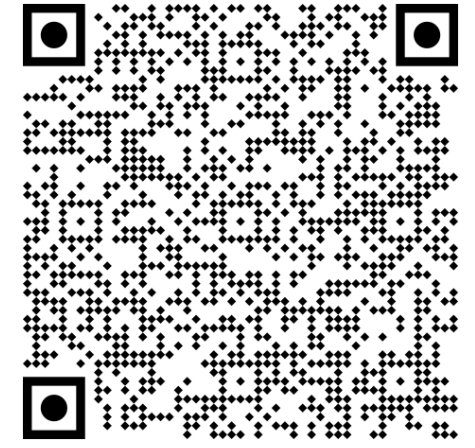


The Piano Music of Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr.



Dr. Susanna Garcia

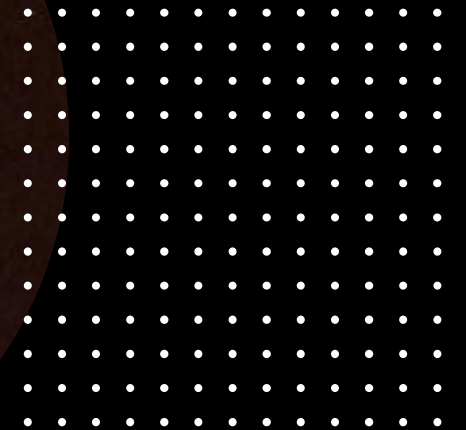
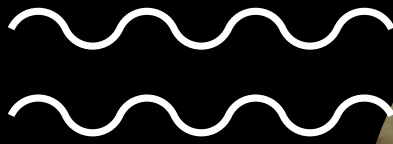
she/her/hers

Professor Emerita

University of Louisiana at Lafayette

susanna.garcia@louisiana.edu

Thomas
Henderson
Kerr, Jr.
(1915 – 1988)



Early Years

Baltimore, Maryland 1915

Thomas Kerr, Sr. was an orchestra leader, composer, pianist, and violinist.

Thomas, Jr. took piano lessons, but was self-taught on the organ.

Thomas played for church services and in nightclubs from the age of 14.



Education

(Frederick) Douglass High School

Studied with W. Llewellyn Wilson

Notable Graduates:

- Thomas Kerr, Jr., pianist and composer
- Ellis Larkins, jazz pianist
- Mark Fax, composer
- Blanche and Cab Calloway, jazz singers and bandleaders
- Anne Wiggins Brown, soprano
- Paul Brent, pianist



Education

Peabody Institute

Peabody Institute in Baltimore denied admission to Black students until 1949.

- Mark Fax attended Syracuse University
- Anne Brown attended Julliard School of Music
- Cab Calloway attended Lincoln University
- Blanche Calloway attended Morgan State College
- Ellis Larkins was associated with Peabody but was not allowed to attend classes or receive credit.
- Thomas Kerr attended Howard University briefly, then transferred to Eastman School of Music



Education

Eastman School of Music

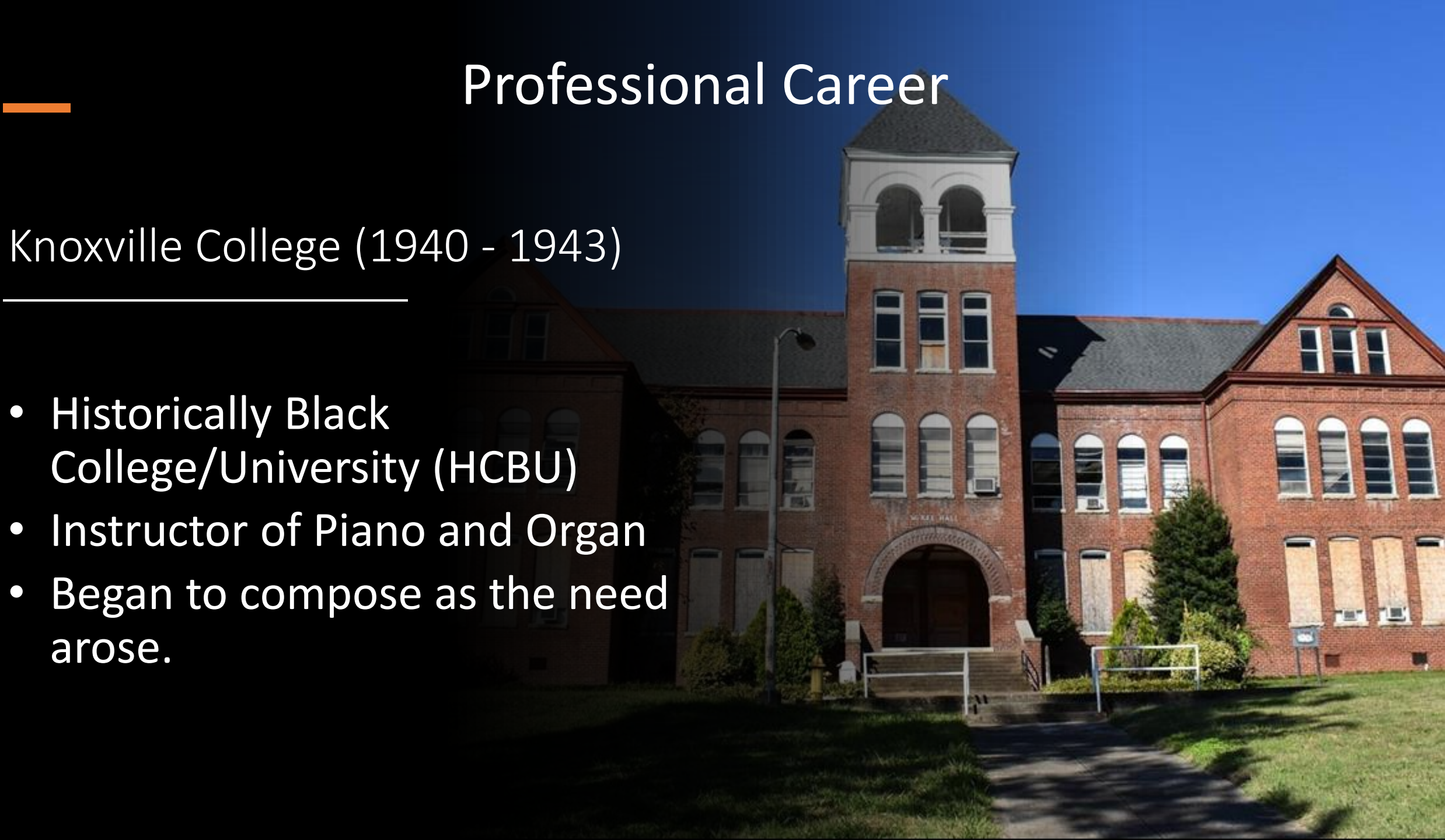
- Studied piano with Cecile Genhart
- Graduated *summa cum laude*
- Earned Three Degrees
 - Bachelor of Music in Piano
 - Bachelor of Music in Theory
 - Master of Music in Theory



