

THE IMPACT OF RACE ON PERCEPTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE
DELIVERY AND RECEPTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN GOSPEL MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

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Can a gospel choir made up of more White singers than Black create authentic gospel music? This project examines how racial perceptions, a persistent factor in American society, impact the delivery and reception of Black gospel music. This ethnographic study describes the lived experiences of the Ohio Northern University Gospel Ensemble, which began as an exclusively African American student organization and over the course of its twenty-six year existence experienced a shift in racial composition resulting in a membership that is currently majority White.

Interviews with key gospel music figures who have interacted with the Ensemble reveal insights about the industry, the spiritual significance of gospel music and the effect of race on the delivery of the music. Foundational gospel music figure, Bishop Rance Allen, recalls experiences that illustrate the influence race has had on opportunities to advance within the gospel music industry. Gospel recording artist and music innovator, Minister Chris Byrd, discusses his attraction to praise and worship music and his desire to create music that appeals to people of all races. Gospel music author and church pastor, Bishop Terence M. Sykes, describes changes in the sound of the gospel music performed by the Ensemble as the cultural configuration of the group shifted. This project also includes observations from Ensemble members past and present and from church congregation members for whom the group has performed.

The overall approach to this project is feminist and ethnographic, having been influenced by the work of D. Soyini Madison, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Audre Lorde. It also includes a performance studies lens, while incorporating textual analyses, and in-depth interviews as methods. The work of Dwight Conquergood on coperformance, Victor Turner on cultural performances and T.V. Reed on textual analysis of direct action movements provided inspiration and direction. In addition, the project draws heavily from work done by E. Patrick Johnson with a White, mostly atheist, Australian gospel choir. The study concludes that perceptions of authenticity are influenced greatly by the ability of those delivering and those receiving the music to make an emotional connection to it.

This project is dedicated to our loving creator, to all who love God and all who love African
American gospel music.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Prologue

The setting is Presser Hall on the campus of Ohio Northern University. The occasion is the 2013 spring concert for the ONU Women's Chorus, Men's Chorus and University Singers. It is an unseasonably cold March evening and as I watch the auditorium fill with students, parents, grandparents, faculty and staff I reflect on a much warmer spring afternoon when another concert was held in this same hall. In the spring of 1988 a smaller crowd of students and parents gathered in Presser to witness the first spring concert of the Ohio Northern University Gospel Ensemble. That audience was almost exclusively African American, as were the members of the Ensemble who took the stage that afternoon. That day there were about 75 in attendance. Tonight there is a standing room only crowd, mostly white. The program that day in 1988 was African American gospel music. The program tonight includes an eclectic mix of musical selections, mostly secular in nature. Though the racial composition of each of the performing groups tonight is majority white, as are the directors and musicians, their repertoire includes a Mexican song, a Negro spiritual, and a medley of African freedom songs. The concert finale is a gospel music selection performed by all three choirs combined and an African American soloist, me.

For most of the concert I am part of the audience. I sit in the balcony with my husband and family members of participating students. We make polite conversation as we wait for the music to begin. From the balcony we have a better view of the audience on the main floor than we do of the performers on the stage, but the acoustics of the hall are such that we are able to enjoy the music even if we cannot observe every move of the singers. The ensembles are in good voice and the audience is very receptive. After intermission I make my way out of the

balcony and down to the main floor. Much to the surprise of several audience members who had been sitting near me most of the night, I appear on stage for the final song of the evening. In 1988 when I stood on that stage there were 16 singers, a piano player and a drummer. Tonight there is a choir of 125 singers, a variety of instruments including several horns, drums, guitar and piano. The song begins and I hear the combination of the trumpets, trombone, tuba and then the entrance of the choir and even though I know what to expect, I can't help thinking this is not your typical gospel performance. The song is "He Never Failed Me Yet" and it was written by Robert Ray, an African American composer. As the song progresses the audience seems to get more involved. I can see heads bobbing and feet tapping. By the time we get to the chorus and I signal the choir to begin clapping, some of the audience members are ready to fall right in with us. We conclude the song after repeating the chorus several times and upon hitting the final notes the audience cheers and many leap to their feet. The concert has lasted more than two hours, yet people are slow to leave the building choosing instead to visit and share thoughts and feelings about the music of the evening. As I head to the parking lot I encounter a family also walking in that direction. They speak and are very complimentary about my performance and express their appreciation for the fact that ONU is not afraid to openly "praise the Lord."

As I walked to my car I reflected on the significance of what I just experienced. Twenty-six years ago I moved into a community that was completely foreign to me with a need to acclimate myself to my new environment and to make a place for myself within it. There is a Bible verse that says: "A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men." (Proverbs 18:16, Amplified Bible) I've spent a lifetime in search of what my gift might be. My twenty-six year journey at Ohio Northern has revealed that music is that gift and it has been

central to making room for me in this environment, helping me to navigate racial, gender and generational differences and helping me create a sense of community for myself and others.

Setting the Stage

In August of 1987 I accepted a position on the student affairs staff at Ohio Northern University. When I arrived in Ada, Ohio I soon learned that I would be the only African American female resident of the town not living on campus. In addition, I would be the only African American female staff member on campus. There were two African American males working on campus at the time, one faculty and the other staff. They were both over 60 years of age and both commuted to work daily from nearby Lima, Ohio. Having been born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio in a predominately African American neighborhood I was not accustomed to being in a setting where I was the only person of color or one of a very few. My childhood church had an African American congregation. I attended Cleveland public schools, which were predominately African American. My undergraduate college experience began at Howard University, a historically black university. (Howard is one of the HBCU's; historically black colleges and universities. Throughout this paper I will alternate between the terms African American and black. Although the term black can be used to include people of African descent who may not be American, in most cases it is used interchangeably with the term African American. That is the way it will be used here.) I eventually transferred to Old Dominion University to complete my undergraduate degree where the African American student population was about ten percent; even there the African American community on campus was significant enough to allow me not to feel like "the only" or "one of the few." Adjusting to life in Ada and at ONU required great effort on my part. Though I never received any outright threats there were enough stares and scowls from Ada residents to make me question how safe it was for me to live and work in this strange new environment. My first impression of Ada was that it looked

like one of those towns I had seen on drives through Ohio and other states and wondered aloud if there were any African American residents or if they had in fact ever even seen any people of color. Now I was calling this tiny village home. There were some friendly Ada inhabitants. When I ventured into the local grocery store or post office sometimes people would strike up conversation. They usually asked me what I was studying, assuming that I was a student. Sometimes I would correct the notion and other times I would let it go. It was clear they knew my reason for being in Ada was a connection to ONU. A realization about how conspicuous I was in this small village came one day when a United Parcel Service package was delivered to me. The package was left at the information desk of the student center on campus, which was in close proximity to my office. When I opened the package I noticed it was addressed to my apartment, which was several blocks away from campus. It struck me that somehow the driver knew where I worked and that I would be there rather than at home even though I had never met nor had any conversation with him. At that point I became keenly aware that life in Ada would be unlike life had been anywhere else I had lived up to this point.

On campus, there was a small African American student population and two Black student organizations; the Black Student Union for undergraduate students and the Black Law Student Association for law students. I became advisor for the Black Student Union and within two months of my being on campus I was involved in conversations about the possibility of starting a gospel choir. The purpose of the Black Student Union was to serve as part of a support system for Black students. BSU meetings and group activities gave students a place of refuge and stood in contrast to their experiences in residence halls or classrooms where many times as individuals they were the only person of color in the room. This group also gave them a collective voice on campus. The desire for the creation of a gospel choir seemed to come from

the need to express spirituality in a way that was not being practiced on campus or in the Ada community. The Village of Ada had eight churches at the time and the denominations ranged from Catholic to Methodist to Southern Baptist to Full Gospel, but with only one African American resident in town (me) there were no worship services where Black gospel music was part of the culture. I missed having the opportunity to take part in this kind of activity. There were African American students who seemed to be hungry for this expression, as well.

The Formation of the ONU Gospel Ensemble

Though I had been part of my church choir during my junior high and high school years and had been in my college gospel choir as an undergraduate student I had never directed a choir. It seemed clear, however, if we were to have a gospel choir at ONU, I was going to direct it whether or not I had previous experience. The ONU Gospel Ensemble was formed with a group of sixteen African American students. We decided to call it an ensemble rather than a choir because in my mind the word choir conjured up visions of thirty or forty robed singers and since we were few in number and planned to wear no formal uniformed apparel we thought Gospel Ensemble was a more accurate descriptor. We rehearsed for several weeks and had our first opportunity to sing in public at the campus Martin Luther King, Jr. remembrance in January of 1988. While I cannot remember the song we sang I remember the service was held in the campus chapel and the guest speaker was former civil rights activist Fred Shuttlesworth. The music of the Ensemble was well received and the campus seemed pleased to have the students showcased in this way. The Chaplain approached me about having this group become one of what they were calling Deputation Teams. These were student groups that would go out to churches in the area and share with various congregations. The existing Deputation Teams at that time included: The Chancel Singers – a group of students who led worship through song;

The Mime Troupe – a group of students who acted out the word of God in silence; Northern Chimes – a group of students who played music with hand bells; Puppets Personified – a group of students who acted out Christian themed skits with puppets; Unlimited Sharing – a group of students who led retreats with youth; Wesley Players – a Christian theatre troupe made up of student actors; and Son's Rays – a group of students who shared the message of Jesus Christ through song and testimony. Since Ohio Northern is a church related school affiliated with the United Methodist Church most of the requests for the student groups came from area United Methodist churches, many of them in rural areas of northwest and west central Ohio. We agreed to become one of the traveling teams going out to churches representing ONU. Our stated purpose, as it appeared in literature sent out by the Chapel to local and regional churches, was to share the word of God in song. In addition to the stated purpose we would find over the years this group would become a kind of second family with a set of shared experiences that bonded us to one another in special ways. The Gospel Ensemble became an officially recognized student organization and posed for our first yearbook photo in the 1989 edition. In that photo were eight student members and me as director.

