

Bringing the Past to the Present: A History of the Brazeal Dennard Chorale

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In 2002, the Brazeal Dennard Chorale celebrated thirty years of music-making. During that time the Detroit-based ensemble grew from a small group of dedicated musicians to a fifty-voice ensemble with a national reputation for choral excellence. Renowned for their moving performances of the Negro spiritual as well as contemporary African American music, the Chorale continues its mission to preserve and promote the music of African Americans. This paper examines the contributions of the Brazeal Dennard Chorale toward the advancement of African American choral music and explores the role of the Chorale in shaping both a cultural and musical identity for African Americans as well as their perceptions of that identity.

Historical Beginnings

To begin our journey it is necessary to travel back to Detroit in the early 1970s. At that time, the city was trying to recover from the devastating race riots of 1967. Tough times prevailed. Recessions, energy crises, and the crippling of the auto industry plagued the city (Poremba; 2001). Culturally, however, the city was alive with the sounds of jazz, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) continued its broadcasting and recording tradition, while Motown ruled the music industry. Nonetheless, opportunities for African Americans interested in singing or hearing classical or more traditional music were limited. Says Chorale founder, Brazeal Dennard:

I was hearing all the wonderful choral music in the community, but none of it really reflected my culture. I heard all the wonderful Bach, Brahms, Beethoven and it was all wonderful, but at the same time, in growing up in the church choir I was hearing the Afro-American spirituals or the Negro spirituals and I heard long metered hymns and then I joined the National Association of Negro Musicians and discovered all of the wonderful wealth of material that was out there that I was not hearing. And I thought well, if I have this information then I should use it, and so I established the Chorale.

Dennard's intent was to create an ensemble that would not only promote the music of African Americans, but would also provide people in Detroit with opportunities to perform classical choral music. Furthermore, he wanted to offer African Americans the chance to "perform with a major orchestra, to meet conductors, to meet young performers." In essence, Dennard sought to nurture the aesthetic and artistic needs of his singers using the Chorale as a vehicle for developing a vibrant musical culture within the Detroit community. Thus began the Brazeal Dennard Chorale.

As the Chorale began to grow, so did their ambitions. During a gathering in Dennard's home, he and other individuals voiced a concern that African American musicians were not being included as part of the DSO concert series.

We were not hearing music by African Americans nor did we see an African American conductor . . . at that time the DSO was getting a pretty hefty annual gift from the city, [the gift went] straight to the orchestra and not all of us were being represented.

To act upon their concerns, they put together a plan that would address these inequities and presented their ideas to the management of the DSO. Their plan focussed on creating a

special concert, to be performed annually with the DSO that would feature music of African Americans.

What we said was that of this concert we would like to present a major work by an African American composer and we would also like to utilize an African American soloist and have an African American conductor, [and] we wanted something on a regular basis.

Furthermore, Dennard's group believed African American musicians should be recognized for their skills and artistic talents as conductors and performers of the classical music repertoire. To that end they advocated [that] "a standard classical piece be performed [as part of the concert series] because we're inviting an African American conductor here and it's important that they see that this conductor has the skills to do that also." The symphony supported their plan and created the Classical Roots Concert Series, now in its 26th year. Some of the African American composers featured as part of the series include Adolphus Hailstork ("Done Made My Vow"), Hannibal ("African Portraits") Roland Carter ("Lift Every Voice and Sing"), and Augustus O. Hill ("Psalm 91").

Dennard's years as a music educator and later as vocal music supervisor for the city of Detroit sparked sensitivity towards the musical needs of young people in the community. He was disturbed that many young people upon graduation from high school did not have a chance to continue singing. He was also concerned that opportunities to sing quality music and especially to perform major works with an orchestra were not feasible in the public schools. To accommodate these needs, Dennard formed the Brazeal Dennard Youth Chorale in 1982. With the success of the Youth Chorale underway, Dennard turned his attention to the needs of the adult community. He recognized that there was still a portion of the adult community whose musical needs were not being met. According to Dennard, these adults "had good voices and they could do more than the average church choir, particularly now with just the emphasis on so much contemporary music. They wanted to sing some quality music, [but] didn't quite have the reading skills or the necessary foundation for [more difficult] music." Thus Dennard created the Brazeal Dennard Community Chorus in 1985.