Professional Career

Knoxville College (1940 - 1943)

- Historically Black College/University (HCBU)
- Instructor of Piano and Organ
- Began to compose as the need arose.



A black and white photograph of a large, multi-story brick building with a prominent clock tower. The building has many windows and a classical architectural style. The clock tower is the central focus, with a clock face visible. The building is surrounded by some landscaping and a paved area in the foreground.

Professional Career

Howard University (1943 – 1976)

Largest Historically Black College/University
(HCBU)

Served as Professor of Piano
Chair of the Piano Department

- Composed for university events
- Composed for significant social and historical Events
- Composed for individual concert artists

Professional Career

Plymouth Congregational Church

Served as organist for over 35 years.

- Composed many organ, choral, vocal, and ensemble works for services.

The background image shows the exterior of a brick church building. The text "PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST" is mounted on the brick facade in large, white, serif capital letters. Above the text is a circular window with a brick surround. Below the text are two white double doors with transoms, each set within a brick archway. Two black lantern-style light fixtures are mounted on the brick wall, one on each side of the central archway.

PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Professional Career

Performances as Pianist

Solo Recitals at

- National Gallery of Art
- Phillips Collection

Soloist with the National
Symphony Orchestra



Archives

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Division of the New York Public Library

Leading cultural institution devoted to the research, preservation, and exhibition of materials focused on African American, African Diaspora, and African experiences.

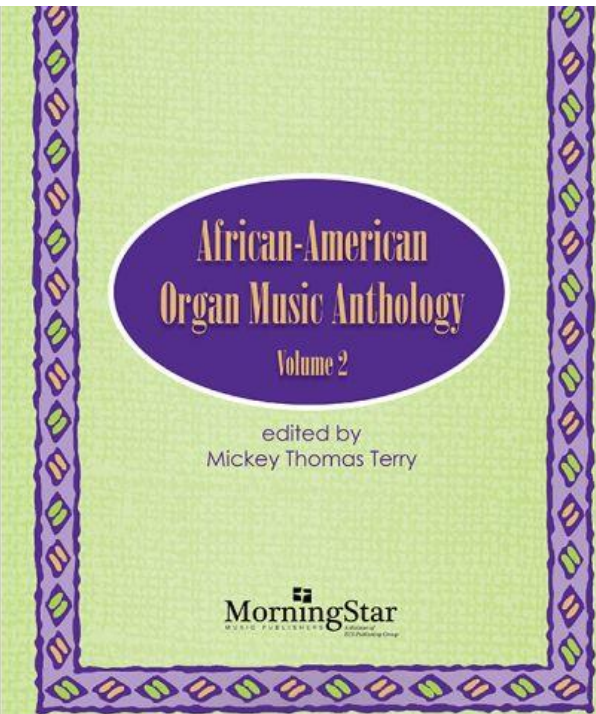


Catalogue by Genre

Over 150 works for piano, organ, voice, chorus, and chamber ensembles.

PIANO WORKS (all unpublished)

- There are 10 complete manuscripts for solo piano (1937-1970)
- 4 works for two-pianos, including a cadenza for Mozart K. 365 Concerto
- Two for duet, but with some missing pages
- 5 or 6 hymn arrangements written later, (1950-65)
- Some simplified and pedagogical works.