Our first off-campus trip was to a small church over an hour away from campus. We traveled on an ONU van and though I was not experienced at van driving either, I got behind the wheel, followed the directions and drove us safely to our destination. The fifteen passenger van was somewhat intimidating to drive, but it allowed us all to travel as one group and those rides to and from the church became some of the most memorable moments of our engagements. We walked into the small country church that had invited us to share in worship and were the only people of color in the building. It was a church, so there was a relative sense of safety, but there was also a clear sense of being out of our element. We were on display. We sang our program

of prepared songs and after the service we stood in a receiving line and greeted members of the congregation. One by one, members would shake our hands and compliment us on our performance. All were friendly and most well-meaning, but some of the comments revealed a lack of exposure to people of color. There was one elderly woman who remarked how happy she was that we had not brought our “boom boxes” with us. Another woman asked if we had been at a nearby church the week before and when we said we had not she commented that there had been a group of “them” over there and she thought maybe it was us. When the students stared at me in disbelief I simply smiled and told them we would talk about it in the van. That became our signature response to questionable remarks or experiences. We would simply smile and say “in the van” and everyone knew that meant we would debrief on our trip back to campus. The ONU van became a multi-purpose space for us. It was our transportation to and from Ada, a private, safe space for discussing our experiences and even a mobile rehearsal space allowing us to run through our songs on the way to our engagements and to sing just for fun on the way home. In the early days when the group was all Black and we were visiting White churches there was discussion about comments that were made that revealed what a unique experience our visit was for members of the various congregations. Over the years, as the racial make-up of our group changed, the reactions of the congregations changed too, as did the conversations in the van. We talked more about funny experiences. These could include everything from missed notes and forgotten lyrics to misbehaving children in the congregation or interesting casseroles served at the carry-in luncheons that usually followed our morning worship service engagements. (There was one particularly memorable meal where we discovered the mystery filling in the sandwiches was bologna salad.)

Just recently I realized we may have done a one hundred-eighty degree turn, as conversation on the van after a Gospel Ensemble outreach experience (Deputation Teams are now referred to as Outreach Teams) turned once again to race. In this most recent van trip one of the members, who is bi-racial (Black and White) was talking about her mixed heritage and one of the White members commented how beautiful “mixed babies” are, especially those who are Black and White. The conversation continued for several minutes and I couldn’t help but think how the inclusion of racial subject matter in the “in the van” discussions had ebbed and flowed throughout the years.

The Ensemble continued to travel as one of the Chapel Deputation Teams and also developed an annual tradition of having a spring concert on campus. We would have a guest musician and director come in and do a workshop teaching the group new music which would be performed for members of the campus community and parents and family members of the group. Through these campus appearances the groups’ popularity continued to grow. After several years, there were white students expressing an interest in joining the group. At first there were just one or two. We welcomed them and there was no attempt to make them try to sound a certain way. There were no auditions. Anyone who loved to sing, expressed a love for God and agreed to sing Black gospel music was welcome to join us. In subsequent years we began attracting international students from England, Japan, and Africa. We even had an Arab student from Kuwait who expressed interest in singing with us one year. I was not surprised by the attraction of these other students to the music. What was surprising was their sustained interest in joining and continuing as part of the group. Something as simple as the way music was taught at rehearsals I thought might be a barrier to those who were not accustomed to such a routine. In school choirs in which I had participated, sheet music was distributed at rehearsal and used

during performances. The Gospel Ensemble rehearsal process was much like my church gospel choir experience and my college choir experience. There was no sheet music. You would receive a copy of the song lyrics and those were only to be used during the learning process. They would not be used when the songs were presented to a congregation or audience. Singers needed to have their hands free for clapping and the words memorized so that they could be sung from the heart. This process was uncomfortable for some, but many embraced it and came to truly enjoy it.

The Music of the Gospel

At one point there was a young White male who joined the group and wanted us to do some of his original compositions. This was the first direct challenge I had about the musical content of the groups' performances. The songs he was proposing were in a style that was clearly not gospel. They were more like folk songs and while I gave him an opportunity to teach two of the songs to the group, it really began to bother me that we were not staying true to the music the group had been founded upon. As I recall we only sang those songs at a few rehearsals. I do not recall them being part of any off campus engagement. The student only remained in the Ensemble for one academic year and though he continued to be a student at ONU he did not return to the Ensemble the following year.

It was not my goal to discourage that students' participation in the Ensemble, nor his desire to share his music, but I felt compelled to preserve the heritage of the group. I believed the preservation of that heritage was central to the mission of the Ensemble. One of the reasons we were formed was to introduce to this community a way of worshipping God that had not been part of the community when we joined it. This way of expressing our spirituality was part of a culture many of us shared. We were willing to share it with others and to have others share in it

with us, but preserving the form and content was an important part of the process. The journey of African Americans is such an integral part of the development of black gospel music that I believed being intentional about preserving that connection was important. Noted gospel scholar Melva Wilson Costen describes gospel music this way: “By definition, black gospel music is both a genre (song form) and a style of performance, embodying the soulful expressions of the history of black people in and out of bondage and looking with joy to the future.” (Costen, 2004, p. 76) Negro spirituals emerged from the bondage experienced by Africans who were enslaved in America. Black or African American gospel music has its’ roots in those spirituals and in blues music and the experiences of life after slavery; in the depression of the 1930s and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s where bolder music called freedom songs emerged.

(Kwon, 2011, p. 1) Music in the African American tradition, Black gospel included, is a product of a rich and problematized history. As Costen put it, “In a strange and alien land, they were enslaved, marginalized, denied respect, and oppressed by the very people who introduced them to Christianity! This unique history allows the gathered Christian community to freely call itself by whatever name it chooses. African American, Black and Afro-American have replaced the names spuriously given by Euro-American evangelizers.” (Costen, 2007, p. 2) A review of the literature reveals a wealth of material on the subject of Black gospel music. Much has been written about the origin of the music and its connection to the history of Africans in America. Trineice Robinson-Martin (2009), in her article “Performance Styles and Musical Characteristics of Black Gospel Music”, Deborah Smith Pollard (2008) in her book *When The Church Becomes Your Party*, and Jerma Jackson (2004) in her book *Singing In My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* all bring clarity to an understanding of gospel music. The work of Angela M.S. Nelson, in her essay “‘Why We Sing’: The Role and Meaning of Gospel in African American

Popular Culture,” is helpful for providing a thorough definition and context for those who may not be familiar with this music. The work Joyce Marie Jackson (1995) did in her article, “The Changing Nature of Gospel Music: A Southern Case Study”, makes the case that this genre has remained essentially Black and unencumbered by White influences. This is a claim which is challenged by recent changes in the gospel music community, and by the basic premise of this study. My quest to stay connected to the roots of the music was being reflected in decisions about what music to include in the groups repertoire.

Though the Ensemble did not include the songs that White male student wrote in the list of regularly performed music, several years later there was another White Ensemble member, this one female, who wrote a song that was stylistically very much like the staples in the groups’ repertoire. This particular song was performed for several years by the group and ended up being recorded on one of the Ensemble’s anniversary concert compact discs. To date the Gospel Ensemble has recorded four CD’s; one each for the tenth, fifteenth, twentieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries.

In more recent years some of the songs the Ensemble now sings could be categorized more as praise and worship songs than traditional or contemporary gospel songs. The genre of praise and worship music has roots traced to White contemporary Christian music rather than Black music. There is a significant segment of the gospel recording industry that has embraced this music, however, and has ushered in a movement being called urban praise and worship. This has led Black churches to pick up these songs and incorporate them into worship services. In turn, students that have joined the Gospel Ensemble in recent years have been attracted to these songs and have made requests to have them included in the repertoire.

Contemporary Christian music (CCM) is thought to have emerged in the 1960s on the heels of what was referred to as a “Hippie” movement called the “Jesus People Movement.” (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 117) The development of this genre was a product of young people mixing a spiritual message with the popular music of the day, which in most cases was rock music. Praise and worship music has become a very popular and fast growing sub-genre of CCM. Where many Black gospel songs focused on overcoming opposition CCM was focused on inspiration and devotion. (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 115)

Another difference between traditional and even contemporary gospel songs and praise and worship songs is the fact that praise and worship music is designed to be congregation friendly. Gospel songs and even Christian rock songs can be complex, involve improvisation and be difficult to memorize. Praise and worship songs are designed to be easy to memorize and to pick up. They generally have simple melody lines and lyrics which allow the congregation to join in rather than act as observers. (Neto, 2010, p. 196) Praise and worship leaders are tasked with engaging the congregation so that they are participants and the goal is to create an atmosphere that will allow the congregants to experience the presence of God. (Pollard, 2008, p. 17) Pastors and praise leaders often refer to praise as a way of guiding people into worship with the purpose of worship being to honor God for who He is and thus this is an exercise that is exclusively for those who have a personal relationship with God. (Pollard, 2008, p. 19) Since the emphasis in praise and worship is more on the congregation than on the praise leader who is in front of the congregation there is less importance placed on the actual quality of the voice of the singer. Leon Neto, in his article about praise and worship style describes the contrast to Black gospel music this way: “... the singers usually possess common, ordinary voices, not too

distant from the untrained person. As opposed to Gospel singers, Praise and Worship artists usually do not possess extreme or potent voices.” (Neto, 2010, p. 196)

While praise and worship music is still closely associated by many with White people it has been growing in popularity in African American communities. White artists performing the music with a more soulful sound, such as Martha Munizzi and her twin sister Mary Alesci, bi-racial artists such as Israel Houghton, who grew up in an Hispanic church and believes his music defies categorization and Black contemporary gospel artists like Fred Hammond, who is known as the creator of urban praise and worship all account for the growing popularity of this music within the Black community. (Pollard, 2008, pp. 26 - 34) The popularity of this genre of music actually led to the creation of a spin-off group from the Gospel Ensemble at ONU. People of Worship was founded in 2008 by an African American student who was part of the Gospel Ensemble. People of Worship concentrated primarily on sharing praise and worship music and became another one of the traveling teams on the Chapel’s roster. The group was smaller than Gospel Ensemble, but no less enthusiastic. There were both Black and White student participants and they kept an ambitious travel schedule. There were several joint ventures over the years, but there were also times when students who were members of both groups had to choose between one or the other, as both had engagements for the same day and time.

Building a Community Within a Community

The choice to honor the heritage of the Gospel Ensemble not only reflects the history of the African American people, but helps convey the sense of community among the people who create the music. Costen (2007) says: “This history also served to deepen the need for communities of refuge, which happen naturally when people gather around a common cause. The gathered community, first in secrecy as “invisible communities of faith,” found that the

separate environments were conducive to authentic communication with God and with one another.” (Costen, 2007. p. 2) What Costen describes relates to the experience and intent of the original Gospel Ensemble members. They built a community based on what they intended to be authentic communication with God through their music and with one another and in coming together found a sort of refuge from what felt at times like a strange land. This corresponds with what noted gospel scholar Horace Boyer relates as the purpose for gospel choirs on college campuses. Boyer says:

Gospel music is the unifying element of Black students all over the campuses of the United States. Gospel choirs began on college campuses to provide some continuity between the black church and the academic life, but students found that they liked it and wanted to perpetuate its existence. On many predominately white campuses – and I happen to work at one of these – the gospel choir is the one visible evidence of the presence of Black students. They’re not in the theater group; they’re not in the symphony orchestra; they’re not in the ballet troupe. They are in the gospel choir because they find, through it, some means of expression. (Jackson, 2004, p. 134)

In line with the observations made by Boyer about the role of the gospel choir on a college campus Janet Ciccone (2012) writes about the Ohio State University gospel choir, African American Voices, in her article, “Start with a song to Belong: Scholars Show that Gospel Choirs, Other Strategies, Help College Students Stay.” The focus of her article, as reflected in the title, is the effect of that group on African American student retention. The OSU group is exclusively African American and according to Ciccone, provides a family atmosphere for the participants and establishes a connection to OSU that allows the students to persist to graduation.