Today, both ensembles actively support the musical needs of the Detroit community. The Youth Chorale is currently under the direction of music educator Nina Scott and is open to young singers ages 13 through 18. The Community Chorus, directed by Dr. Augustus O. Hill continues to nurture the musical growth of adult singers whose abilities or schedules do not meet the requirements of the Chorale. Both the Youth Chorale and the Community Chorus are dedicated to teaching the basics of healthy singing, developing music reading skills, while building a challenging and varied repertoire of choral music, including traditional spirituals, music of contemporary African American composers, and choral masterworks. The Chorale sponsors an active performance schedule involving all three ensembles. Although each ensemble has its own set of concerts, occasionally all three will combine to perform major works that are often featured on the Classical Roots Concert Series.

Contributions of the Chorale

The chorale's mission is to perform unlimited choral repertoire with an emphasis on African American composers. This includes a repertoire featuring historical Negro spirituals as well as works by contemporary African Americans. Perhaps one of the most important contributions of the Chorale has been towards the preservation of the Negro spirituals. Through concert performances, lectures, and recordings, the Chorale has kept this sometimes-neglected musical heritage alive. Dennard describes the Chorale's legacy in relation to the contribution of the Fisk Jubilee Singers; "It's [the spirituals] been with us since the Fisk Jubilee Singers. They've left us the printed score and we will leave the recorded score . . ." Dennard goes so far as to claim that "this may be the last time in the 20th century that this music [traditional spirituals] has been recorded."

To date the Chorale has produced five CDs featuring a wide variety of spirituals. The first recording, *Hush! Somebody's Calling My Name* (1994), includes such standards as "There is a Balm" and "Ev'ry Time I Feel The Spirit," both arranged by William Dawson; Harry T. Burleigh's "My Lord What A Morning;" and Hall Johnson's "Aint Got Time To Die." This CD also features arrangements by John Work, Roland Carter, and Wendell W. Whalum as well as an arrangement of "Fix Me Jesus" by assistant director, Augustus O. Hill. Several arrangements by conductor, Brazeal Dennard are on this recording including his well-known arrangement of "Hush! Somebody's Calling My Name," at one time Shawnee Press's top seller. When asked why he chose to arrange this spiritual Dennard responded with this story:

Well, first let me answer [with] my experience as a kid. In the Baptist church we had this wonderful, wonderful choir and...being the youngest of five I would always go to choir rehearsal with my mother who was a choir singer, and I listened to this music. But on the first Sunday evening for communion...the minister would invite the choir to leave the stands and join their families for communion. And as the choir was leaving the choir stand there was an old woman over in the corner who would just start singing, (he sings) "Hush, hush, somebody's calling my name" and it would grow, and it would catch on to the church, and they would all start singing it. It was *so* rivetting that that song never left me. And that was the first piece that I ever arranged...and I arranged it in a manner and for the voicings [so] that an SA choir could do it, SAB, TTBB, SATB. I wanted everyone to experience that! And it was just infectious. And yes it was very simple to catch on to, and it did.

This CD also opens with Dennard's arrangement of "Oh Lord I Want To Be A Christian." The story behind this arrangement is especially compelling, illustrating Dennard's penchant for storytelling, and the importance he attributes to knowing the background and history of a given piece of music.

I often get calls from conductors who are doing my music and they want to know the background and the history and these kinds of sorts of things. And I'm happy to do that. And I always encourage them to talk to the composers and the arrangers, find out what's on their mind. There was a choir that was going to do my arrangement of "Lord, I Want to be a Christian" and then when they got what was behind it and when I told them the story it was like, "Whoa! it was during a race riot in Detroit, it was back in 1943 and I left the house and I was about to step off of the curb and into the path of an oncoming car and there was a car that was going in the other direction across the street and the man yelled out 'Kill 'em, kill 'em.' Well, it was very frightening and I went back in the house and related the incident. And my mother said, 'Son, that was terrible, it shouldn't have happened, but you have to love them anyway.'" And that always stayed with me. And I arranged "Lord, I want to be a Christian" and dedicated that to my parents. Now my father was not as convinced of that as my mother (laughs) but those are the kinds of, I think, stories and incidents that give people greater insight into what the music's about.