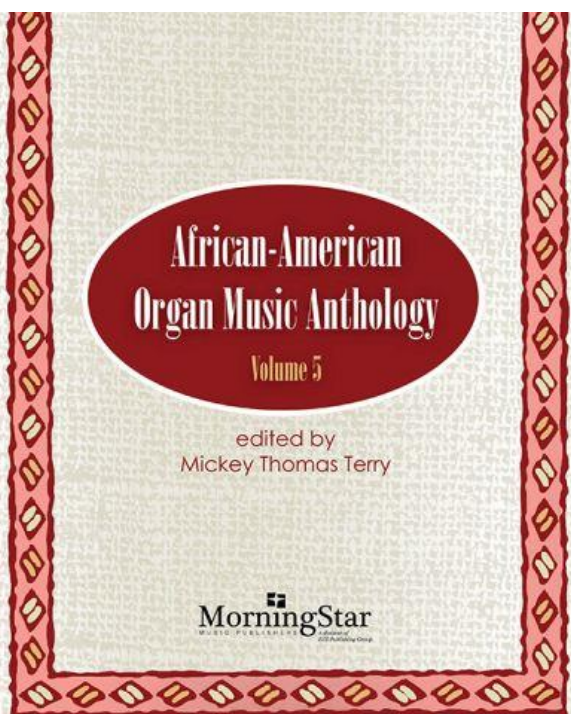


African-American Organ Music Anthology

Volume 2

edited by
Mickey Thomas Terry

MorningStar
MUSIC PUBLISHERS

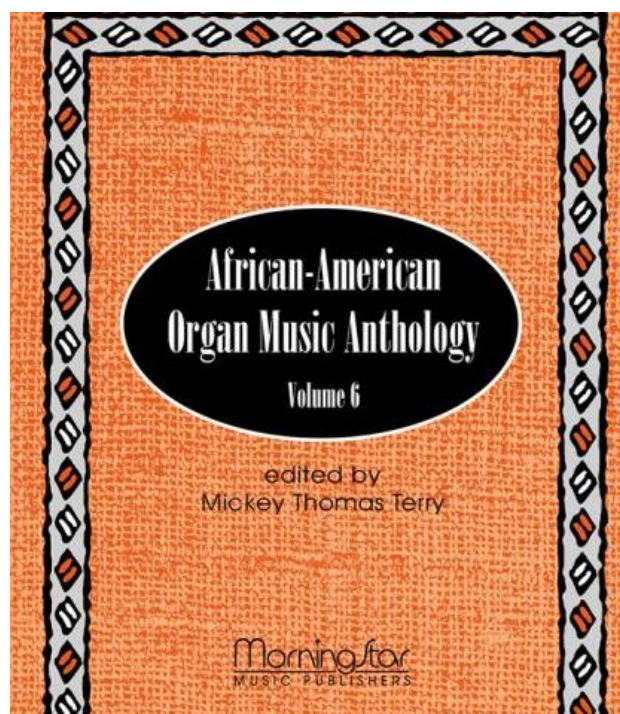


African-American Organ Music Anthology

Volume 5

edited by
Mickey Thomas Terry

MorningStar
MUSIC PUBLISHERS



African-American Organ Music Anthology

Volume 6

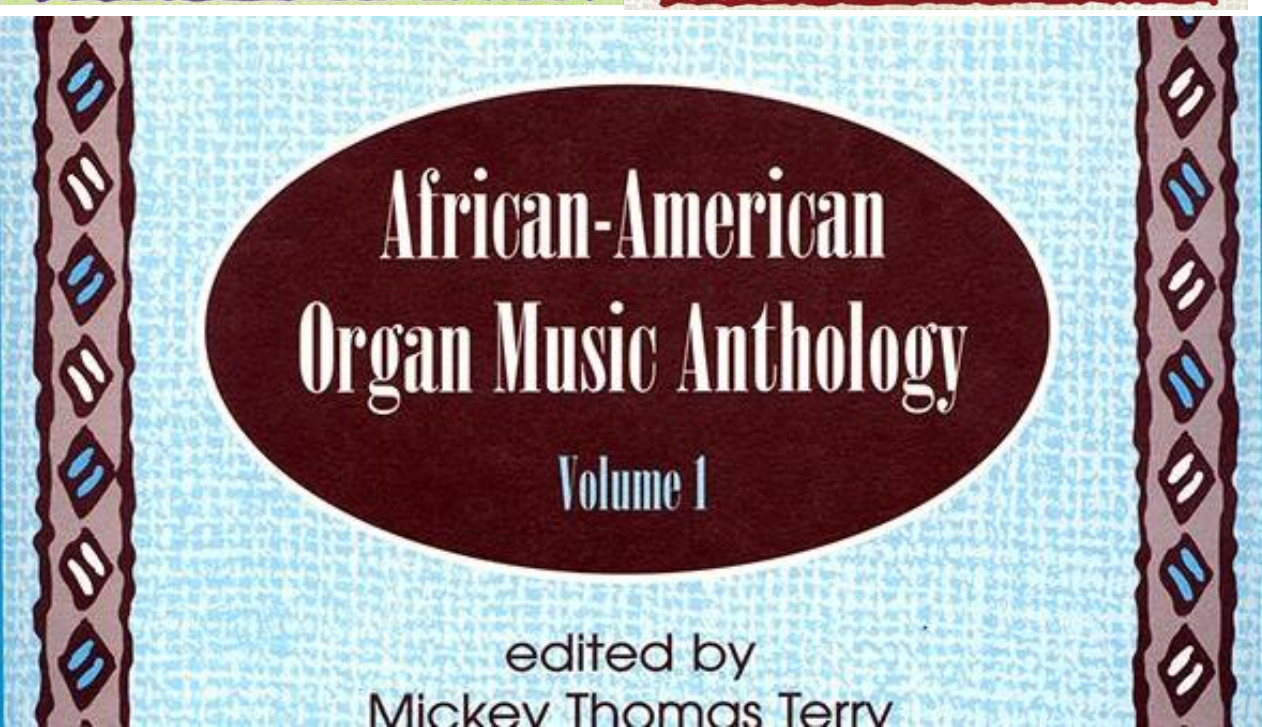
edited by
Mickey Thomas Terry

MorningStar
MUSIC PUBLISHERS



Anguished
American
Easter, 1968
for Organ

Thomas H. Terry, Jr.
2004 for American Organist



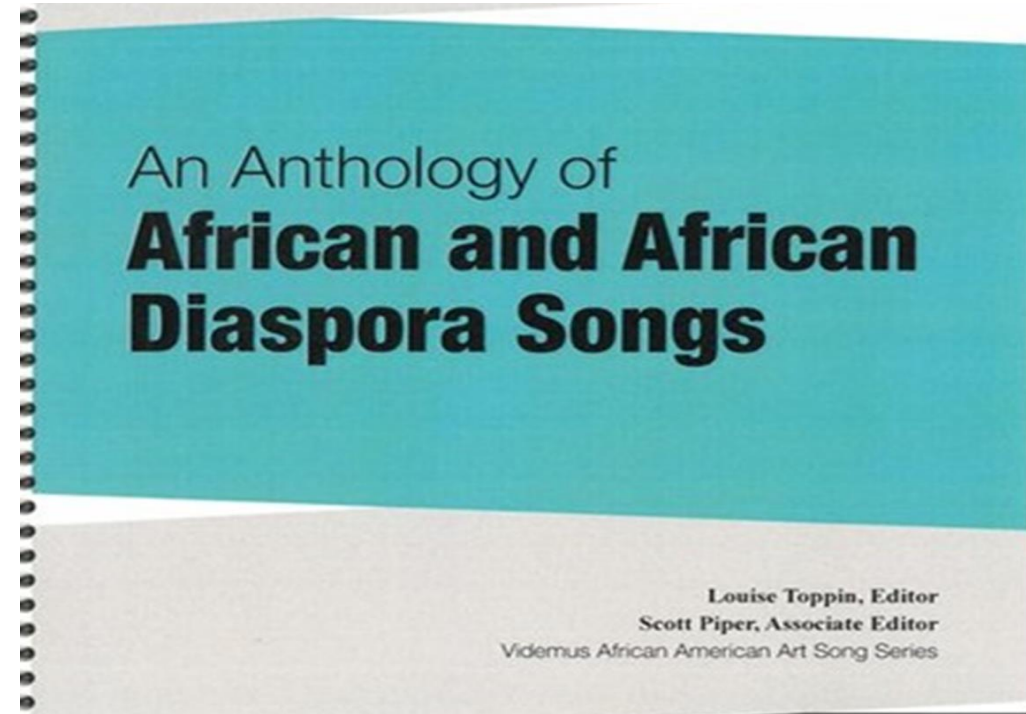
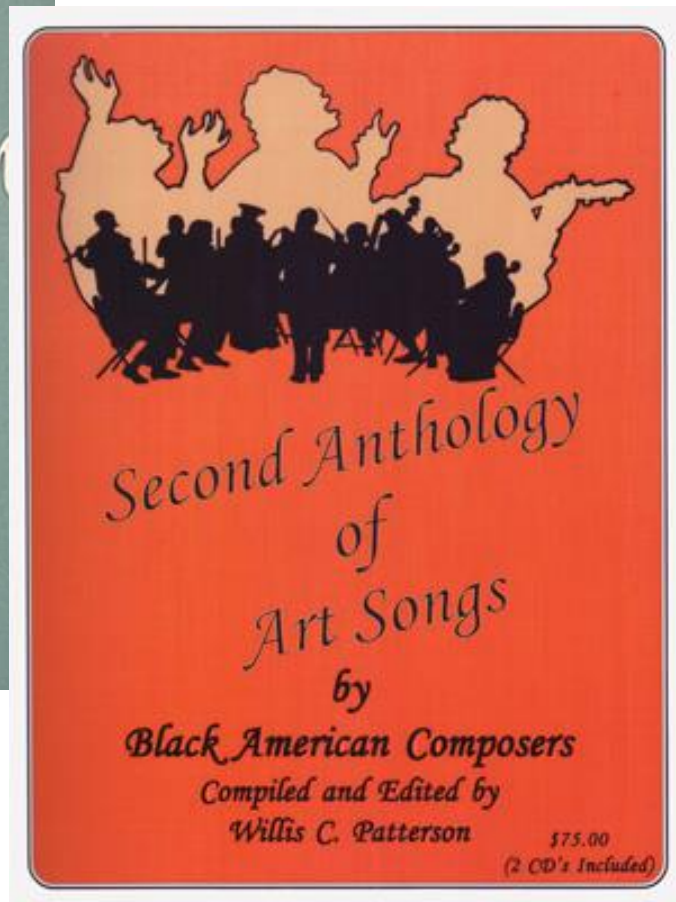
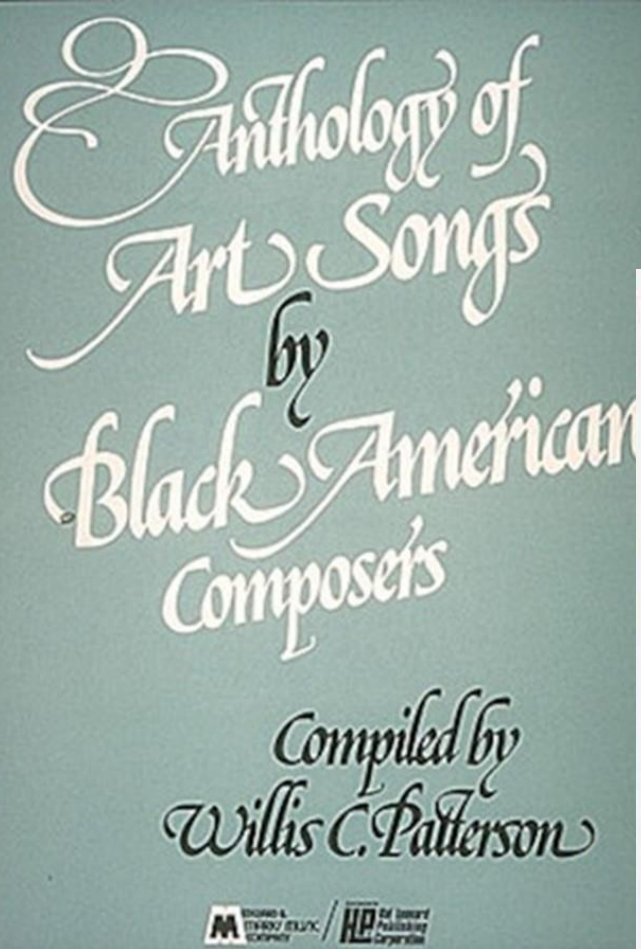
African-American Organ Music Anthology

Volume 1

edited by
Mickey Thomas Terry

Published Organ Works

- Volume 1: Arietta
- Volume 2: Miniature Antiphonal on a Pedal Point
- Volume 2: Procession of the Gargoyles
- Volume 5: Frolicking Flutes
- Volume 6: Reverie for Celestes
- Anguished American Easter, GIA Publications



Published Art Songs

- Riding to Town (1984)
- Soliloquy (2002, 2021)
- Thou Art My Lute (2002)
- In Memorium (2002)

The background of the slide is a handwritten musical score on aged paper. It features several staves of music with various notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Visible markings include "a tempo", "poco rit.", and "sfz". The handwriting is in dark ink, and the paper shows signs of age with some yellowing and faint smudges.

Compositional Style

To me music first and foremost and forever, is a language to speak directly to the hearts of the listeners. – THK, Jr.

