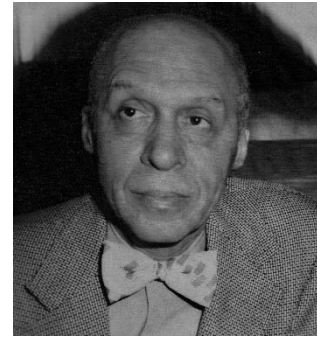


An Introduction to Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr. and *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?: Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos, Four Hands*.

Frances Clark Center Publication Party
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William Chapman Nyaho (nyaho@mac.com)



Biographical

- Dates: 1915 – 1988
- Born in Baltimore, Maryland
- Attended Frederic Douglass High School, where he studied with W. Llewellyn Wilson, a Baltimore-born African American conductor, musician, and music educator.
- Denied entrance to Peabody Conservatory because Black students were not allowed to attend.
- Attended Howard University briefly, then Eastman School of Music.
- At Eastman he studied piano with Cécile Genhart.
- Earned three degrees BM in piano, theory, and MM in theory, and graduated with honors.
- First position was Instructor of Piano and Organ at Knoxville College in Tennessee (HBCU).
- Taught at Howard University (HCBU) as Professor of Piano and Chair of the Piano Department from 1943-1976.
- Served as the organist at Plymouth Congregational Church in Washington, D.C. for 35 years.
- As pianist, performed widely in the Baltimore and Washington, DC area, and on the Black College Circuit.
- Two children, Judith, and Thomas III, from first marriage with Norma McAlister Kerr.
- 2nd marriage to Hortense Reid Kerr, professor of piano at Howard University.

Compositional Style and Output

- Composed for necessity and for special occasions.
- The catalogue lists over 150 works for piano, organ, voice, chorus, and chamber ensembles.
- No publications during his lifetime.
- Publications (prior to 2024): Six organ works and four art songs.
- Composition style merges European art music forms with African and African American musical elements and traditions. He was especially influenced by the African American Spiritual.
- Describes his musical style as “conservative,” rejecting serialism and atonality.
- Wanted to compose music that would “speak directly to the hearts of the listeners.”

Piano Catalogue

- 10 complete manuscripts for solo piano (1937-1970)
- 4 compositions for piano duo
- 2 compositions (missing pages) for piano duet
- 5 hymn settings for solo piano
- Simplified and pedagogical works

Selected Piano Works with Publication Forthcoming

Publications planned by the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy
eds. Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho

- *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?: Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos*, 1940 (**published March 2024**)
- *Dancétudes: 7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets for Piano*. 1959-63 written for his daughter, Judy Kerr to perform for auditions. (Late Intermediate – Early Advanced)
- *Easter Monday Swagger, Scherzino for Piano* 1970 (Advanced) written for Natalie Hinderas.

Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?: Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos

- Composed in 1940
- Needed a piece to perform with his duo-piano partner, [Sylvia Olden Lee](#), on the "Black College Circuit."
- Based on the African American Spiritual "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?"
- Formal Design: Loose theme and variation structure
 - Kerr's treatment of variation form enhances the narrative effect of the work by writing variations of differing lengths thus obscuring the more common sectional structure of variation form.
 - Hortense Reid Kerr writes, "And so, in this version of that form, he has tried to abbreviate some variations and elongate others, while at the same time altering the style and character of each."
- Advanced harmonic language. Tonal, but utilizing many extended harmonies; jazz, gospel, and blues influences.
- Performance History
 - Performed by Kerr/Lee duo over 20 times on the Black College Circuit
 - Performed by Delphin and Romain Piano Duo in several high-profile concerts during the 1980s including the Kennedy Center, the White House, and Carnegie Hall
 - Performed by Hortense Reid Kerr / Constance Tibbs Hobson throughout the 1980s
 - Performed by the Nyaho/Garcia Piano Duo in several performances, 2021-2023
 - Recorded by the Nyaho/Garcia Piano Duo in 2022

Bibliography and Resources

Archives

New York Public Library <https://archives.nypl.org/scm/23943>
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

[U.S. Library of Congress entry: Kerr, Thomas H., Jr.](#)

Published Works

- [African-American Organ Music Anthology](#), ed. Micky Thomas Terry, MorningStar Music
 - 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](#), ed. Herndon Spillman, GIA Publications (Organ)
- [Anthology Of Art Songs By Black American Composers](#), ed. Willis C. Patterson, Hal Leonard
 - Riding to Town
- [Second Anthology of Art Songs By Black American Composers](#), ed. Willis C. Patterson
 - Thou art my lute
 - In memoriam
 - Soliloquy
- [An Anthology of African and African Diaspora Songs](#), ed. Louise Toppin
 - Soliloquy
- [Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?: Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos](#), eds. Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho. The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy. (March 2024)

Recordings of Piano Works

- Natalie Hinderas Pianist Plays Music by Black Composers (1971)
Reissued on CD 1995: [Piano Music By African American Composers](#)
 - *Scherzino, Easter Monday Swagger*
- Nyaho/Garcia Piano Duo: Five by Four (2022)
 - [Concert Scherzo: Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?](#)

Dissertations and Articles

- Fitz-Fitzharris, Jane. "Compositional Techniques in Thomas Kerr, Jr.'s 'Anguished American Easter, 1968' and Their Application to the Theme of African-American Theology." DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2006. https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/4045/
- Hortense R. Kerr and Marva Cooper. "Selected Piano Music of Thomas H. Kerr, Jr." Archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20220203074502/http://www.music-research-inst.org/subs/im4_1/hrkerr.htm

Websites

- [African Diaspora Music Project: Thomas Kerr](#)
- [Songs of America: Thomas H. Kerr](#)
- [Piano Inspires Publications - Kerr](#)

Suggestions for Continued Research

- Kerr's Archives at the Schomburg Center. There is an abundance of piano, organ, vocal, and choral music waiting to be brought to light.
- Explore archives for other composers whose works remain unpublished due to racial bias or neglect.
 - Amistad Research Center (New Orleans, LA)
 - Center for Black Music Research (Columbia College, Chicago, IL)
 - Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York, NY)
- Learn about the Black College Circuit and artists that performed in these venues.
- Explore the relationships that developed within communities of color.