Perhaps the chorale's two most significant CDs, in terms of the spiritual, are *Remembering...Discovering...Preserving...Songs of African American History* (1999) and *Remembering II: Significant Spirituals* (2002). Both CDs attempt to document the works of important composers and arrangers of spirituals, especially those whose work is not as well-known. The earlier CD, *Remembering...Discovering...Preserving...*, includes spirituals by R. Nathaniel Dett, William Dawson, Wendell Whalum, John Work and Hall Johnson. Undine Smith Moore's arrangement of "Oh, that Bleeding Lamb" is the first cut on the CD while two arrangements by the late Moses Hogan, "I'm Gonna Sing The Spirit" and "Elijah Rock" are the final two cuts on the CD. *Remembering II* includes more

contemporary arrangements reflecting important contributions by Hall Johnson ("Hol' de Light," "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray," and "I've Been 'Buked"), Undine Smith Moore ("Daniel, Daniel Servant of the Lord," "I Believe This Is Jesus"), Roland Carter ("Ride On Jesus"), James Miller ("I Wanna Be Ready" featuring Brazeal Dennard as tenor soloist), Glen Jones ("My Soul's Been Anchored In de Lord"), Jester Hairston ("Lord I Don't Feel Noways Tired"), and Richard Jackson ("Crossin Ovuh"). The CD closes with Dennard's own arrangement of "Oh Freedom." He arranged this spiritual for the dedication ceremony of a sculpture commissioned for the celebration of Detroit's tricentennial. The eleven foot bronze statue, created by sculptor Ed Dwight, depicts Detroit's Underground Railroad leader, George DeBaptiste, leading seven escaped slaves to freedom. The Chorale sang Dennard's arrangement at the dedication ceremony on October 20, 2001.

The Chorale's recordings exemplify the sorrow, longing, and fervent religious beliefs characteristic of this art form, and the Chorale performs the spirituals with a heartfelt passion and spirit that is truly moving. It is rare for recorded performances to deliver the same emotional punch as a live performance; however, the Chorale certainly comes close. Reviews published in the *Detroit Free Press* speak favourably of the Chorale's performances under Dennard's direction. In a review of the first CD, *Remembering... Discovering... Preserving...* Stryker (2000) of the *Detroit Free Press* states, "The Brazeal Dennard Chorale performs this music with all of the sophisticated grace and seamless blend we've come to expect from this group, balancing discipline and spontaneity. History lessons are rarely so moving" (p. 4K). A more recent review of *Remembering II: Significant Spirituals* (Stryker, 2003) praises the Chorale for an outstanding recording. "The performances, under Dennard's direction, are exemplary in the rhythmic freedom of the call-and-response phrasing, the exquisite balance of sugar and vinegar in the ensemble's tonal blend and spontaneous expression of the choir's many stellar soloists" (Stryker, 2003, p. 4J).

To summarize, it is possible to reflect on the contributions of the Brazeal Dennard Chorale from three perspectives: contributions related to the music, the culture, and the profession. Musically, the Chorale has left a legacy of outstanding recordings and memorable performances. Their moving and artistic interpretations of quality music at a very high level of musical expertise have touched many people. Culturally, the Chorale's work of preserving the traditional music of African Americans as well as their promotion of the music of contemporary African American composers has gone a long way towards creating an awareness and appreciation of the richness to be found in the music of the African American people. Finally, the Chorale's contributions to the profession include promoting contemporary choral music through commissions, performances, and recordings of exemplary composers while nurturing future singers through the training opportunities available to young and not so young singers through the Youth Chorale and the Community Chorus. Furthermore, the Classical Roots Concert Series functions as a vehicle for providing up and coming conductors, performers, and singers the opportunity to perform a wide variety of choral music including not only the music of African Americans, but also other important choral masterworks.

The Interviews

Perhaps one of the Chorale's most unique contributions lies in their ability to recreate the past while building the future. Through their efforts to preserve the spiritual, promote the music of contemporary African American composers, and provide performance opportunities for African American musicians, the Chorale does just that. In order to gain a better understanding of the meaning this has for African Americans, several members of the Chorale along with assistant director Augustus Hill and founder Brazeal Dennard were invited to participate in a set of interviews designed to explore the role of the Chorale in shaping a musical and cultural identity for African Americans.

