateur adult choir which was a mixed ethnic and racial group with backgrounds from both the aural and visual cultural learning traditions. The level of discomfort among individuals from both learning traditions appeared to be greater because in the beginning processes of this research, the researcher

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<sup>32</sup> John W. Santrock, *Life-Span Development* (McGraw Hill, 2004), 201.

<sup>33</sup> Evelyn Hermann, *Shinichi Suzuki: The Man and His Philosophy* (Summy-Birchard, 1981), 139.

failed initially to find the commonalities among both groups. The main culturally-rooted resource found in both music learning traditions is the ability to listen and sing by rote.

A suggested Gospel song is, *Oh, Happy Day* by Edwin Hawkins.<sup>34</sup> *Oh, Happy Day* is a moderate tempo Gospel song that carries an international message and has universal appeal. The rhythm is also catchy while not entirely intimidating to those who are not accustomed to movement.

In Gospel Music, the aural learning tradition continues to dominate. But to elevate the aural over the visual would be akin to making the assertion that the ears are more important than the eyes, therefore the eyes are secondary. Sight and sound were made to complement, cooperate and function in harmony with each other. “We have to learn to look and listen simultaneously.”<sup>35</sup>

2. Give the group the written text to the song. It is a common practice among those who are from the aural cultural learning tradition to be given the written text, albeit not the written music notation. This written text also gives those from the visual cultural learning tradition something tangible to “grasp,” thereby producing a commonality between groups.

3. Recite the words first and have the group repeat in rhythm one section at a time.

4. Recite the melodic parts of the song by section and have each section echo.

5. Instruct and direct the group to make *small* rhythmic movements (Do this *sitting* down, *not* standing).

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<sup>34</sup> Artist Direct, *Edwin Hawkins Biography* (Artist Direct, 2009, accessed 28 April); available from <http://www.artistdirect.com/artist/bio/edwin-hawkins/426797>; Internet.

<sup>35</sup> Evelyn Hermann, *Shinichi Suzuki: The Man and His Philosophy* (Summy-Birchard, 1981), 139.

During this segment of the rehearsal, the individuals from the aural learning tradition tend to respond well and quickly to learning Gospel Music by rote. They also respond to the music by moving to the beat somewhat in a dance-like manner, although they do not consider it dancing. Those coming from a visual learning tradition tend to be more timid and awkward during this segment of the rehearsal. But this dance response is infectious and tends to allow the visual learners to relax, have fun and enjoy the freedom of learning by rote. To help “develop” the dance response,

- a. start with hand movement
- b. advance to foot/heel tapping
- c. continue by swaying back and forth in rhythm while sitting
- d. finally, stand while swaying (make the group feel more at ease by allowing them to use any of the above movements; the goal is to encourage freedom of movement and camaraderie between groups).

6. When the Gospel song has been “mastered” (meaning they have learned the basic notes and basic style), proceed by introducing the same group to a beginning Spiritual using written notation. Use a combination of teaching by rote and teaching by written notation.

During this segment of the rehearsal, individuals from the visual learning tradition tend to respond well and quickly to the written notation of the Spiritual. They seem to “spark” and come to life and feel more at ease. At this point, those from the aural learning tradition now begin to show signs of uneasiness. This becomes the “leveling ground.” Use a beginning level Spiritual such as *Run Li'l Chillun!* by Hall Johnson.

What usually happens next is amazing and rewarding: those from the visual culture reach out to assist those from the aural culture, but not from a paternalistic position of “superiority.” Considering that they can now relate to the feeling of discomfort, having experienced discomfort during the aural and “movement” section of the exercise, they appear to be more “compassionate” and move closer, leaning toward the other group to aid them with reading the musical notation which helps the other group feel less intimidated.

7. Point out the way in which the rhythms correspond to the written page.

8. Point out the way in which the melodic lines have a distinct contour; for example, when the notes go up, the pitch also goes up in the same manner as when singing the melodic lines by rote.