(Ciccone, 2012, p. 4) Terrell L. Strayhorn is also at OSU and for his article, “Singing in a Foreign Land: An Exploratory Study of Gospel Choir Participation Among African American Undergraduates at a Predominantly White Institution”, he conducted interviews with 21 Black, undergraduate students who were members of a college gospel choir. What he found was three recurring themes with regard to benefits gained by the Black student choir participants and they were: “establishing a sense of belonging, developing ethnic identity, and nurturing resilience.” (Strayhorn, 2011, p. 137) The function and benefits described by Boyer, Ciccone and Strayhorn may have been true of the ONU Gospel Ensemble in the early years, but over the years things began to change. African American students were becoming active in other campus clubs and organizations. Fewer African American students coming to campus seemed to come from a background where church or singing in a gospel choir was part of their experience. White students were being attracted to the group in larger numbers. The group began to be identified less as an African American student organization and more as a multicultural group. Still there were functions and benefits that remained. The sense of community and bonding to each other and the institution seemed to be a constant. Jan McCrary, in her article “ ‘Good’ and ‘Real’ Reasons College-Age Participants Join University Gospel and Traditional Choral Ensembles”, surveyed nearly 300 individual choir or ensemble members. McCrary quoted one of her survey respondents as a way to summarize her findings. “I like ‘the sense of community and of a higher purpose...music is a vehicle for a deeper experience and not an end in itself.’ ” (McCrary, 2001, p. 29) The ONU Gospel Ensemble was created to meet African American student needs, but now seemed to be serving additional purposes, as well. It had become a means of bringing students from different backgrounds together around a central theme. It had also become a way

for church congregations who may never before have been exposed to this kind of music or to students from various backgrounds to have that kind of experience.

Transition and Change

As more and more White students joined the Ensemble and fewer Black students seemed interested in being part of it, the racial balance began to shift dramatically. And then we were invited to sing at a Black Baptist church in Lima, Ohio. Earlier in the history of the group we had gone to black churches, but those had been churches associated with members of our Ensemble and the racial mix of the Ensemble at the time had been mostly Black. Now we were being invited to a church where none of the members of the Ensemble had any family or friends in the congregation and the membership of the Ensemble was now three quarters White. How would we be received? The church was relatively small, but was completely full. The White students in our Ensemble were the only White people present in the building. I wondered what thoughts and feelings they were experiencing. I wondered if they would be intimidated since before our part of the service there were several selections delivered by the all Black church choir. Our turn came. The students sang and showed no sign of intimidation or concern. The congregation was very warm and encouraging. They gave audible and visible signs of support and when the group finished singing many in the congregation stood and applauded. At one point the choir began singing a song the Ensemble knew and the students joined in and sang along with the choir. On the ride back to campus in the van the students were bubbling over with excitement. They enjoyed the experience so much they were anxious for another invitation to a church in Lima. As I considered the events of that day it brought to mind a similar experience from a previous year with the Ensemble. We had learned a song to perform with a gospel recording artist who was being presented in concert on our campus in the performing arts center.

Rance Allen, who pastors a church in Toledo, Ohio (and is now a Bishop in the Church of God in Christ), is a well-respected name nationally and internationally in the field of gospel music. Many young artists credit him with influencing their styles and careers. He has been tapped to lend his voice to recordings for a wide range of artists from the up and coming to the older and well established. He came to Ohio Northern University to perform and the Gospel Ensemble got a chance to open for him and to do one selection at the close of the concert with him. In an interview with the campus television station after the concert Allen was quoted as saying he would always remember ONU where the gospel choir was almost all White and “did alright.”

It has been more than 25 years since I first arrived in Ada and at Ohio Northern University. There are a few more African American residents in the Village of Ada now and a few more African American students, faculty and staff on campus. The Black Student Union and Black Law Student Association are still active groups with healthy student participation and they have been joined by a few other Black student organizations. The Chapel Deputation Teams are now referred to as Religious Life Outreach Teams. The 2013 roster of teams includes: People of Worship – a contemporary praise and worship team that sings songs of different genres and cultures; Unlimited Faith Outreach –formerly Unlimited Sharing; Northern Chimes; Son’s Rays; Agape Improv – formerly Wesley Players; and the Gospel Ensemble. It is worth noting that of the six current Outreach Teams only two of them, People of Worship and Gospel Ensemble, have participation by students of color. The Gospel Ensemble still fulfills a spiritual need for some African American students, but it is no longer an exclusively African American group. In fact, during the 2012-13 spring semester, the group had more White members than Black. The evolution of this group and my experiences with it inspired a desire to examine it more closely and pose some questions about the role of the Ensemble past and

present, the music produced by the Ensemble and the role that race may have played both within and surrounding the Ensemble. I have struggled throughout the years with the notion of authenticity and being true to the heritage of the music. What makes gospel music authentic? Can a gospel choir made up of more White singers than Black make authentic gospel music? What about me as director of this group? Am I an authentic gospel singer just because I am Black and does that lend authenticity to the group as I serve as director? I participated in a gospel choir in college, but grew up in a church where the staples were spirituals and anthems. With a church and music background such as that am I equipped to create an authentic gospel experience for the students at ONU or the church congregations who invite the Ensemble to be part of their worship services? I have also wrestled with notions of potential “betrayal” to my heritage. The Gospel Ensemble was formed as a way for African American students to have a voice, (literally and figuratively) and it has become more White than Black. Along the way I have also allowed myself to be cast in the stereotypical role of gospel soloist standing out in front of this group. I am the large African American woman who sings; that stereotypical image that has been part of popular culture for decades. And last, but not least, there have been fears that I have failed my community because many of the students for whom this group was started no longer seem to have any use for it. Who owns this music and who has “the right” to sing it?

In a sermon given at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “We must face the sad fact that at eleven o’clock on Sunday morning when we stand to sing ‘In Christ there is no East or West,’ we stand in the most segregated hour of America.” (Barndt, 2011, p. 1) The racial segregation to which Dr. King referred in 1968 is still very much in existence in 2013. There is a stark contrast between the Christian ideals expressed in the hymn referenced by Dr. King and reality. The lyrics of the hymn say:

In Christ there is no East or West, In Him no South or North;
 But one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.
 In Him shall true hearts everywhere their high communion find;
 His service is the golden cord, close binding humankind.
 Join hands, then, members of the faith, whatever your race may be!
 Who serves my Father as His child is surely kin to me.
 In Christ now meet both East and West, in Him meet North and South;
 All Christly souls are one in Him throughout the whole wide earth.
 (Oxenham, 2013, p. 1)

The words of this hymn declare a kind of Christian unity that is easier sung about than lived. In many ways the ONU Gospel Ensemble is living out this kind of unity. Throughout its history, regardless of the racial make-up of the group or the audience the performance of some traditional African American gospel music has remained consistent. E. Patrick Johnson, in the introduction to his book *Appropriating Blackness*, asks the question: "...how are the stakes changed when a 'white' body performs Blackness?" (Johnson, 2003, p. 2) I would like to pose similar questions with regard to the performance of African American gospel music by those other than African Americans, particularly White people. Are the stakes changed when White bodies perform Black gospel music? For whom are the stakes changed; the singer, the listener, both? It seems to me what is at stake is the authenticity of the experience. The central question is: have perceptions of race impacted individual beliefs about authenticity in the delivery and reception of the music sung by the ONU Gospel Ensemble?

This Project

Working with the Ohio Northern University Gospel Ensemble for the past twenty-six years has been a joy and a challenge. I am grateful for the many opportunities it has afforded me both personally and professionally. Even more importantly, I am grateful that there are scores of students who report that their association with the Ensemble has made meaningful contributions to their lives. An added bonus is that there are members of numerous church congregations throughout Ohio and surrounding states who have expressed appreciation for the ministry of this ensemble. None of these facts prompted the pursuit of this project, however. There were several specific reasons I believed this project to be significant for study. First is the racial composition of the Ensemble throughout the history of the group. This group began as exclusively African American and evolved into a more multicultural ensemble and the racial evolution of the group resulted in an interesting dance to try to balance the multicultural interest and appeal, diverse membership and the desire to remain true to the roots of the group and the tradition of the music. The second reason has to do specifically with the music. The genre of gospel music has grown and developed over the twenty-six years the ensemble has been in existence. What is popular in gospel music today is not the same as what was popular in 1987. In particular, there has been a trend in popularity of praise and worship music (also known as contemporary worship music) which is being embraced by many African American gospel music recording artists and churches yet is seen by some as a departure from the roots of the form. The third reason is the unique challenge/opportunity gospel music provides for some form of diverse community building. This uniqueness is tied to Christianity which professes one great fellowship with no respect to race. In an increasingly diverse culture we have made strides in integrating several institutions, yet the church remains one of the most segregated areas in American society. At the very heart of this project is a desire to examine how racial perceptions,

which seem to be such a persistent factor in American society, might impact what individuals believe to be authentic or inauthentic about the delivery and reception of Black gospel music by the ONU Gospel Ensemble.

Chapter Two lays out the theoretical and methodological framework for this project. It takes a detailed look at the research tools and explores with more specificity how the research was conducted. Chapter Three focuses on the composition of the ONU Gospel Ensemble throughout its twenty-six year history. It surveys the racial make-up of the group past and present. It also examines comments from current and alumni members of the ensemble with regard to race and comments from members of some of the church congregations who have hosted the Ensemble. Chapter Four places emphasis on the music. It compares and contrasts what was popular in gospel music in 1987, when the Ensemble began, with what is popular today. It examines not only songs within the Ensembles' repertoire over its history, but explores some of the changes and developments in the broader gospel music community. Particular attention is paid to the rise of praise and worship music and how that music relates to gospel music. Chapter Five considers what role the Gospel Ensemble may play in multicultural worship experiences. In addition there is also an examination of various individual definitions for authenticity and how perceptions about the racial mix of the Ensemble impact individual beliefs about the authenticity of the music produced by the Ensemble. The final chapter explores the perceived importance of the preservation of African American heritage or ties to the roots of the Ensemble. It also draws conclusions from an examination of the themes that emerged throughout the process of the study. Finally, those themes and conclusions are measured against the original questions that launched this project.