Interview Questions

A series of researcher-developed questions organized according to content (Patton, as cited in LeCompte and Preissle, 1993) helped guide the interviews. For the purpose of this study, Patton's six categories were compressed into four major categories: 1) *participant background* – focussing on age, Chorale membership and musical background, 2) *experience/behaviour* – looking at the kinds of activities Chorale members engage in, 3) *feelings/reactions* – exploring how the members feel about their involvement with the Chorale, and 4) *opinions/values* – investigating how their experience with the Chorale colours their opinions and values associated with singing and the music of their culture. Data analysis was completed using the constant-comparative method (Merriam, 1998) to identify recurrent themes and important concepts.

Participants

Four members of the Chorale were chosen by Dennard to participate in this study. The criteria for selection were based on attaining a balance between gender, choral section, age, and years with the Chorale. All of the interviewees were African American. In addition, two members of the Community Chorus were interviewed, director Augustus Hill, and one of the original members of the Community Chorus. These two were chosen in order to give a slightly different perspective to the study and to provide information about the outreach efforts of the Community Chorus.

Each interview began with questions related to the participants' background focussing primarily on each member's musical training and related experiences as well as how they came to hear of the Chorale and become a member. Interviewees ranged in age from 39 to 82. Participant's names, with the exception of Hill and Dennard, have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

Gloria, aged 82, is retired and has been a member of the Community Chorus since its inception in 1985. Prior to that time she sang with the Chorale as part of the Classical Roots Concert series. Yolanda (39), an elementary school teacher, has been a member of the Chorale for five years; however, she sang previously with the Youth Chorale and Community Chorus for a total of 18 years. She currently sings soprano II with the Chorale. Celeste is one of the two remaining oldest members of the Chorale, joining the Chorale in 1974. Celeste, a retired businesswoman, is 66 years old and sings alto. Lionel (39) began with the Community Chorus in 1993, moved up into the Chorale a year later and is currently the tenor section leader. Singing bass with the Chorale is Simon, a medical doctor. Simon has been with the Chorale for about 10 years and is sixty-two years old.

The participants' musical background or training varied somewhat. Only Celeste and Yolanda had voice lessons before their involvement with the Chorale; the others relied upon their church choirs to provide vocal training. Yolanda minored in music in college and thus received a bit more formal training than the others. Gloria and Celeste studied piano while Simon took up the tuba in high school. All of them continue to share a love of singing and all are currently active members of their church choir. Lionel is the only one who did not have any musical background prior to joining the group. His story about how he came to join the Chorale is inspiring.

Well, in 1993, I was looking for a church home...it was like a year after my mother had passed and it was not a good time. But the music, you know, it lifts you out of despair and so I got involved in the choirs at church and it just so happened our minister of music, Miss Catherine Keyes, she's an alto in the Chorale, and she invited me to one of the performances and I was so moved! It just brought tears to my eyes and I said then I'm gonna be in that group (laughs). Mind you I had no musical background at all. Couldn't read music, had a little raw talent and I told her about my dream and she sat down with me at the organ on Sunday mornings for an hour before services and helped me learn how to sight-read. We worked on that for about a year, you know, singing in the choir. I had never sang [sic] in a choral group before, so it was all new...and about a year later

I joined the Community Chorus.... The next season I was asked to join the Chorale. Just like that and I was just overwhelmed. You know, me! No one! I mean [I] never had any musical background, it just happened.

Activities/Behaviours

Being a member of the Chorale requires that singers make a commitment to attending all rehearsals and performances. As the group has a very heavy performance schedule, members must be willing to make the Chorale a priority. Said Celeste,

All the travelling, you know, I don't know how I did it! I knew that when I got my vacation schedule, I said: "Now let me see what we're doing with the Chorale." That was the first thing that got taken care of.... So it's been a priority and you know sometimes I wonder how fair that was to my kids...I wonder if I've been really selfish with this Chorale all my adult life, maybe so.