9. Rehearse the Spiritual until it has been “mastered” (meaning they have learned the basic notes and style). Following this segment of the rehearsal, *return* to the previous Gospel song by rote. An amazing observation takes place during this section of the process; now, those from the aural learning tradition make it a point to assist those from the visual cultural background with their movements and singing. Unconsciously, the two groups begin to “communicate.”

10. Discuss what has “unconsciously” taken place by asking the following questions:

a. How did your experience learning the Spiritual differ from that of learning the Gospel song?

b. How did your visual or aural learning tradition affect your approach to learning the Gospel song or Spiritual?

This opens the door for verbal communication between the groups of varied races, cultures, religions, and learning traditions.



Upon completion of this step, the researcher observed that both groups were much more relaxed than they had been at the beginning of the process. At this point, he initiated a discussion regarding what had taken place during the session. Individuals from both the visual and aural traditions were eager to share their different and similar “life” experiences. Some of those from the visual tradition expressed being intimidated by those from another racial group. More specifically, some of the Caucasians felt intimidated by African Americans because they perceived blacks to be “divinely” blessed with natural rhythmic abilities and were themselves void of this natural gift. In response, others pointed out that their [Caucasian’s] uneasiness with rhythmic movement was perhaps more related to their religious or cultural upbringing rather than their racial group. One white participant confided that she had never sat next to a black person prior to this session. Several other biases and preconceived ideas concerning the various groups were dispelled. Many African Americans in the group assumed that the other black participants were from the same or similar background, more specifically, from the aural tradition. They were surprised to find out that there were several blacks who felt very uncomfortable with learning songs by rote because they had been raised in a visual learning culture. This “revelation” was just as surprising to many of the whites in the group. There was also a group of Caucasians who were just as stunned when other whites within the group pointed out that they were from backgrounds which emphasized the aural tradition over the visual tradition. Both the black and white participants were shocked upon finding out that many Hispanics also enjoy singing Gospel Music and Spirituals. As a result of this dialogue, questions followed regarding ethnic, racial and religious practices among the various groups and individuals. Unfortunately, the

researcher had to adjourn the session because of time constraints; ending the session with clasped hands and teary eyes, while singing the Gospel song, *I Need You to Survive*; “I need you, you need me, we’re all a part of God’s family...You are important to me, I need you to survive.” Several individuals continued their conversations even after the close of the session. The outcome of this research prompted a weekly, six-month follow-up by a news reporter and resulted in a cover story in *The Washington Post* entitled, “Gospel Harmony Through Diversity.”<sup>36</sup> The ability to bridge cultural learning traditions through the use of Gospel Music and Spirituals had been accomplished. What an awesome discovery!

## **Curriculum**

A. V. Kelly defines curriculum as: (i) the range of courses from which students choose what subject matters to study; (ii) a specific learning program; (iii) the curriculum collectively describes the teaching, learning, and assessment materials available for a given course of study.<sup>37</sup>

One of the main purposes for formulating a curriculum in Gospel Music and Spirituals is to assist educators in effectively using these two genres for the purpose of connecting those from the aural and visual learning traditions. In order to become more effective in their presentation, educators must have an understanding of the history and stylistic practices of this music. Formulating a curriculum for Gospel Music can be somewhat difficult. Like the aural cultural learning tradition, the music itself comes from an oral tradition. The main source of information pertaining to Gospel Music

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<sup>36</sup> Jenna Johnson, *Gospel Harmony Through Diversity* (Washington, DC: The Washington Post June 22, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> A. V. Kelly, *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice 6th Ed* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009).

performance practice is primarily found in recordings of past and present Gospel artists. Therefore, it is imperative that a listening segment be included within the curriculum.