Prologue Part II

At the concert that was the culmination of a Gospel, Praise and Worship workshop held in the spring of 2013 with the ONU Gospel Ensemble, Philippian Missionary Baptist Church choir and guest director, gospel recording artist, Minister Chris Byrd, there was a diverse audience. There were parents of Ensemble members, other ONU students, faculty and staff members, Philippian church members, people from the Ada, Kenton and Lima communities in attendance. The music was lively and everyone in the room seemed to respond and connect. During the intermission a little girl who looked to be about seven or eight years old, came up to speak to me. She was the daughter of a faculty member. She extended her hand to me and told me I was “doing a very good job.” I smiled and thanked her and gave her a hug. As I turned to walk to the back of the ballroom I was approached by an elderly White woman who was eager to share her thoughts with me and they put me in mind of that first ONU Gospel Ensemble trip to that small rural church several miles away from campus. The woman said “This is different, but it is still good.”

CHAPTER 2.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

The structure for this project has many facets and draws on interdisciplinary frameworks. The overall approach is feminist and ethnographic. It also includes a performance studies lens, while incorporating textual analyses, and in-depth interviews as methods. Other methods employed include surveys, interviews, field notes, and the sharing of my personal narrative. My project, therefore, describes the lived experiences of the Ohio Northern University Gospel Ensemble and seeks to answer research questions by examining themes that emerge from the participant observation, in-depth interviews, textual analyses and some amount of self-reflexivity revealed through personal narrative. I examined these themes and experiences through existing literature.

Ethnography. The term ethnography, derived from Greek, refers to the act of describing people and is believed to be the oldest qualitative research methodology in existence. (Roberts, 2009, p. 291) Chris Barker, in his book, *Cultural Studies: Theories and Practice*, describes ethnography as seeking a “detailed holistic description and analysis of cultures based on intensive fieldwork.” (Barker, 2012, p. 32) This fieldwork requires spending a significant period of time with people observing and listening to them, asking questions and participating in their lives with the goal being to produce what cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls “thick descriptions” of the array of multifaceted theoretical structures within which they operate, including the “unspoken and taken for granted assumptions ...” (Barker, 2012, p. 32) As Barker notes, ethnography “concentrates on the details of local life while connecting them to wider social processes.” (Barker, 2012, p. 32) Barker’s observations describe the approach I take to this project. I have chosen to focus on a close, in-depth case study of the Ohio Northern

University (ONU) Gospel Ensemble, a local group, rather than do a survey of several college gospel choirs in general, thus my fieldwork with the ONU gospel group and seeking out connections to broader societal practices of gospel groups.

Having chosen to study a group with which I have been associated for more than a quarter century, participant ethnography combined with some autoethnography was a logical methodological choice for this project. In *Critical Ethnography*, D. Soyini Madison (2012) describes autoethnography as the study of “one’s own social, ethnic, or cultural group” or a study with “an autobiographical focus that has an ethnographic or extended contextual interest.” (Madison, 2012, p. 197) In *The Extended Case Method*, Michael Burawoy (2009) makes the statement that no matter what approach we take to research “we are always simultaneously participant and observer, because inescapably we live in the world we study.” (Burawoy, 2009, p. 9) In the early developmental stages of the project I was concerned that selecting a group with which I was so closely associated would make it difficult for me to approach the work with impartiality, which I believed was the expectation. How liberating it was to discover this methodological approach and learn that my perspective would be a valued part of the process and product. This was further underscored when I was made aware of a feminist perspective which emphasized the importance of “making the researcher visible in the ‘frame’ of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer” (Lester, 1999, p. 1) Armed with this knowledge I was empowered to bring my own voice to the project.

Performance Theory. Dwight Conquergood is credited with highlighting intersections between performance studies and ethnography. In her work on critical ethnography, D. Soyini Madison expounds on Conquergood’s ideas about taking an alternative approach to research.

Rather than engaging in traditional research which centers on how accurately human behavior can be measured, Madison suggests the focus of study shift from “structures, patterns and products that were so revered by positivist thinking, to the yearnings, struggles, stories, tensions, symbols and performance that produce and are produced by these structures, patterns and products.” (Madison, 2012, p. 184) Madison describes several characteristics of performance studies that justify my inclusion of this lens in the framework for my study. According to Madison (2012), performance studies makes behavior the focus of study, includes a focus on the relationship between studying performance and doing performance as integral to the process, and does not require that researchers aspire to ideological neutrality. “The challenge is to become as aware as possible of one’s own stances in relation to the positions of others and then take steps to maintain or change positions.” (Madison, 2012, p. 177) Additionally, Madison describes how dialogical performance can be valuable. She talks about the practice of this kind of performance bringing many different voices into the conversation without subduing or quieting each other. (Madison, 2012, p. 186) Madison discusses Conquergood’s suggestion that the ethnographic participant observer become more of a cop performer. “Cop performance as dialogical performance means you not only do what subjects do, but you are intellectually and relationally invested in their symbol making practices as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires. Cop performance, for Conquergood, is a ‘doing with’ that is a deep commitment.” (Madison, 2012, p. 186) My involvement with the Gospel Ensemble provided easy access for me to engage in a cop performance role and to exercise and exhibit the deep commitment Conquergood suggested, as I operated as both participant and observer.

Many of the experiences I observed and in which I participated during the course of my research could be considered cultural performances. Anthropologist Milton Singer introduced

that term and defined these performances as having a start and finish, a set sequence of actions, a group of performers, an audience, a location and an occasion. (Madison, 2012, p. 169) In other words, these were conventional performances in various settings, such as a religious service, which was one example he gave. (Madison, 2012, p. 170) Taking Singer's definition, the Gospel Ensemble outreach engagements (trips to regional churches) and spring concerts line up perfectly as examples of cultural performances. They each had a beginning and an ending, there was a set program of songs, a congregation or audience, the location was either a church or an appropriate performance space on campus and the occasion was communal worship, whether that was for a morning worship service or an afternoon anniversary concert. Anthropologist Victor Turner produced a comprehensive and rich body of work which has been helpful to many and illuminates the relationship between performance, culture and ethnography. (Madison, 2012, p. 169) One concept associated with Turner's work, which is particularly key here, is the notion that cultural performances "show ourselves to ourselves in ways that help us recognize our behavior,...as well as our unconscious needs and desires." (Madison, 2012, p. 170) These cultural performances have the potential to call our attention to things that may remain invisible to us in daily life. Turner compared cultural performances to "magic" mirrors allowing people to see their reflections in ways that provoke thought, powerful emotions and in some cases a desire to make changes. (Madison, 2012, p. 170) These are intriguing claims, especially as we consider them in relation to gospel music presentations as cultural performances, with one of the goals of the gospel message being changed lives. Madison remarks that not only do cultural performances have the ability to show us things about ourselves as we are, but to "shape and direct who we are and what we can become." (Madison, 2012, p. 170)

Feminist Theory. Having been influenced by the work of bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw, I incorporated Black feminist theory in my approach to this work. I privileged my experience and the experiences of the participants and allowed theory to emerge from those experiences. In an article called “Sisterhood: Beyond Public and Private,” bell hooks (McKinnon, 1996) speaks at length about the relationship of theory to practice in the academy. She commented how much of the work she has done related to the practice of feminist theory has involved trying to understand something she was experiencing and moving from that experience into theorizing about it. This approach was important to me as I participated in work with the Gospel Ensemble during my research period, as allowing theory to emerge seems a much more organic process. The flexibility this affords is beneficial in the event unanticipated themes present themselves. The research questions for this project revolve around race, however, as an adult, female, African American administrator working with a group of adolescent students of various races, interacting with church congregations with members of various races and ages eight to eighty, any one of the facets of who I am or who they are might demand focus at any given time. It was important to consider the intersection of these various aspects and their possible impact upon the project.

Kimberle Crenshaw, an African-American woman, attorney and professor of law, coined the term intersectionality to address the struggles of women of color who she saw falling through the cracks, as they navigated the intersection of their race and gender. As I considered my role in this study, intersectionality was an important concept for me to contemplate. It was essential to consider the role of gender and of age along with race as I did my investigation. A model I considered for navigating this intersectional concept was found in the approach taken by Patricia Hill Collins. In an article titled “Reply to Commentaries: Black Sexual Politics Revisited”

Collins (2008) discusses a strategy called dynamic centering, which is “foregrounding selected themes and ideas while moving others to the background.” (Collins, 2008, p. 68) Though racial themes may be in the foreground for much of the study there is a gender presence, which may be in the background, but plays a pertinent role. The role that age plays is important, as well. There is an age differential between me and the students that is more pronounced now than it was when I first began work with the Ensemble. There is also an interesting age dynamic at work between our group and the congregations with whom we engage. All of these variables operating simultaneously broaden the meaning and experience of intersectionality.

Poet, Audre Lorde’s work is a model of intersectionality in several ways. Lorde (1984) considered herself a poet, not a theorist, yet her voice “is central to the development of contemporary feminist theory.” (Lorde, 1984, p. 7) She brought her many intersecting identities to bare on her work. She was an artist who was able to merge the creativity of her art with the objectivity of the world of ideas that is the theoretical. I was influenced by the work Lorde did in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* as I conducted my research and drew conclusions from the data. According to Lorde “it is the work of feminism to make connections, to heal unnecessary divisions,” (Lorde, 1984, p. 8) and establishing that kind of connection was key to the work of my study and indeed to the work of the Gospel Ensemble.

Textual Analysis. In his book, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle*, T.V. Reed (2005) looks at direct action movements using textual analysis as his methodology, but with a twist. He says:

While I value formal textual analysis,...I think it has been overvalued in cultural studies to the neglect of meaning-making contexts. In this book, I have been more interested in social movements as sites of the

production and reception of cultural texts than in the formal interpretation of these texts. Or put differently, the texts I am interested in most are the movements themselves, with their cultural productions as a means to that end.” (Reed, 2005, p. xvii)

This approach caught my attention because it opened up new possibilities for ways to look at my work. I was inspired by Reed’s tactic viewing the movement as the text to be examined with the cultural production being regarded as a means to that end. This seemed applicable to considering the Gospel Ensemble as text. Reed’s approach allowed for examining the process of forming the group, making the music and sharing that music. As Reed stated: “In my view, the best cultural studies work has attended to three interrelated levels of analysis: cultural production, the texts produced, and audience reception of those texts.” (Reed, 2005, p. xvii)

There are many ideas and concepts within the Reed work which are parallel to the work I am exploring in gospel music. He chose to examine protests, but the cultural work of the Gospel Ensemble can be considered a movement, as well. As Reed indicated,; “The forms of culture most central to the civil rights movement were undoubtedly music and religion.” (Reed, 2005, p. 2) Just as those elements were central to the civil rights movement, gospel music which combines music and religion, might be viewed as a central components to the diversity efforts within the religious life program at Ohio Northern University and perhaps to the churches that invite the Ensemble to share with them in worship. Reed commented: “Alongside and entwined with the ‘liberation theology’ of black ministers stood the great ‘liberation musicology’ contained in the tradition of African American song. Singing proved to have wide appeal across class, regional, generational, gender, and other lines of difference.” (Reed, 2005, p. 13) Singing

African American gospel music at ONU and taking it to churches throughout the region has displayed the kind of cross cultural appeal Reed described. Reed also stated:

Music had always been a central part of the black religious experience.