The chorale rehearses once a week on Tuesday evenings for a couple of hours. Occasionally extra rehearsals are required particularly as performance dates become imminent or a major work such as *Elijah* is being learned. Lionel remarked, "That's the work, that's the challenge, keeping your calendar clear for those dates." Most of the time is spent rehearsing or performing; however, occasionally members or sections get together socially. Celeste talked about the altos, "We have picnics in the summer and we have parties in the winter...the alto section is just always a special section I think, in any choir, so we have our own T-shirts, and we have our own, we call it our "alto thing," a cookout or something."

In summary, interviewed Chorale members represent people from all walks of life, ranging in age from 39 to 82 who come to the Chorale with a diverse background of musical experiences. Interviewed members demonstrated a high level of commitment to the group, arranging their personal schedules around the needs of the ensemble in addition to making a long term commitment (ten or more years) to singing with the ensemble. While social contact and personal friendships are valued, the main focus of the member's activities is on rehearsing and performing.

Feelings/Reactions

To determine the kinds of feeling and reactions members had towards being a member of the Chorale, three open-ended questions were asked: 1) What does it feel like to be a part of the Chorale, 2) what is it like to sing music written by other African Americans, and 3) do you feel more of a connection with this music because of your race?

In describing what it felt like to be a part of the Chorale, participant responses ranged from intimidation to exhilaration. Yolanda and Simon both spoke of being intimidated and worried about being able to contribute positively to the group. Yolanda, when asked whether she felt intimidated, responded with a resounding, "A lot! Because, like I said, I had been watching this group and listening to it for years and I never thought I could do it, even though I passed the audition." Simon commented,

It's still intimidating.... I guess I've gained more confidence over the years. I'm not quite as intimidated until we go to perform...my heart always races when it's time for performance and all, but it's not as intimidating as it used to be and it's really an exhilarating experience. I feel like I'm contributing now. In the beginning I wasn't so sure.

Yolanda talked about experiencing a kind of probationary period and described her need to feel accepted for her contributions to the group.

When I can't measure up to what I think people expect, I feel kind of bad. Not that I can't learn it, but I'm not learning it fast enough.... I guess with any group you

join there's a probationary period, even though it's unspoken. But you're new and people want to see what you can do and what you can't, so there's a lot of nervousness and tenseness on your part, but then you want to be accepted on their part, and so to work towards that and then finally arrive.... It makes me feel good...because I'm a part of it now, it's a part of me.

On the other hand, Celeste, who has been with the group the longest, spoke of feeling like the members are extended family. She described members as nurturing and supportive friends. She also talked about how proud she feels to be a part of an ensemble that in her words "is making history...and to that end it's very, very special." Several other members also spoke about how proud they are to be a part of this group.

When asked what it's like to sing music written by other African Americans, the interviewees' most common response was pride. Said Gloria, "I feel proud, you know, that we have people who can do that type of music just like anyone else." Celeste commented,

I have a sense of pride when I sing their music because I'm so glad that, it's been around for a long time...and it's finally here so I can sing it.... I'm always overjoyed to attempt [contemporary African American music]. I'm glad that it's finally there and that recognition is given, so actually I feel empowered, I feel challenged.... It's not always roses though; it's difficult [the music] and sometimes I don't want to be bothered to learn something new.

In response to the more direct question of whether they felt more of a connection to this music because of their race, three of the members answered yes. Yolanda responded, "There's a connection between me and the slaves, I think, some type of relationship...that okay, yeah, you suffered and this is what you did, but now I'm here and because of what you went through I can stand up and sing this song proudly." Said Celeste, "Yes, I think there's a different connection. I am always interested in how we, how other African American composers see their world, which is how they write their music." Lionel described the connection on a more personal level:

Yes, I do, because it feels like your soul has lived some of what's being sung about, you can kind of identify with the struggle...with the spirituals, yeah, you can kind of feel it because, most of us have probably had some type of bad experience or something with racism...just, personally in some way. You got a lot of cruel people that will do little things, not that will stop you, but you can kind of say, whatever...it helps you appreciate the whole experience of having to go through that, and I guess the spiritual helps you relieve yourself of the experience...like a cleansing, you sing a good spiritual and you're free of whatever that was.

For Simon, however, the composer's race was not as important as the quality of the music. He claimed to feel more of a connection with the music because of the words and melodies rather than the ethnicity of the composers. He admitted he might feel slightly more connected to the music because of his race "because it is perhaps more the music of my life," but went on to talk about the universality of good music regardless of the composer.