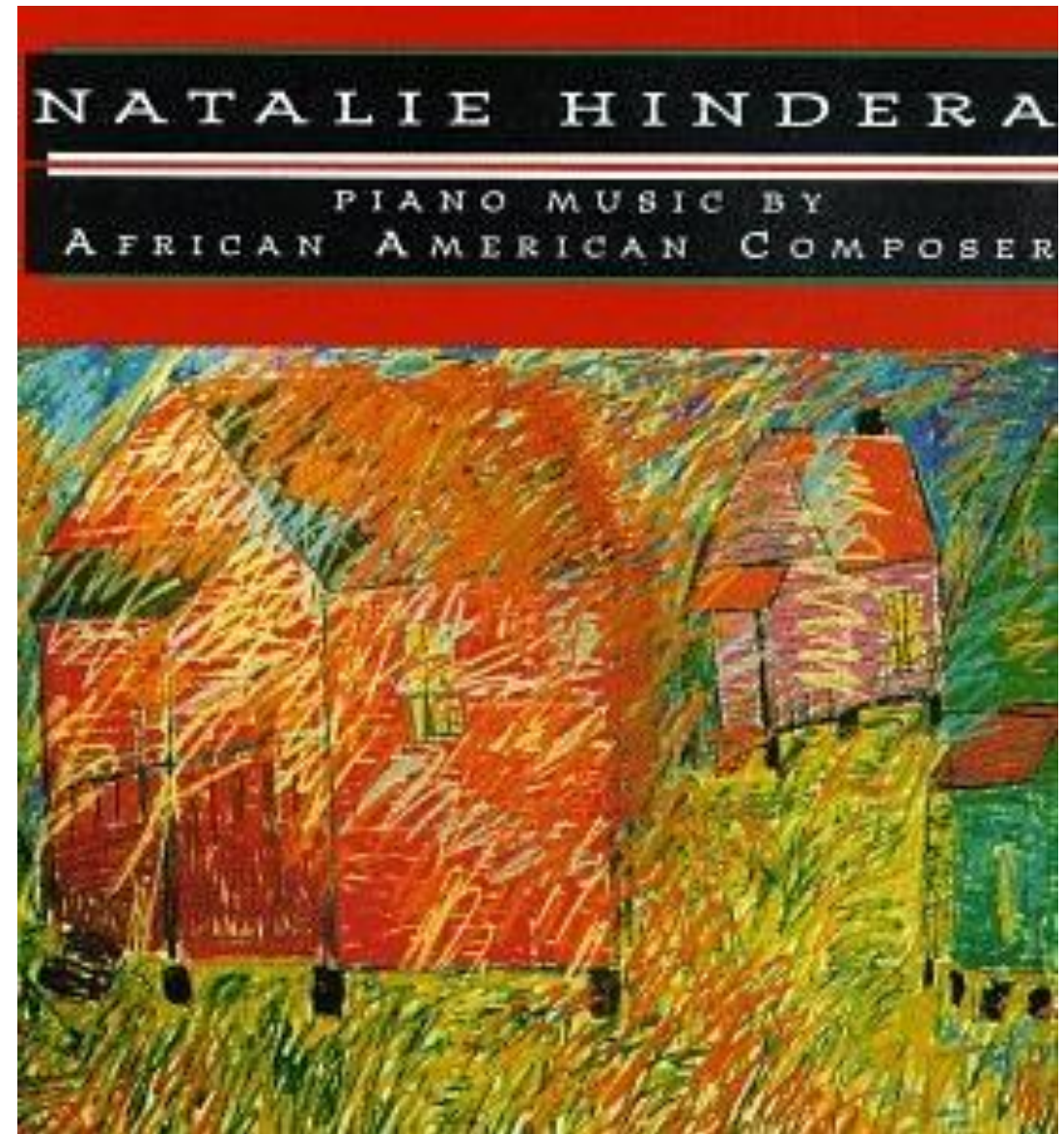
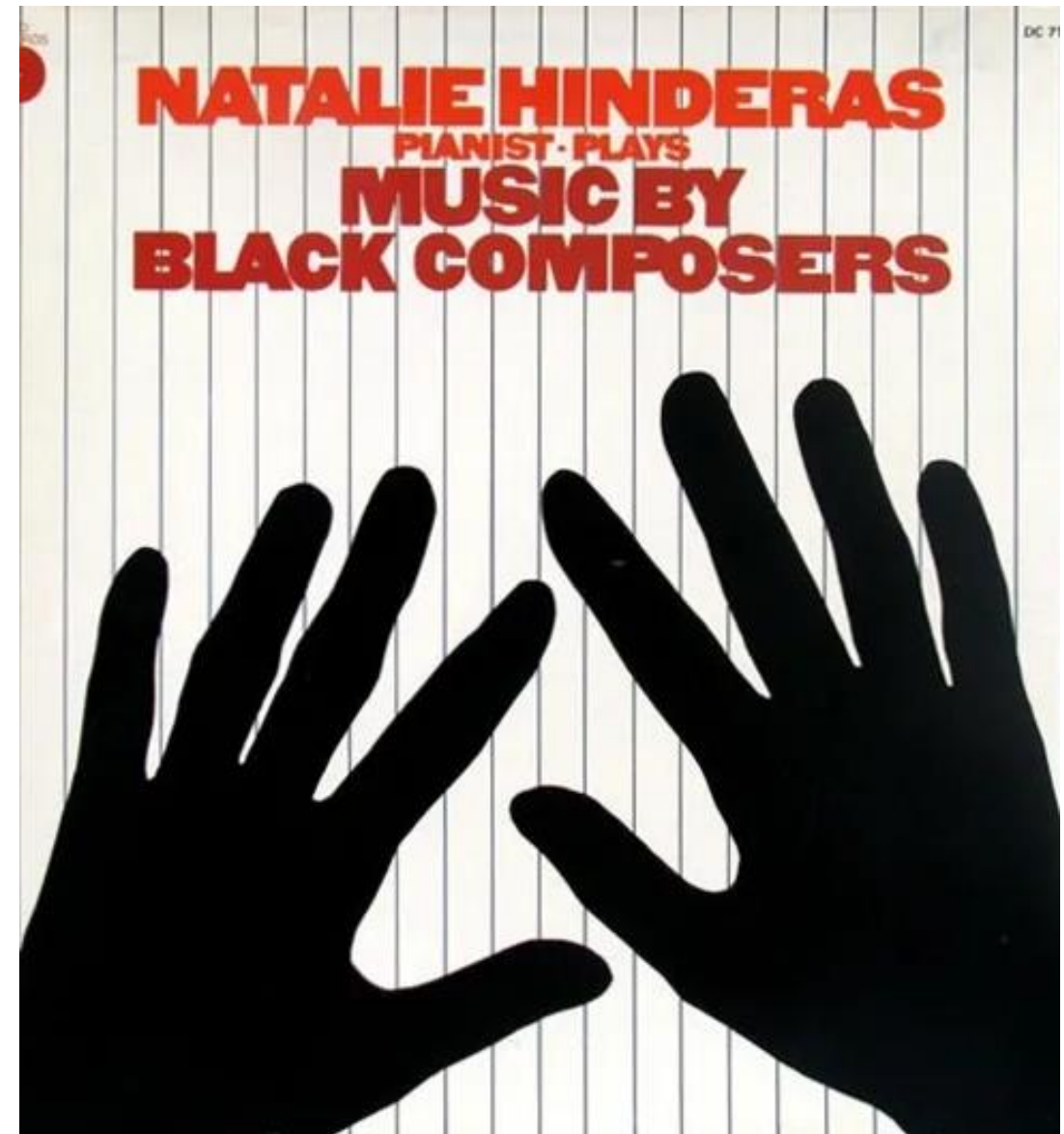
- Compositional style merges European art music forms with African and African American musical elements and traditions.
- Especially influenced by the African American Spiritual and American Jazz
- Describes his musical style as “conservative,” rejecting serialism and atonality.