Ministers knew that a good choir was a good recruiting device. In the same fashion, many who came to meetings came just to hear the singing.

This is music that bypasses the commercial interests of the music industry, and it also downplays the importance of singing expertise. Singing in the black tradition is very much a participatory event. Thus going to a meeting, even just to listen, could quickly lead to deeper levels of involvement. Get their voices, one might say, and their politics will follow. (Reed, 2005, p. 28)

Music was used very deliberately to draw people into the civil rights movement. While the initial intention of the gospel music shared by the ONU Ensemble was to draw people in spiritually it displayed the ability to use that same power to draw people in and challenge their notions about diversity.

While gospel music is a personal passion for me I struggled with how I might do cultural studies work which would make a new or significant contribution on this topic. I felt constrained believing my approach would be limited to looking at the history of the genre or focusing on the commercially successful contributors to the genre. Reading the work of T.V. Reed and noting his focus on the role of unknown, ordinary individuals and their contributions to the civil rights movement helped open my mind to the possibility that examination of the ONU Gospel Ensemble might have merit. Using this group as a subject would allow me to examine how ordinary people from various ethnic, racial, religious and other backgrounds are affected by participating in the making of gospel music and how their experience shaped the experience of

various listeners. I agree with Reed's statement: "those forces labeled cultural may at times have a deeper and more widespread impact on most of our lives than political or economic forces." (Reed, 2005, p. xviii)

Methods

My methods included surveys, interviews, field notes and the sharing of my personal narrative. There were several populations surveyed for this project. Over the course of the first four months of 2013, the Gospel Ensemble traveled to six churches to sing during Sunday morning or evening worship services. Surveys were done with three of those congregations. The churches who participated in the study included two small, white, United Methodist churches and one multi-racial, non-denominational church. The surveys were distributed in hard copy to members of the congregation who filled them out by hand. In April of 2013 the Ensemble participated in a praise and worship music workshop. A guest director was brought in and the Ensemble paired with the mass choir of the Philippian Missionary Baptist Church of Lima, Ohio. At the workshop, the guest director instructed the combined choir about the role of praise and worship music and taught the group eight new songs. At the conclusion of the two day workshop participants were asked to respond to survey questions about their involvement. Again, these were hard copy paper survey forms and participants filled them out by hand. Following the workshop the Ensemble and the choir performed together in concert presenting the music they learned at the workshop. The audience for that concert was also surveyed in the same method as the church congregations and workshop participants had been with hard copy paper surveys. At the end of the term, members of the Ensemble were surveyed about their experiences throughout the 2012-13 school year. This survey was conducted on line in order to allow Ensemble members to respond to questions anonymously. This approach was taken to

encourage candid, un-censored responses. Interviews were conducted with twenty-one alumni Gospel Ensemble members. Some of the interviews were done by telephone and others were conducted face to face. Every effort was made to obtain a wide range of participants to reflect the various years the Ensemble has been in existence. In addition, an effort was made to acquire a mix of interviewees by race, gender and level of involvement. Some of the interviews were conducted in a small group setting bringing several alumni members together. Also interviewed, were gospel music recording artists who have at one point or another either directed the Ensemble in a workshop setting or performed as a guest artist with the Ensemble in concert.

Having founded the Gospel Ensemble and kept continuous contact with and involvement in it throughout its history there are experiences and reflections I was able to recall and connect to the research done with the Ensemble during the current period. I kept field notes with my observations gleaned from experiences I had while traveling with the group during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 academic years. I was also a participant in the workshop and culminating concert held in spring 2013. Reactions and memories from those experiences are shared and considered part of the process.

Survey and Interview Questions. Members of the Ensemble were asked to complete an online survey responding to the following questions:

1. What motivated you to join the ONU Gospel Ensemble?
2. Have you had other experience singing or listening to gospel music? If so, please describe that experience.
3. How does the music Gospel Ensemble produces compare to gospel music produced by other groups in which you have participated or other gospel music you have heard?

4. Do you consider the music presented by the Gospel Ensemble to be “authentic” gospel music in the African American tradition?
Why or why not?
5. Do you believe the racial mix of the ONU Gospel Ensemble makes the music it produces unique or special in any way? If so, how?
6. Of all the churches the Ensemble visited during spring semester of 2013, which church congregation seemed most receptive to the presentation of the Gospel Ensemble?
7. Of all the churches the Ensemble visited during spring semester of 2013, which church service did you enjoy most and why?
8. Did you have any expectations about any of the churches prior to visiting them based on the denominational affiliation or assumed racial make-up of the congregation?
9. How did your experience line up with your expectations?
10. For statistical purposes, please provide the following demographic information: Race, Age, Gender

Please share any additional observations or comments you believe will be helpful or relevant: (You may share your name, if you wish to be quoted or have statements attributed to you, or you may withhold your name to remain anonymous.)

There were seventeen active members of the Ensemble for the 2012-13 academic year. The gender breakdown was twelve women and five men. There were two African American women, one Bi-Racial woman (Black and White), two African American men, one African man, one

woman of Middle-Eastern and White descent, eight White women and two White men. The group included five sophomores, two juniors, nine seniors and one alumna who is now a University staff member. Of the seventeen Ensemble participants for 2012-13, thirteen remained active for the entire year and participated in the survey.

Members of the church congregations where the Gospel Ensemble visited and the audience for the Ensemble spring concert were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Prior to hearing the ONU Gospel Ensemble, have you heard or had other experiences with gospel music? If so, please describe that experience.
2. How does the music the Gospel Ensemble presented compare to other gospel music you have heard?
3. Would you consider the music presented by the Gospel Ensemble to be authentic gospel music in the African American tradition? Why or why not?
4. Do you believe the racial mix of the ONU Gospel Ensemble has any effect on the music they produce? If so, what is (are) the effect(s)?
5. What expectations did you have for the Gospel Ensemble's presentation prior to their visit?
6. How did today's experience line up with your expectations?
7. For statistical purposes, please provide the following demographic information: Race, Gender and Age

Please share any additional observations or comments you may have:

(You may share your name, if you wish to be quoted or have statements attributed to you, or you may withhold your name to remain anonymous.)

There was a request for demographical information on all of the surveys. On the ones for the

concert audience members it was also requested they share their religious denomination, if any. There were thirty-five church congregation members who chose to participate in the survey and forty-two concert audience members. There were nine participants from the Hope United Methodist Church of Franklin, Ohio. Those respondents ranged in age from forty-four to seventy-seven. There were seven females, one male and one who did not disclose. All respondents at Hope were White. Verona United Methodist Church of Verona, Ohio had eight congregants participate in the survey. They ranged in age from forty to eighty-three. Of the respondents who chose to disclose gender all were female except one, and all were White except for one who was African American. The third participating congregation was the Village Church of Toledo, Ohio. They had eighteen respondents ranging in age from twenty-eight to sixty-four. There were fourteen females and four males and a racial mix which included White, Black, Asian and one man who identified as African American and Irish.

Members of various church congregations from Ada, Lima, the surrounding area and as far away as Toledo, came together with members of the ONU campus community to be part of the spring gospel concert “congregation.” This concert audience was more diverse than any other group that had been assembled all year during a Gospel Ensemble performance. There were well over one hundred in attendance. Those who responded to the survey ranged in age from nineteen to seventy-eight. Respondents included twenty-four females, fifteen males and three who did not disclose gender. There were Black, White and Asian participants and their religious affiliations included Baptist, Pentecostal, Non-denominational Christian, Church of God in Christ, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, United Methodist, Brethren, Church of Christ, Southern Baptist, Mormon, and no affiliation.

Workshop participants, both Ensemble members and church members, were asked to respond to the following survey questions:

1. Is there a difference between praise and worship music and Black gospel music? If so, what is the difference?
2. Do you consider the music presented in the workshop to be authentic gospel music in the African American tradition? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe the racial mix of the workshop participants gave the music produced by the group a different sound than if the group was all African American? If so, how?
4. How did your experience today compare to the expectations you had before the workshop?
5. For statistical purposes, please provide the following demographic information: Race, Gender, Age and Religious Denomination, if any.

Please share any additional thoughts or comments you may have:

(You may share your name, if you wish to be quoted or have statements attributed to you, or you may withhold your name to remain anonymous.)

There were twenty-four respondents to the workshop participant survey. They ranged in age from nineteen to sixty-four and were either Black or White. There were fifteen female participants and eight male with one respondent choosing not to disclose gender. Participants indicated religious affiliations which included Baptist, Presbyterian, United Methodist, Church of the Brethren, and some indicated Christian, Spiritual and “Just Love the Lord.”

In addition to the surveys I conducted several in-depth interviews with alumni members of the Ensemble, and with guest directors, worship leaders and/or gospel recording artists who

worked with the Ensemble at one time or another during the last twenty-six years. The questions used to guide the conversation during these interviews were:

1. In your opinion, what makes a performance of gospel music “authentic”?
2. How does the music the Gospel Ensemble produces compare to gospel music produced by other groups with which you have worked?
3. Do you consider the music presented by the Gospel Ensemble to be “authentic” gospel music in the African American tradition? Why or why not?
4. Do you believe the racial mix of the ONU Gospel Ensemble has any effect on the music it produces? If so, what is (are) the effect(s)?
5. I would like to get some of your thoughts on praise and worship music. How does praise and worship music fit into the gospel music genre?
6. How does praise and worship music differ from other forms of (gospel) music?
7. How and why did you come to embrace praise and worship music?
8. What are your thoughts about the perception that praise and worship music is “white music”?
9. What were your impressions after working with the racially mixed group for the workshop/concert you led with the ONU Gospel Ensemble?
10. How would you characterize the sound of the music produced by the group? Did it meet your standards for authenticity?
11. Do you believe race impacts the delivery and reception of the music? If so, how?
12. Would you like to have your identity and participation in this study kept confidential?
13. Would you like to share any additional observations or comments you believe

will be helpful or relevant?