Although each genre can be taught as a separate class within itself, it would be highly beneficial to include some sort of comparative analysis of the two genres. To formulate any type of curriculum, one has to determine the components that are essential to the subject in order to provide a “common knowledge” foundation, a core curriculum. The following tables highlight essential topics which may be used to teach a course in Spirituals and Gospel Music and/or a comparative analysis course in Spirituals and Gospel Music. The course curriculum outlined in these tables can provide a resource as the basis for bridging those from the aural and visual traditions, using the genre of Gospel Music and Spirituals.

Table 1 lists the essential topics needed to formulate a course in Spirituals and Gospel Music.

**Table 1**

**TOPICS FOR A CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT COURSE IN SPIRITUALS  
AND GOSPEL MUSIC**

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<b>Spirituals</b>	<b>Gospel</b>
Origin and History	Origin and History
Performance Practice	Performance Practice
Teaching Methodology	Teaching Methodology
Prominent Composers/Arrangers	Prominent Composers/Arrangers
Repertoire	Repertoire
Prominent Artists to the genre	Prominent Artists to the genre
Impact upon society	Prominent Accompanists
References and Subject Related Texts	Impact upon society
Selected Discography	References and Subject Related Texts
	Selected Discography

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A basic foundation of the essential elements needed to formulate a core curriculum for a *comparative analysis* course in Spirituals and Gospel Music is outlined in Table 2. Names of both traditional as well as contemporary composers have been included. Several of the contemporary composers of Spirituals and Gospel Music are not included on this list for several reasons. Although many contemporary composers of Spirituals are quite well known to educators and because these arrangements are so “accessible” to the masses, many of the great masters have either been overlooked or even in some cases, entirely abandoned. The same is true for Gospel Music. Gospel Music is still “evolving,” and many young students and performers have very little knowledge of the traditional gospel styles that form the foundation of this genre.

Table 2 lists the essential topics necessary to formulate a dual curriculum for a comparative analysis course in *Spirituals and Gospel Music Performance Practice*.

**Table 2**

**TOPICS NEEDED TO FORMULATE A CORE CURRICULUM FOR A  
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS COURSE IN SPIRITUALS AND GOSPEL MUSIC**

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**Spirituals**

**Origin and History**

- American slavery
- field hollers; work songs
- origins in the Southern United States and rural settings of the south
- religious origins and everyday life
- many texts having dual meanings and secret codes
- text looking toward the other-worldly; longing to “escape” to the other-worldly

**Impact upon society**

- influenced the communal life of the slaves and slave owners
- played a role in aiding in the escape of the slaves

**Performance Practice**

- adherence to the written notation
- improvisation, “ornamentation” not encouraged
- four part choral harmony
- a cappella standard
- use of “call and response”

**Gospel**

**Origin and History**

- end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; first becoming popular in the early 1920’s
- Blues origins
- origins in the Northern United States and urbanized settings of the north
- religious text pertaining to personal experiences with God
- text requesting God’s help in this life rather than escaping to the other-worldly

**Impact upon society**

- played a role in the Civil Rights movement
- influenced Pop Culture

**Performance Practice**

- written notation is almost non-essential
- improvisation greatly encouraged
- three part choral harmony
- instrumental accompaniment standard
- use of “call and response” (use of lead vocalist)

Table 2 continued:

**Prominent Composers/Arrangers**

R. Nathaniel Dett  
Hall Johnson  
William Dawson  
Undine Moore  
Evelyn La Rue Pittman  
Moses Hogan  
Robert L. Morris

**Prominent artists in the genre**

Fisk Jubilee Singers  
Hall Johnson Singers  
Marian Anderson  
Paul Robeson  
Moses Hogan Chorale

**Repertoire**<sup>38</sup>

Ride on King Jesus (Nathaniel Dett)  
Run Li'l Chillun (Hall Johnson)  
Soon-ah Will be Done (Dawson)  
Sinner Man You Can't Walk My  
Path (Moore)  
Any How (La Rue Pittman)  
Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel  
(Hogan)  
Fix me, Jesus (Morris)