Opinions/Values

A series of four open-ended questions were then asked to investigate the opinions and value members place on their experiences with the Chorale: 1) has singing in this group made a difference to you personally, 2) has being part of this ensemble helped you grow as a singer or musician, 3) has your experience with the Chorale changed the way you think about the music of African Americans, and 4) do you think future generations will continue to preserve, perform and promote the music of African Americans, specifically the art form of the spiritual?

All of the singers valued their membership with the group. Comments ranged from, "It's the high point of my week," "It's the thing that really balances the rest of what I do," and "Tuesday means everything to me" to "Without that [music in my life] there would be a tremendous void," "It's like my whole life," and "If I could wake up [in the morning] without music, I don't know what I would do."

Lionel spoke about how singing in the Chorale has made his life more complete, "When the music with the Chorale happened, it was like completeness. I know what to do. This is it. This is what I'm supposed to do with your life—is sing!" Lionel also talked about how the music helps keep him "mellow and peaceful" and how it provides a release from any anger he might feel. He connected how the spirituals helped his ancestors survive with how they help him today, "It's [the spiritual] still taking people on, you know, because it's helping you get through all the emotional baggage, that's what I get from it, I can love, because of the music" Not only that, he appreciates what the music can do for others as described in this anecdote:

I had an experience at Central Michigan [University]. Brazeal always told us that the music would change you. And after our concert... an elderly white man came up. Tears were welling in his eyes and he said, "That was so beautiful." and he just had to walk away because his tears were just [overflowing]...and I was like, "Wow! It made me feel very good, because I had relieved [him]...and it felt good that the music to him was beautiful. That's what I like.

All of the singers felt they had grown musically as part of their experience with the Chorale. In particular they discussed learning about specific aspects of vocal technique, such as how to control dynamics, adjust vowels, manage their breath and control the phrasing. Both Simon and Celeste described the Chorale as musically fulfilling because of the quality of the repertoire and the high expectations of the group when it comes to performing.

I've grown as a singer because I've almost had to. The repertoire that the Chorale has will make you stretch yourself because you're under pressure to get it together or be embarrassed.... So at some point you learn these things and you grow from that... learning the caliber of repertoire that we have, from some of the languages to the various complex and layered rhythms to being able to interpret a piece and interpret that music into a clear message, is all growth.

Several of them talked about changing personally by developing tolerance, patience, discipline, stage presence, professionalism, and character. Even Dennard, when asked what made him most proud of his singers, he replied,

Number one, its [the Chorale's] professionalism, and certainly their ability to make wonderful, wonderful music. And they come with varied backgrounds and to see them achieve, it's just absolutely marvellous...as you well know, in the last few years public school music has not been that nurturing in terms of developing technique...[so] to see them come in and become very involved in the development of the process of singing, I'm very proud of that.

When asked whether their experience with the Chorale has changed the way they think about the music of African Americans, all of the singers responded positively. Simon explained how the Chorale expanded his knowledge of African American composers. Lionel stated simply that it had changed his opinion because, "It has shown me it's as good as any other music." Both Yolanda and Celeste described how becoming more aware of their heritage enhanced their understanding of and appreciation for the music. Celeste commented:

I'm African American, right? But did I really focus on it [African American music] from an analytical point of view like we do frequently when we're learning

a piece of music? No. Did I really get into the social conditions at the time this music came about? Not in depth like you do [in rehearsal].... I'm continuing to be amazed about how much I'm learning on an ongoing basis about things that I thought I knew about, so it has got me a wealth of education about the music of my past, about the music of my own people.

Yolanda was influenced by the historical background and anecdotal stories Dennard brings to the rehearsals, "Because I'm telling you, when he's telling those stories you get so caught up in the story that it changes the way you're going to perform that piece, and that's a good thing... because it has to have spirit, you know, music it moves, you can't just sing it, you gotta SING it!" Celeste likened going to rehearsal to attending a music history class: "He [Dennard] gives us history of performances, history of those who played or accompanied those who wrote the song, what the social setting was at the time, so it's like going to music history class."