With the membership of the current Ensemble being largely White and female efforts were made, when recruiting alumni to be interviewed, to attain input from more people of color and more males. The alumni who were interviewed included eleven Black females, seven Black males, one Latina woman, and two White women. Among those being interviewed were two founding members and participants from every year of the Ensemble's existence from 1987 through 2011. Several of the alumni members who agreed to be interviewed requested their identities be kept confidential. Others who did not request complete confidentiality preferred to have certain candid responses shared without having their names attached.

Conclusions

The advantage to the localized case study approach taken on this project is that the information gathered can be put to almost immediate use for planning of future work being performed by the student affairs staff at Ohio Northern University. In particular the Religious Life department and the Office of Multicultural Development might find the themes, thoughts and experiences shared helpful for programming efforts in their areas. The overall goal, however, was to answer the questions of perception and authenticity on a very local level, which might then be expounded upon in future studies to take a more global look at these questions. In addition, the local focus on answers to the questions about community and connection will be very important to work at ONU. My expectation before delving into this study was that research would reveal the perception of race on the delivery and reception of African American gospel music varies according to age, race, level of exposure to diverse experiences and spiritual sensitivities. I further expected questions to be raised. Rather than provide definitive answers I viewed this project as a way to begin conversation and to lay the foundation for future, more in-

depth studies in this area, which might lend themselves to a more regional or perhaps global look at the issues raised.

In Chapter Three I will look at the membership of the ONU Gospel Ensemble. I will begin with the founding of the group and a survey of the membership over the years. I will track when the racial make-up began to shift and what affect that had on group dynamics.

CHAPTER 3.

THE ONU GE

During the 2012 – 13 academic year Ohio Northern University, guided by new president, Dr. Daniel DiBiasio, crafted and adopted a new strategic plan. Though the plan adjusted some of the University's goals making them more current, it simultaneously reaffirmed several of the University's core values, one of those being faith. University documents openly display a commitment to and celebration of its historic relationship to the United Methodist Church, to welcoming persons of all faiths and to providing a supportive environment for moral and spiritual growth. One of the ways this commitment to faith is demonstrated is by the ongoing support of a religious life program on campus. Ohio Northern maintains a full-time University Chaplain on staff. There is a weekly chapel service held during a protected hour, against which no courses or formal meetings may be scheduled. There are numerous student organizations that fall under the umbrella of religious life on campus and many of their activities are advised or coordinated through the office of the Chaplain. Another of the University's core values is diversity. The University motto is "Ex diversitate vires" which means, out of diversity strength. When that motto was originally adopted the diversity it referred to was academic diversity. Ohio Northern has several professional programs, such as pharmacy, nursing, various areas of engineering and business administration. In addition there are arts and humanities programs. This academic variety was the focus of the diversity touted in the motto. Throughout the years as American society has grown increasingly diverse, Ohio Northern has been faced with challenges on how that motto should be interpreted and fulfilled. There has been a gradual shift to and recognition of the need to prepare students for citizenship in a diverse and changing global society. In the most recent process of evaluation and charting a path for future success the University has formally embraced that shift. And so it was in an environment where faith was

encouraged and there was a stated commitment to valuing diversity that the Ohio Northern University Gospel Ensemble was created. The University has sought in the recent program review and strategic planning process to embrace change and position itself to effectively serve the present campus community and prepare for the future. It has concurrently embraced, confirmed and placed renewed value upon its heritage. It is in that same spirit that I approach this review of the membership, music and role of the ONU Gospel Ensemble. This chapter will focus on the membership.

African American Beginnings

In 1987 when I came to ONU there did not seem to be wide participation by African American students in the religious life programs, though there were several black students on campus for whom faith and regular worship were an important part of life. One of those students, Nicole, became a founding member of the ensemble. In a recent conversation, she recalled: “When you said let’s do the Gospel Ensemble, we said OK, Cool. For some of us, it wasn’t just singing it was us going to church. I grew up going to church every Sunday.” (N. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2013) In the fall of 1987 the ONU Gospel Ensemble was formed. The founding members were all African American. Another one of the members from the early days of the ensemble, Latrice, shared her thoughts on why the group was an important addition to religious life on campus: “...we could pray, we could praise, we could laugh and that just kind of lifted our spirits. For me it helped... You need that. You need something that’s kinda like home away from home. It was hard to come to Ada.” (L. Howard, personal communication, July 19, 2013) Another one of the early members, Sherman, also expressed appreciation for the formation of the Ensemble. He commented on what it was like coming to Ada to attend ONU during those years: “...coming out to Ada and to Ohio Northern

that was also eye opening. I was terrified. I was scared to death coming out there. I had no idea how I would be welcomed or not.” (S. Dean, personal communication, June 17, 2013)

The search for that welcoming space in Ada and on campus that Sherman references, and that desire for fellowship and worship with those who make you feel at home when you are away from home that Latrice mentioned, were key reasons to create the Ensemble. In the book, *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, there is a passage that describes gospel music and the Black church experience in this way: “Gospel music is perceived to be an independent stream of music that most preserves, captures, and characterizes the black experience. And playing gospel music (or “negro spirituals”) in church is seen as an affirmation of the dignity and value of black Christians.” (Marti, 2012, p. 53) Students like Nicole, Latrice and Sherman embraced the formation of the Ensemble and participated faithfully. The introduction of this gospel music into the religious life program of the University helped to affirm the existence of these African American students in this community where they were few in number and looking to make a connection. Over twenty-five years later, some of the same sentiments were expressed by one of the current African American members of the Ensemble. LaDavia shared thoughts on why she joined the Ensemble:

I love gospel music and I enjoy singing. Being away from home I thought joining the Gospel Ensemble would be the closest thing to the gospel music I listen to when I am home. Also I wanted to be involved in a religious group and this group stuck out to me the most. From the first day of rehearsal I knew that this was perfect and exactly what I needed. (L. Peavy, personal communication, October 29, 2013)

Kendra and Traci, both African American, were members of the Ensemble during the 2010 – 11 academic year. They shared that they also thought of attending Ensemble rehearsals as “going to

church,” so in many ways it seems the experiences of the African American students who are drawn to the Gospel Ensemble has been consistent throughout the years. Over the years, however, the membership expanded beyond its African American beginnings. A look at the rosters from the years the group has been in existence will reveal how the racial dynamics changed and when.

Roster Survey

In 1989 the Ensemble posed for its first yearbook photo. A survey of Ohio Northern University yearbooks chronicles the racial composition of the group throughout the years. The 1994 photo of the Ensemble is the first where the membership is not exclusively African American. There is one White female member. The following year there were three White members who posed with the ensemble; one faculty member and two students. The number of White members increased gradually each year and then in 1999 there were significantly more White students participating than Black. Since that year African American students have never again been in the majority in the Ensemble.

Table 1

Survey of ONU Gospel Ensemble Yearbook Photographs

Year	Ensemble Photograph Included	Racial Composition of Photographed Group
1987	No (Group Not Yet Recognized)	
1988	No (Group Not Yet Recognized)	
1989	Yes (1st Official Photo)	All African American
1990	No (No Group Photos Included in the Book This Year)	
1991	Yes	All African American
1992	Yes	All African American
1993	Yes	All African American
1994	Yes	5 African American; 1

		Caucasian
1995	Yes	9 African American; 3 Caucasian
1996	Yes	5 African American; 2 Caucasian
1997	Yes	9 African American; 7 Caucasian; 1 Latina
1998	Yes	18 African American; 11 Caucasian
1999	Yes	6 African American; 13 Caucasian; 1 Latina
2000	Yes	5 African American; 8 Caucasian; 1 Latina
2001	No	
2002	Yes	7 African American; 22 Caucasian
2003	Yes	7 African American; 12 Caucasian
2004	No	
2005	Yes	1 African American; 17 Caucasian; 1 Latina
2006	Yes	2 African American; 11 Caucasian; 1 African
2007	Yes	2 African American; 9 Caucasian
2008	Yes	4 African American; 9 Caucasian
2009	Yes	5 African American; 13 Caucasian; 2 Asian
2010	No	
2011	No	
2012	No	

The Gospel Ensemble photographs from ONU yearbooks, surveyed in Table 1, is the best and most consistent record in existence of the Ensemble throughout the years. Unfortunately it is not comprehensive. It does not document that there were Latina members and various international student members throughout the years.

Heather was the first White female to be part of the ONU Gospel Ensemble and during the time she participated she was the only White student involved. She recalls: "...it never

crossed my mind that I would be the only white student and it didn't bother me at all, as you know. As you could clearly tell, it wasn't something that was an issue at all. It wasn't even a thought, to be truthful, for me." (H. Davey, personal communication, July 10, 2013) One of the Black students from those years remembers admiring Heather for her willingness to be part of the group: "I felt as though it took courage on her part to sing with us because she kinda would get some flack some times of 'why are you singing with them?'...I think it's one thing to be in the group and welcoming someone of a different racial background to the group and being the recipient of that welcome." (confidential, personal communication, June 18, 2013)

Several other former members of the Ensemble had thoughts about the racial composition of the group during their years of participation. Sherman shared: "I think it was eye opening for both, when we finally started having more Caucasian members or I think we had Latino members and things like that. Just to see the mix, for me it opened my eyes, like they have the same experiences, they feel the same type of things I'm feelin'." (S. Dean, personal communication, June 17, 2013) Maia, another alumna of the group, said: "For me our gospel ensemble was the first time where it was more diverse than other gospel groups. Mostly gospel groups are pretty much black." (M. Rucker, personal communication, June 17, 2013) Isaac commented: "Coming from an all-Black church, if a White person walks in our church it's like, 'Who they with?' And then going to Gospel Ensemble and seeing a lot of White members it was like an experience. I didn't sing. I played the drums, but it was still kinda crazy just to sit up there and look and like man everybody's singing and blending and sounding good together, so it was cool." (I. Williams, personal communication, June 17, 2013) The reaction of these Black members to the participation of White members included some level of surprise that White students would want to be part of this group. We discussed why several Black students joined.

They were looking for an environment that was familiar to them. One would not assume this was a familiar environment for the White students, so it begs the question, what motivated these White students to join?

What Attracted White Students to Black Gospel Music?