**Prominent Composers/Arrangers**

Thomas A. Dorsey  
Roberta Martin  
Sallie Martin  
Kenneth Morris  
James Cleveland  
Andrae Crouch  
Edwin Hawkins  
Kirk Franklin

**Prominent artists in the genre**

Thomas A. Dorsey  
Roberta Martin  
Sallie Martin  
Mahalia Jackson  
Rosetta Tharpe  
Alex Bradford  
Marion Williams  
James Cleveland  
Andrae Crouch  
Walter Hawkins  
Shirley Caesar  
Yolanda Adams

**Repertoire**<sup>39</sup>

Precious Lord (Dorsey)  
Only a Look (Roberta Martin)  
Lord Help Me to Hold Out (Cleveland)  
My Tribute (Crouch)  
O, Happy Day (Edwin Hawkins)  
Stomp (Franklin)  
(The song books compiled and edited  
by Sallie Martin and Kenneth  
Morris are essential)

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<sup>38</sup> This list represents choral arrangements of the repertoire. A great deal of solo repertoire by the various composers is also available.

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<sup>39</sup> These were songs that made a societal impact upon the genre.

Table 2 continued:

**Teaching Methodology**

- use a beginning level Spiritual
- teach the piece primarily through the means of written notation
- identify the similarities and differences as compared to singing Gospel Music

**References and Subject Related Texts**

*The Music of Black Americans: A History 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed* by Eileen Southern

*The Books of American Negro Spirituals* by James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson

*Notes on the Negro Spiritual* by Hall Johnson, comp. and ed. By Eileen Southern

**Selected Discography**<sup>40</sup>

*Old Time Spirituals: Volume 1 & 2;*  
Various Artists  
(<http://www.besmark.com/spiritual.html>)

*The Best of the Hall Johnson Centennial Festival:* Various Artists  
(Rowan University of New Jersey)

*Marian Anderson: Spirituals;* Marian Anderson (RCA)

*Paul Robeson: Spirituals;* Paul Robeson (Naxos)

**Teaching Methodology**

- use a beginning level Gospel song
- teach the song by rote
- identify the similarities and differences as compared to singing Spirituals

**References and Subject Related Texts**

*The Music of Black Americans: A History 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed* by Eileen Southern

*The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* by Tony Heilbut

*Gospel Music Performance Practice and Technique Volume 1 & 2* by Robert L. Jefferson

*Golden Gospel Songs Volume 1* by Martin Morris, Inc.

**Selected Discography**<sup>41</sup>

*Precious Lord: New Recordings of the Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey;* Thomas A. Dorsey (Columbia)

*James Cleveland Sings with the World's Greatest Choirs;* James Cleveland (Savoy)

*James Cleveland and the Cleveland Singers: God Specializes;* James Cleveland (Savoy)

*Try Jesus;* Roberta Martin (Savoy)

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<sup>40</sup> Albums included in the Selected Discography are meant to provide representations of historical recordings as well as arrangements and performances of contemporary artists.

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<sup>41</sup> Albums included in the Selected Discography include artists and/or songs which greatly influenced the genre from its beginnings to the contemporary.

Table 2 continued:

*Wade in the Water: African-American Spirituals; Volume 1; Various Artists (Smithsonian/Folkways)*

*Tuskegee Institute Choir – William Dawson Director: Spirituals; Tuskegee Institute Choir (Tuskegee Institute)*

*Remembering, Discovering, Preserving: The Brazeal Dennard Chorale; Brazeal Dennard Chorale*