All of the members expressed concern when asked whether they felt future generations would continue to preserve and promote the traditional music of African Americans. The influence of contemporary gospel music and the decline of the spiritual within the services of the African American churches were two reasons cited as to why they felt the traditional music was threatened. Said Lionel, "A lot of the churches though are not quite appreciating the spirituals like before. They're into this contemporary gospel and it's so different." Gloria commented that, "As far as church music [is concerned], some of the young people are exposed to this real swinging stuff and they're not really interested in studying and learning the good music."

Several of the members discussed the influence of the schools and the need for music teachers and other professionals to take a proactive role in preserving and promoting the musical heritage of African Americans. Yolanda believes that "As long as we have people like Brazeal Dennard, who makes this his life's work and shares it with us, and we in turn can share it with [others], you know, [like] my fourth graders, then I think that history has a chance to be saved." Celeste fears that if no one is around to teach the music it will be lost, "A lot of this stuff is out of print... [so] if you can't get it into the schools, and they're no longer doing it in the churches, who's going to teach it? Who's going to call the CDs to someone's attention?"

Organizations like the Brazeal Dennard Youth Chorale are cited as hope for the future. Lionel asserted, "A lot of them go off to school and come back, and they get all that training and they come back and teach." Dr. Hill concurred that organizations like the Youth Chorale are important but he also stressed that public schools must take an active role in promoting this music. Simon's concerns were shared by most of the respondents:

I don't know. I'm certainly concerned about it, worried about it, more. Certainly, I have the impression, on more than a few instances, that there are a number of people who... see that [slavery] as part of a past they would like to forget, and don't see it as something that needs to be preserved. And if we don't have institutions and if we don't educate our students, whether they're in public school or private school, I think we're in danger of losing this history in the way that we're losing other musical history and other histories that we just don't... teach or talk about any more. And I think back, as poor as we were in our public school situation [in Augusta, Georgia] there was always a lot of emphasis on culture and on education, and on the arts as a way of making one a well-rounded individual, and I think that's missing. I guess the short answer is I don't know. I'm worried about it and I think we may be in danger of losing it.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of these interviews suggest that the African Americans participating in this study share similar feelings or reactions to their experience as members of the Brazeal

Dennard Chorale. Feelings about being part of the ensemble range from intimidation to exhilaration and appear to centre around issues of self-esteem, belonging and racial pride. These members seemed to gain a strong sense of self-esteem from being a part of the Chorale. Although they were initially intimidated by the musical demands of the ensemble, their self-confidence grew as their skills developed. Recognition of their musical talents and abilities, requirements for acceptance into the ensemble, were also a source of pride and confidence. Being part of something important, being accepted as a contributing member of the group, and developing a fellowship with others who share the same goals and aspirations were important factors for all interviewees. Although race was not a primary focus for any of the members, they were very much aware of their ethnicity and seemed to connect more closely with the music because of their shared heritage. Certainly the group's mission, to foster and preserve traditional and contemporary African American music, is tied to race; however, any political overtones were overshadowed by a focus on the inherent quality of the music and the singers.

All of those interviewed demonstrated a strong commitment to the mission of the Chorale. Furthermore, they all valued their Chorale experience as fulfilling, challenging and enriching. Several spoke of the sense of completeness and balance the Chorale brought to their lives. All of the participants valued the opportunity to grow musically. They obviously enjoyed being stretched and at the same time were very proud of their accomplishments. Exposure to the music of their people, both music of the past and present, seemed to enrich their musical experience. Knowledge of their musical history strengthened and deepened the connections they felt towards the music of their people regardless of whether they were performing a spiritual or a contemporary oratorio. All of the members shared a concern for the future of both the traditional and contemporary "classical" music of African Americans, questioning the role of the church and the schools in the preservation of their musical heritage.

What are the implications of these findings for the choral profession? First, we must recognize the importance of ensembles such as the Brazeal Dennard Chorale to the non-professional singer and continue to create opportunities for individuals of all ability levels and ethnicities to experience the joy of singing throughout their lives. In many instances this means providing singers with the training and skill development that they are not receiving in the public or private schools. Second, we must recognize and seek to understand more fully the role of culture in the musical development and artistic expression of the communities in which we practice our craft. Finally, we must encourage the inclusion of this music at the university level and be willing to acculturate our young conductors into the musical histories and performance practices inherent in African American music so they in turn may continue to bring the past into the future.

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