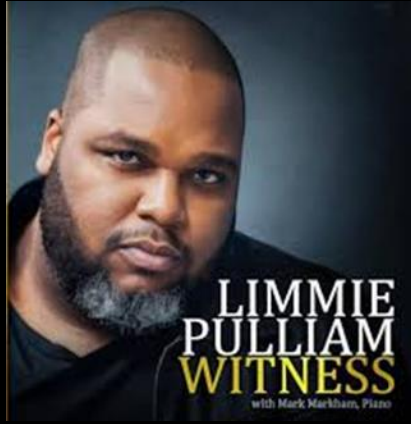
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Compositional Style

Works based on Spirituals

- Vocal/Piano arrangements
- Organ and choral works
- Piano Works:
 - Concert Scherzo: *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?* For two pianos (1940)
 - Scherzino, *Easter Monday Swagger*, For solo piano (based on *Walk Together Chillen*) (1970)
 - 8-10 four-part piano settings





Arrangements of Spirituals

- Jessye Norman
- Kathleen Battle
- William Warfield
- Leontyne Price
- Darryl Taylor
- Limmie Pulliam

- Will Liverman: Riding to Town



Compositional Style

Concert Scherzo: Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?

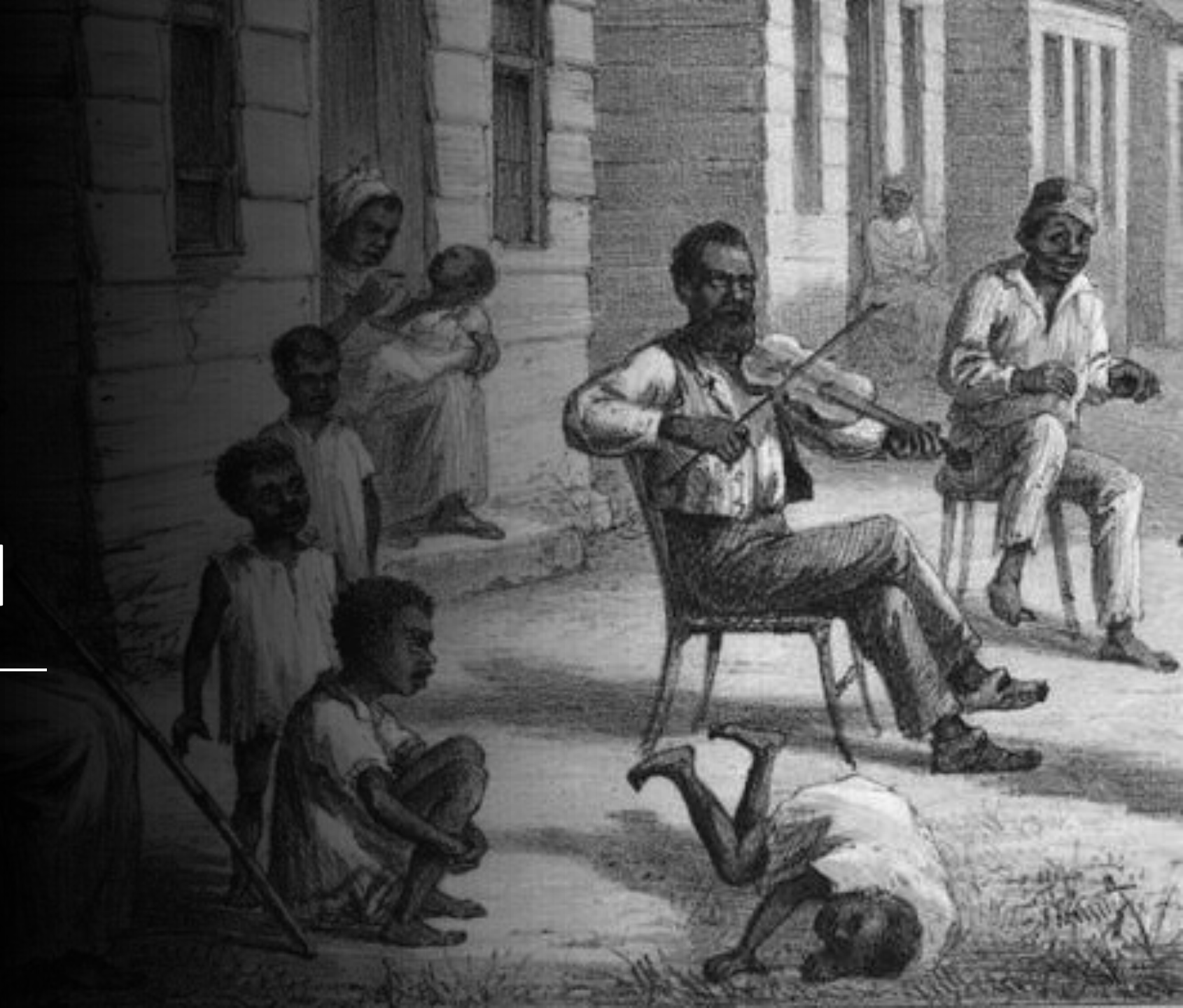
For Two Pianos

1940





Negro Spiritual





Jane Fitz-Fitzharris:

The spiritual was the most significant, creative art expression of pre-civil war African Americans, specifically those enslaved by their white owners. The text and music of this unique genre reflect their perspectives on life, death, and the world around them.

In general, the spirituals span a variety of emotions and experiences, including hope and despair, joy and sorrow, and death and life. They reflect the intense range of feelings for a volatile people in an oppressive environment. . . Black history, as witnessed in the spirituals, told the story of the slaves' world and their struggle for freedom. The art of story telling through music was an African tradition; out of this was born the spiritual with its aural text and roots.



Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?

Chorus

*Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel?
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
And why not every man?*

Verse

*He delivered Daniel from the lion's den
Jonah from the belly of the whale
And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace
And why not every man?*

Chorus

Verse

*The moon runs down in a purple stream
The sun refused to shine
Every star did disappear
Yes, freedom shall be mine!*

Chorus

Kerr/Lee Piano Duo

- Needed a piece to perform with his duo-piano partner, Sylvia Olden Lee, on the "Black College Circuit."
- Decided to write an extended work for their recitals based on an African American folk melody.
- *Concert Scherzo* employs a loose variation structure using the Negro Spiritual "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" as the theme.
- Performed over 20 times on the Black College Circuit.



Concert Scherzo: Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? (1940) (two pianos)

Theme and Variation Form

Reid-Hobson Duo concert program notes from 1985.

Theme Chorus (mm. 1-10) (G minor)	Accompanied by a bumpity [sic] rhythmic figure, the theme is introduced in octaves.
Var. I Chorus (mm. 11-18) (G minor) Verse (mm. 19-30) (F blues)	Variation I is also set off in octaves against a syncopated figure which tapers off quietly before erupting violently into Variation II, marked "Allegro Barbaro".