*Give Me Jesus: Spirituals; Barbara Hendricks and The Moses Hogan Chorale (EMI)*

*Mahalia Jackson Sings America's Favorite Hymns; Mahalia Jackson (Sony)*

*Andre Crouch & the Disciples: Live in London; Andrae Crouch (Compendia)*

*Oh Happy Day!: The Best of the Edwin Hawkins Singers; Edwin Hawkins (Buddha)*

*Gospel's Greatest Hits; Various Artists (Light)*

*God's Property: from Kirk Franklin's Nu Nation; Kirk Franklin (Gospocentric)*



## Chapter 6: Conclusion and Practical Application

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to show the ways in which Gospel Music and Spirituals could be used as a tool to bridge learning traditions and cross racial divides. It was pointed out that individual cultures have distinct and *opposite* approaches to learning music. By outlining and developing a dual curriculum for Spirituals and Gospel Music performance practice, one can create an opportunity to bridge the gap between the aural and visual cultural learning traditions and thereby create an environment for intra-cultural and cross-cultural communication. The implications and applications behind applying this dual curriculum in *Spirituals and Gospel Music Performance Practice* carry tremendous possibilities in music education as well as in society as a whole.

### **Practical implications behind including Spirituals and Gospel Music Performance Practice as part of a core curriculum in music education**

The importance of music in the study of a culture can be supported by the 1968 “Cantometrics” report by Conrad Arensberg. From the hypothesis that “song style reinforces and expresses the major abiding themes of culture,” there emerged a conclusion that “...song seems the most summatory art of all.”<sup>42</sup> Any student of music quickly discovers that the history of the people is in the music and the history of the music is in the people.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Conrad Arensberg, *Folk Song Style and Culture* (Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968), 307.

<sup>43</sup> T.J. Anderson, *Racial and Ethnic Directions in American Music* (The College Music Society, 1982), 44.

If ethnic diversity is to be more than an “intellectual” concept, *all* American music, including Gospel and Spirituals, will have to become firmly embedded in the music educational curriculum in the same manner as they are valued in the general population. The elements that comprise the musical products of African Americans, specifically Gospel Music and Spirituals, are integral to the disciplines of music itself.

Through personal travel, conducting informal surveys among music educators nationwide, and internet research, the researcher has observed that at the time of the writing of this document, formal courses specifically pertaining to the study of Gospel Music and Spirituals are almost nonexistent in the American educational system. Although this music is often performed on choral concerts, the origins and history behind these great American musical art forms have often been neglected. The true nature and cultural significance of this music has been minimized making Gospel Music and Spirituals into a “novelty” to be inserted within or in most cases at the beginning or end of a concert program. But they should be afforded ample study and attention and should also be incorporated into the core curriculum of music education in the United States.

The potential behind including Spirituals and Gospel Music as part of the core curriculum in music education extends beyond the academic. By approaching Spirituals and Gospel Music in terms of their cultural significance, cross-cultural learning and intra-cultural awareness will become possible and might lead to the disappearance of certain myths and abandonment of the beliefs which hold one culture or learning tradition fundamentally apart from another. An attempt to understand differences in terms of cultural uniqueness, rather than in terms of

superior or inferior, is a step toward building a bridge between groups of varied racial, ethnic and learning traditions.

Regardless of the way education occurs, the choices a society and culture make concerning its structure, organization, planning, and implementation all encourage and reinforce a certain view of culture. We are not always cognizant of our own cultural view because we are in the middle of it. To see our own biases and choices, we need to observe education in other cultures and compare what is done elsewhere to what we do. Through such comparisons, the differences and the similarities often become quite clear.<sup>44</sup>

Gospel Music and Spirituals are prime idioms to help promote this type of understanding and cross-cultural learning. Being “bi-lingual” in terms of cultural learning traditions can expand one’s worldview and offer the tremendous opportunity to traverse between cultures.

Gospel Music and Spirituals are vital musical genres and demonstrate that music is *not* culture-exclusive. These related genres can be introduced to groups comprising various cultural, ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds, to help each group to better understand, appreciate, and respect individual and group differences. Therefore, a dual curriculum consisting of Spirituals and Gospel Music can be used as an effective tool to help connect those from the visual and aural cultural learning traditions and assist in eradicating many of the schisms that permeate our present day society.

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<sup>44</sup> David Matsumoto and Linda Juang, *Culture and Psychology*; 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Thomson/ Wadsworth, 2004), 148.

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