In *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, we get a hint about what might make Gospel Ensemble attractive to those outside of the African American community. Marti states: “Blacks have unique access to God through their ‘soulfulness’ in singing gospel, and this makes worship for blacks a unique arena of envy and privilege in the United States.” (G. Marti, 2012, p. 55) This “soulfulness” that is associated with African Americans in general and with gospel music in particular seems to draw and attract people from all walks of life. Heather spoke with me about how she came to join the Ensemble at ONU:

I was in the dormitory and the “Dorm Mom” (Head Resident) ...always talked to me and guided me... One day we were talking about gospel music and I told her that I loved gospel music. It was just in my soul. I’m not a good singer. I told her I’m an awful singer, but my Mom was a really good singer. And my mom always sang gospel songs to me. She grew up very, very, poor and in the church and what not and so I just always loved gospel music. Maybe because my mom sang it to me when I was a child and like I said my mom came from a very, very, poor background. So, we were talking about that and that’s when (my Head Resident) said: “Hey, I’m in the Gospel Ensemble, why don’t you join?” And I said, I can’t sing...and she said: “It doesn’t matter.” She encouraged me ... I cannot sing,.. but I love to listen to gospel music. She said: “You should come on. No one’s gonna hear you. Unless you wanna sing a solo you don’t have to do that.” And she invited me and I said okay. I just loved it so much I said okay, I’ll go and so I did. (H. Davey,

personal communication, July 10, 2013)

In Heather's case, she came into a group where she was the only White member. In subsequent years when there were more White members some students have approached the group to join without having to be recruited or personally invited. A survey of current Ensemble members revealed the following answers about what attracted them:

I heard the gospel ensemble sing at a pack the chapel and knew I wanted to be a part of the group because it was a new style of music that I loved and wanted to be a part of. (*Pack the Chapel is a program planned by the religious life staff and held during the week before final exams each term.*)

At my first orientation before I was a freshman, the current Chaplin [sic] passed out a book that listed all of the Chapel's outreach groups. I put my name and email down to be contacted about it because I was interested in being part of a singing group on campus. I came to the first rehearsal that year and have been coming ever since.

I wanted to join a group that did not require an audition. Music is the way in which I feel the most connected to God, but I don't have the voice to make it into audition oriented groups.

I love to sing, and this group seemed like a perfect fit. I previously sang in my church choir, and I wanted to continue singing for the Lord. The songs are also so uplifting and fun to perform. This group has become like a second family to me while I've been at college.

I attended a Memorial Service as a Freshman in college and was moved by ONU Gospel Ensemble's music. I wanted to be a part of this group immediately.

I love music and I love to sing for God. Gospel Ensemble didn't require a

"try-out" and I was able to sing worship music every week.

I love singing and I would always hear the ensemble practicing and wanted to be a part of it!!

I liked hearing about the experiences from other members and wanted to be a part of that.

I liked the idea of being part of a singing outreach ensemble and some of my friends freshman year were joining as well. I didn't have any idea of what the group would be like when I joined.

I felt like God was encouraging me to do more for Him. An ensemble was the perfect match because I love singing.

I have been singing for a long time. I sang in a choir when I was little and to continue with what I love to do, I was motivated to join the ensemble. (Current Ensemble Members, personal communication, October 29, 2013)

One White alumni member recalls her time in the Ensemble and how African American members of the group helped her acclimate to the experience.

There were some people in the Ensemble, of color, who definitely encouraged some of the Whiter members to find their soul, so as far as really being encouraging and helping us to find that style a little bit, ...and that was a really cool experience for me personally. I grew up in a small town that was very Caucasian, so I had not had a lot of exposure before college to African American people in general and it was a really cool experience just to be exposed to people of a different culture and diversity.

(Confidential, personal communication, July 11, 2013)

Another passage in *Worship Across the Racial Divide* tells us: "...the popularity of gospel music among whites created a unique connection between the Black Church and mainstream white culture." (G. Marti, 2012, p. 67) One recent Ensemble member suggested that popular culture images of gospel choirs may have an impact on the attraction those outside of the African American church community have to gospel music.

Do you think media has something to do with that? Because if you see a movie, like a Tyler Perry movie, you know there's gonna be an all-black choir, you know they're gonna be traditional gospel songs. So, I feel like mainstream movies and television have set that tone. Even for someone that has never stepped foot in a church. Like you know if you walk into a church anywhere across the world, if there's a Black choir you know what to expect. So I think the media has a lot to do with that, too. (Confidential, personal communication, April 27, 2013)

Another example of this can be found in the film industry, which has successfully incorporated gospel music and the image of the gospel choir. In the movie *Sister Act 2: Back In The Habit*, gospel music transformed a class of near juvenile delinquents into an award winning choir. The class started out as individuals with varying levels of musical ability and multiple racial and ethnic identities. Once they achieved official choir status they put on choir robes and entered a choir competition. In the end the success of the gospel choir was less about the robes or the racial make-up of the group, than about the authenticity of the choir performance. The St. Francis choir gave a contemporary gospel music presentation which won first prize in the competition.

Similarly, in the movie *The Fighting Temptations*, a small, fledgling church is saved from being forced to close its doors when community members are recruited to form a competition

winning gospel choir. During their competition winning performance the choir sang a song about God's unconditional love for all people despite the fact that people are imperfect. The song and the performance by the choir, with a mix of people singing who came from various racial and ethnic backgrounds and even varying generations, underscores the point that you don't have to look a certain way to approach God. This is a message which spoke to the community members, who joined the church to be a part of this choir and came from various walks of life including prison and street life. Despite their "come as you are" appearance the Beulah Baptist Church Choir won the competition. Once again, the authenticity was in the performance rather than the appearance. It seems appropriate to note here the similarities in the themes of these movies and the ONU Gospel Ensemble experiences. Though the Gospel Ensemble has not won competitions, they have, as a group of people from varying races and ethnic backgrounds, performed music that has been well received and perceived as authentic. The journey moving from an all African American group to a mixed race Ensemble happened rather organically, yet there were questions and emotional reactions along the way.

Alumni Reaction to the Changing Group Diversity

Beginning with the tenth anniversary of the Ensemble, we began a tradition of marking key anniversaries by inviting alumni members to come back to campus and join with current members in concert. We would have a weekend workshop where we would learn new songs, revisit old songs and enjoy fellowship with one another. Having been continuously involved with this Ensemble, the change in the racial composition of the group had a different effect on me than on some of the founding and early members of the Ensemble. For some of them to find that the current Ensemble was populated by more White students than Black gave them pause. In conversation with them about their thoughts and reactions some shared candidly:

It was a shock. 'Cause on Sundays we're mostly segregated on Sundays.

Then to see them, like look they do it, too. Like Wow.

It's questionable for me. When there's an all-white ensemble or very few of us it's a distraction. I'm more focused on "What are they really doing up there?" When you see other colors worshipping it doesn't seem real sometimes. It's just distracting. You're curious. You want to know how they do it.

...coming back as an alum I was put off by the fact that it had totally changed. I was put off by that... It was our little niche in that environment. But then the 15th anniversary we came, you told us to meet you in McIntosh Center and I walked past that place like two or three times because what I was looking for and what I found was two different things, so it was a surprise to me. I was like: "Are we in the right place?" I was like: "She hoodwinked us." Why didn't you prepare us? Because, that's what it meant to us and I'm not saying it should have been segregated, but it was just something that was ours and it's almost like, I guess it was fun for us and I know other people on the outside looking in, they're gonna capture that as well, so it's not right to be selfish, but at the same time, you cannot discriminate when people want to be a part of that, however it came to be, how it was intended, when you start diluting it, it takes away the effect of what it meant to some of the others. If you talk to some of the other members they'll all probably say that was something that got them through... Now if I were to come now and be a student and I think there's gospel ensemble and then I met you and I got there and it was like that I don't know that I would wanna be in it. Because there's certain things that's culturally just for us that we can relate to that I can discuss with you that I wouldn't feel comfortable discussing with you in that whole arena.

Even coming back and seeing the racial difference, that was different... When I first saw that I was like “Really? This is where we’ve come?”... But I could see how it would be spread because mainstream gospel is not pigeon holed anymore. It’s contemporary. I mean more than Black people listen to Mary Mary, Hezekiah or Richard Smallwood. It’s a much wider focus. It didn’t upset me, it just kinda threw me...

The mix that’s going on now, evidently is the mix that’s on campus, it’s just spilling over ...I know there’s a lot of inter-racial dating, marriage and all that stuff,...I just think it’s such a blend now.

I think you really empowered a lot of that because you were very welcoming. And we watched you, so you were welcoming to it, so we were. And then you also allowed them to express themselves and lead songs and things like that. It was fun. You made it fun. Over the years, like you said, it did change. It evolved. I don’t think the spirit of it ever changed, which is important. But the members just evolved...You were the only reason we were okay with it. I’m like Adriane’s okay with it then it must be alright. (Confidential, personal communication, June 11, June 17, July 19, 2013)

Does the Mixed Race Composition Affect the Delivery of the Music?

Erica, an African American student who was an Ensemble member during the late ‘90s commented:

What I remember about my time in Gospel Ensemble... is that since it’s so diverse it has a different sound. I put like quotation marks on “sound.” If I heard, for example, an all Black gospel choir like Fisk University, they have a sound. It’s a different richness, or timbre or tone or something that comes from a very homogenous group of

singers. But with the Gospel Ensemble you can kinda, if you have your eyes closed you can tell that okay this is a racially diverse group. It's just a different sound. You can tell from the sound. It's not a bad thing. It's not a good thing. It's just a sound that comes from us versus from a mixed gospel ensemble group. It's not bad. It's not good. It's just a different sound. (E. Roddy, personal communication, April 27, 2013)

Bishop Terence M. Sykes has been working with the Ensemble since the first year of its existence. He has come to campus for at least half of the spring concerts and all of the Ensemble recordings. He had the following observation to share about the racial mix and the effect on the music:

It has changed over the years because there have been times when Gospel Ensemble was predominately African American and then there were times ...when it seemed like there were more non-African Americans and then there have been times when it was a nice mixture of them both, so I've kinda seen it in all different facets. The music that's being presented is still the same. And I think the intensity and the heart of the people who were singing it is still the same, even though the sound may vary a little bit because of the different styles and backgrounds of African Americans who come from gospel music and white Americans who come from a different kind of background.

(T.M. Sykes, personal communication, July 7, 2013)

Bishop Sykes' wife, Sheree Sykes, is Co-Pastor of their church in Virginia and she has accompanied him to campus for many of the ONU Ensemble spring concerts. She has participated as a guest vocalist, singing solos and singing in the Ensemble with the students and alumni. She made the following comment on the racial changes within the group:

God gave us both, the White person and the Black person, a different sound. There's

a sound that they make that He likes and there's a sound that we make that He likes...