Var. II "Allegro Barbaro" (Bb minor) Chorus (mm. 31-51) piano 1 Chorus (mm. 52-58) piano 2 interrupted imitando (mm. 62-74) And why not every man?	This second variation is a greatly expanded version of the original period theme, barbaric in nature, punctuated with extreme accents and agitations.
Bridge (mm. 75-79)	A thoughtful, contemplative bridge (mm. 75-79) leads to Variation III, "Andante Sognando" . . .
Var. III "Andante Sognando" Chorus (mm. 80 – 95) (Eb major) Verse (mm. 96 – 104) (Eb Blues)	. . . which according to the composer, has been dubbed "Plantation Love" by Mrs. Hobson. Its cantabile dreamy, nostalgic qualities may explain this subtitle.
Re-establish G Minor	There are two brittle, playful variations (Scherzando) and a "Tempo Grandioso" which leads to a coda which sweeps the players off the stage.
Var IV Scherzando Chorus (mm. 105 – 114)	Variation IV is bumptuous [sic] and humorous, befitting the Scherzando
Var V Misterioso Chorus (mm. 115 – 122)	Variation V is stated through a pizzicato bass, overlaid with light, rippling figures in the soprano This variation ends in crashing chords and a descending glissando foreshadowing the Finale, a large-scale elaboration of the original theme.
Variation VI Finale: Tempo Grandioso Chorus (mm. 123 – 137) (mm. 129 – 137) And why not every man?	Gathering speed and increased energy, the Finale (marked "Tempo Grandioso") is extended through a heavily-accented and syncopated figure derived from the theme and driven headlong toward a decisive, dramatic and thunderous final statement.
Coda (mm. 138 – 145) Fragment of chorus opening motive	(The) coda which sweeps the players off the stage.

Theme: Chorus Only Played by Piano 1

Accompanied by a bumpity
[sic] rhythmic figure, the
theme is introduced in octaves.

Allegro scherzando (♩ = 120)

Piano I

mf *non legato e giocoso*

Piano II

mp ben ritmato sfz sfz sfz

senza ped.

4 (8va)

sfz

Variation I

Musical score for Variation I, Chorus, mm. 11-18. The score is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. It features a melody in the right hand and a syncopated accompaniment in the left hand. The melody is reharmonized over the accompaniment. The score includes dynamics such as *pp*, *sfz*, and *p*, and a *cresc.* marking. The melody is marked *(8va)* and *loco*. The accompaniment is marked *pp* and *sfz*.

Chorus, mm. 11 – 18

Melody reharmonized over a
syncopated accompaniment

Musical score for Variation I, Verse, mm. 19-30. The score is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. It features a melody in the right hand and a syncopated accompaniment in the left hand. The melody is reharmonized over the accompaniment. The score includes dynamics such as *p*, *sfz*, and *poco rit.*, and a *cresc.* marking. The melody is marked *(8va)* and *loco*. The accompaniment is marked *pp* and *sfz*.

Verse, mm. 19-30

Blues elements, overlapping,
syncopated accompaniment,
modulates to Bb Minor

Variation II – *Allegro Barbaro* (Bb minor)

Chorus: mm. 31 – 51 pno 1; 52 -58 pno 2 chorus interrupted;

This second variation is a greatly expanded version of the original period theme, barbaric in nature, punctuated with extreme accents and agitations.

51 *Allegro barbaro*

loco
f sempre non legato
il busso sempre ed energico
mf
f molto marcato
pp
sfz

mm. 31 – 51 pno 1; 52 -58 pno 2 chorus interrupted;

8
62

p imitando
dim.
pochissimo rit.
p
dim.
pochissimo rit.

mm. 62 – 74

Abrupt texture change with imitative treatment of the last line of the chorus “and why not every man?”

Except for the finale, this is the only place in the piece where this musical phrase is spotlighted and developed.

Variation III – *Andante Sognando* (Eb Major) mm. 79 – 104

“*Andante Sognando*” which according to the composer, has been dubbed “*Plantation Love*” by Mrs. Hobson. Its cantabile dreamy, nostalgic qualities may explain this subtitle.

Musical score for the Chorus section, measures 79-84. The tempo is *Andante sognando*. The score is in Eb major. The right hand plays a melody with eighth notes, and the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The dynamics are *p* (piano) and *mf cantabile* (moderato-forte, cantabile). The word *simile* is written below the right hand staff.

Chorus

Musical score for the Verse section, measures 95-104. The tempo is *Andante sognando*. The score is in Eb major. The right hand plays a melody with eighth notes, and the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The dynamics are *molto rit. e dim.* (molto ritardando e diminuendo), *p* (piano), *mf non legato* (moderato-forte, non legato), and *sfz* (sforzando). The word *simile* is written below the right hand staff. The score includes a first ending bracket (8va) and a second ending bracket (9va). The word *Verse* is written below the score.

Verse

Mode change with blues hints. (mm.96)

Variations IV and V (G Minor has been re-established)

105 Tempo I

p scherzando

mf

8va

mf scherzando

8va

simile

Detailed description: This musical score for Variation IV (measures 105-114) is in G minor and 4/4 time. It features a piano introduction with a 'p' dynamic and 'scherzando' marking. The right hand plays a melody with eighth notes, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment of chords. A 'simile' instruction indicates that the piano part continues with a similar texture. The piece concludes with a 'mf' dynamic and an '8va' (octave) marking.

Variation IV: *Scherzando*, mm. 105 – 114

Pianos trade chorus melody

Variation IV is bumptuous [sic] and humorous, befitting the Scherzando.

113

f

pp gracioso

8va *loco*

8va *loco*

f

sub. p e misterioso quasi pizz.

sfz

13

Detailed description: This musical score for Variation V (measures 113-122) is in G minor and 4/4 time. It begins with a piano introduction marked 'f' and '3' (triplets). The right hand features a melodic line with eighth notes and triplets, while the left hand plays a bass line with chords. The piece is marked 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'gracioso'. It includes '8va' (octave) and 'loco' markings. The piece concludes with a 'sub. p' (subito piano) marking and 'e misterioso quasi pizz.' (and mysteriously quasi pizzicato) marking, ending with a 'sfz' (sforzando) marking.

Variation V: *misterioso, quasi pizz.*

mm. 115 – 122

Variation V is stated through a pizzicato bass, overlaid with light, rippling figures in the soprano. This variation ends in crashing chords and a descending glissando foreshadowing the Finale, a large-scale elaboration of the original theme.

FINALE Variation VI: Tempo Grandioso, mm. 123 - 137

14 **Tempo Grandioso**
(8^{va})

123

ff

pesante

simile

Detailed description: This musical score shows measures 123 to 137. It features a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The tempo is marked 'Tempo Grandioso' and the dynamics are 'ff'. The texture is 'pesante' and 'simile'. The music is heavily accented and syncopated, with many notes marked with 'V' (accents). The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 4/4.

Gathering speed and increased energy, the Finale (marked "Tempo Grandioso") is extended through a heavily-accented and syncopated figure derived from the theme and driven headlong toward a decisive, dramatic and thunderous final statement.

126

(8^{va})

loco

meno f
un poco piu mosso

sfz

130

sfz

sfz

(8^{va})

Detailed description: This musical score shows measures 126 to 130. It features a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The tempo is 'Tempo Grandioso'. The dynamics are 'meno f' and 'un poco piu mosso'. The texture is 'loco'. The music is heavily accented and syncopated, with many notes marked with 'V' (accents). The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 4/4.

Kerr again gives extra weight to the line “and why not every man” with a texture change with writing in a very chromatic and harmonically complex language throughout the passage.

Coda (mm. 138 – end)
fragment of opening
motive

138 *cresc. ed accel. al Fine* *p* *8va*

142 *incalzando* *strepitoso* *loco* *tutti forza* *sfz sfz* *8vb*

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system, starting at measure 138, features a piano (*p*) dynamic and a tempo marking of *cresc. ed accel. al Fine*. It includes an *8va* (octave up) marking. The second system, starting at measure 142, includes markings for *incalzando*, *strepitoso*, *loco*, and *tutti forza*. It also features *sfz sfz* (sforzando) markings and an *8vb* (octave down) marking. The score is written in a key signature of two flats and a common time signature.

Other Significant Performances

- Internationally renowned piano duo. (1977 - 1995)
- First African American Piano Duo on the concert scene.
- Performed *Concert Scherzo* in several high-profile concerts during the 1980s including the Kennedy Center, the White House, and Carnegie Hall



Nyaho/Garcia Duo

- Several concert performances, 2021-2024
- Recorded in 2022 on MSR Classics



Three Kerr Publications Forthcoming



- Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos
 - Easter Monday Swagger, Scherzino for Piano
 - Dancétudes: 7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets for Piano

Research Opportunities

- Kerr's Archives
- Explore other composers whose works remain unpublished due to racial bias or neglect.
- Learn more about the artists that traveled on the Black College Circuit.
- Study the relationships that developed within communities of color.