We were so used to not having the sound of the Caucasian voice and we were used to singing with each other, not that it's wrong that they've now joined in, but it's a different sound. And I believe God probably, you know how He is, He's multifaceted, He likes that sound, but there is a definite change in the sound of the Gospel Ensemble when you put them both together. And that may have been what God wanted all along. (S. Sykes, personal communication, July 7, 2013)

During the course of interviews with alumni members there were a couple others who had comments on the racial mix and whether or not it affected the sound of the music. These are their thoughts:

I like the racial mix because you're not just sticking to one sound, one voice, one method of getting through.

I don't think having a mixed group affects the music per se. I mean, everybody was able to hold a tune and, you know, feel it and get into it, so I don't think the racial mix had any effect on it. (Confidential, personal communication, April 27 & June 13, 2013)

The survey of current members revealed thoughts from a slightly different perspective. The following comments were shared on this topic:

I think that both races bring different sounds to the table which together sounds very unique.

I do believe that the racial mix makes the music unique. These differences influence the way we sing and worship, resulting in gospel music that has unique features to it.

It adds diversity

I believe the racial mix of ONU's GE makes the outreach as a whole unique. The music is largely unchanged, but the testimonies given and the variety of backgrounds that each of us has adds to our outreaches. I believe that our racial mix allows us to learn a lot about each other and grow together, but I don't think the music was changed because of it.

It brings a whole new outlook and veers away from the stereotype that gospel music is only for African Americans.

I do not believe the racial mix has anything to do with the performance of music. Each choir has at least three sections the sopranos, the altos, and the tenors, if the lyrics/keys are learned well I believe all music could sound great.

I say every choir has its uniqueness. I'd say that since we all aren't from backgrounds that are very familiar with the music, we sing from our backgrounds and experiences with music, whatever they may be.

I LOVE that we all sing together without race having any part in our worship whatsoever. We are just students singing and worshiping together and I think we create a wonderful product that way, creating an example of what we may see as prophesied in the Bible.

The students that make up this group are racially mixed and this creates Yet another bridge to strengthen the relationships between all students on campus. Freshman year of college, I noticed black and white students sitting separately. Five years later, I see those same students seated together rather than separate. Many were involved in music groups on campus such as GE and People of Worship that included any student in a predominately African American organization. For example, the BSU

organization on campus now welcomes students of any race.

Everyone has a different voice and brings a unique tone to the group.

Whether black or white, each voice helps make the songs we sing special. Each year, when people leave the group and new members join, the same songs we have sung sound different due to the different voices. This is not a bad thing, though. The songs sound different but are still sung with the love of the Lord in each of our hearts.

I typically imagine more powerful voices when I think of gospel music. The racial mix that we have provides a softer, more gentle sound than I typically picture.

I think the racial mix does make the music unique because it shows how all of us can come together as different people and worship as one body. I think that the racial mix allows us to all worship as one body of Christ and reminds everyone that we are all different but we worship the same Lord. I think that it helps us as a group and the audiences who see us be reminded that we all worship as one body and the color of our skin or denomination should not separate us from that.

...the racial mix of the Ensemble has helped spread the music and exposed it to people of other races that did not know about the kind of music.

If we have one Hispanic or Caucasian singing in the group, it will attract people from those races to come experience it making it unique in that kind of direction.

(Current Ensemble Members, personal communication, October 29, 2013)

The Importance of Heritage Maintenance

In *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, there is a reference to the roots of African American worship. Marti states:

Worship in the African-American community is unique because it was conceived

within a peculiar experience. It is an experience with roots in the African continent with its primal worldview, but also an experience growing out of ‘a long bitter night of slavery, segregation, discrimination, oppression, deprivation, exclusion, alienation, and rejection in this country.’ (G. Marti, 2012, p. 57)

The longer the Ensemble is in existence and the more diverse the membership becomes, the more challenging it is to keep the connections to the roots of the music and the practice of the worship style. Part of the challenge is that non-African Americans do not come from this heritage. Another challenge is that even the African American students who are in their college years in these diverse days and times are not intimately acquainted with this heritage.

Another important passage from *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, shares:

The singing of gospel allows not only the performance of racial identity but a particular preservation of history and ancestry tied to African American identity.

Williams-Jones writes, ‘Cultural ties of the ancestral lineage have been preserved in various forms within the enclave of the black gospel church and its music – black gospel.’ (G. Marti, 2012, p. 65)

There are those who question if the Gospel Ensemble, with its mostly White racial composition can carry out this important purpose. In my interview with Bishop Rance Allen, he commented: “In a sense, that Black choir that is now 90% White, if treated right could be touted as a testimony to Black gospel music.” (R. Allen, personal communication, July 26, 2013) A look at that Black gospel music and other music sung by the ONU Gospel Ensemble will be the focus of Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 4.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE MUSIC

There is an anointing on gospel music. There's an anointing on music. That's why I always say that Michael Jackson was anointed. It was a different kind of anointing and it drew people, but it didn't take them to the Savior. Gospel music draws people, but it takes them to the Savior. So there is a special anointing on music, period. When King Jehoshaphat was getting ready to go to war the Bible says he called for the musicians, the singers you know, but that tore down strong holds before they even went in there to fight. Because there's something about the music. (T.M. Sykes, personal communication, July 7, 2013)

Twenty-seven years ago when the ONU Gospel Ensemble was formed, the group introduced contemporary gospel music to the campus community. To be clear, Black sacred music had been shared on campus before the establishment of this group. Several of the existing choral groups included Negro spirituals in their concert repertoires. Shortly after arriving on campus I saw evidence of a visit by a noted African American composer who had spent time on campus working with the University Singers, the premier campus choral group, teaching some of his compositions. I also recall the Chapel Choir doing an arrangement of spirituals in chapel service on campus. The Gospel Ensemble was unique in this environment, however, because it was comprised of African American students, and the music it performed was not being explored or embraced by any other group on campus or in Ada. As is stated in the opening quote, there is something about gospel music. The music performed by this group draws people and attracts attention. In this chapter I will begin by establishing the context for what gospel music is with the help of Angela M.S. Nelson and her work on the role and meaning of gospel music. Later in the chapter I will get input from William C. Banfield and Trineice Robinson-Martin as I seek to

further refine my definition of gospel music. I will and take a closer look at the music that has been embraced and sung by the Ensemble throughout their history. While there have been some constant and enduring pieces throughout the years, there have also been changes; some subtle and some more overt. My overall impression is that gospel music in general has made some pretty dramatic shifts in the nearly three decades that have elapsed since the birth of this Ensemble. As I examine the music produced specifically by the Ensemble, I will also consider the musical choices being made by the larger gospel music community, which in turn have had impact and influence on the repertoire of the Ensemble. In particular, I will consider thoughts shared by Omotayo Banjo and Kesha Morant Williams from their study on intersections between race, social identity and the influence of the Christian music industry, thoughts from Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. who compared the impact of spirituals on social justice issues with the lack of impact of contemporary gospel music in that area and thoughts on praise and worship music shared by Deborah Smith Pollard from her project which explored the wide variety of performance styles related to contemporary gospel music. Additionally, I will contemplate the thoughts of Bishop Rance Allen, Minister Chris Byrd and Bishop Terence Sykes, who was quoted at the outset of this chapter. All three men are composers and performers of gospel music, whose lives and work have intersected at some point with the ONU Gospel Ensemble.

Putting Gospel Music in Context

Angela M. S. Nelson (2001), in her article “Why We Sing: The Role and Meaning of Gospel in African American Popular Culture,” defines gospel music as: “...the contemporary musical expression of the African American Christian’s belief in God.” (Nelson, 2001, p. 97) According to Nelson the three major periods of gospel music are the pre-gospel or transitional period which ran from about 1900 to 1930, the traditional or classic gospel period with ran from

1930 to 1969 and the modern or contemporary gospel period which began in 1969 and continues presently. (Nelson, 2001, p. 98) Nelson describes the music of the pre-gospel period as being primarily hymns that combined popular tunes with spirituals, blues and jazz harmonies and was characterized by piano accompaniment and congregational singing. (Nelson, 2001, p. 99) Also included in this period were male quartets who followed in the tradition of jubilee singers like the choirs being formed at Black colleges during the mid to late nineteenth century. (Nelson, 2001, p. 99)

Nelson credits the classic or traditional gospel period with crystallizing the music into a distinctive form. (Nelson, 2001, p. 99) Thomas Dorsey, referred to by many as the “Father of Gospel Music” is responsible for much of the progress made during this period. (Nelson, 2001, p. 99) Greatly influenced by the gospel hymns, Dorsey wrote over one thousand songs and was the first to call his music gospel songs. (Nelson, 2001, p. 99) Also key to this period was the rise of the solo singer, and music featuring ensembles and choirs. Gospel soloists such as Mahalia Jackson, “Sister” Rosetta Tharpe and Mother Willie Mae Ford Smith became prominent figures and are recognized for their contributions to the creation of this music. (Nelson, 2001, p. 100)

The modern period is believed to have begun in 1969 with the release of the Edwin Hawkins Singers’ recording of a contemporary arrangement of the nineteenth-century Baptist hymn, “Oh Happy Day.” (Nelson, 2001, p. 102) This song was embraced not only by consumers of gospel or sacred music, but also by fans of soul and pop music and the crossover appeal set this music apart from the gospel music of previous periods. (Nelson, 2001, p. 102) Nelson explains that the music produced during this contemporary or modern period opened the door for Urban/Contemporary Gospel, pioneered primarily by two male groups from Detroit, Michigan; the Winans and Commissioned. (Nelson, 2001, p. 102) These groups, influenced by popular

music, rhythm and blues, soul, funk, rap and perhaps even jazz combined those inspirations and used them to address the concerns they saw in their surrounding communities. (Nelson, 2001, p. 104) They saw people suffering from the problems of life in the inner city and believed these people needed to hear the “good news” about Jesus and how He could come into their lives and bring comfort. Their music was a way to share this “good news.” (Nelson, 2001, p. 104)

Having established a timeline for the development of gospel music and outlined distinctions between the music of the various periods within the gospel genre I will now turn my attention to how the genre, as a whole, compares to other sacred music. In particular, a comparison between contemporary Christian music and gospel music seems appropriate, as there are recent intersections between the two that have been impactful in both the operation of the ONU Gospel Ensemble and in the gospel music community at large. I will also examine thoughts about how gospel lines up with some of the roots of the form, in particular spirituals.

Gospel Versus Contemporary Christian

Omotayo O. Banjo and Kesha Morant Williams (2011) did a study on race and Christian music. They analyzed forty-five songs from the Billboard year-end charts for 2007 and 2008 comparing themes in gospel music to those in contemporary Christian music (CCM). The purpose of their study was to lay the foundation for future research in this area, as their research revealed a gap in the literature. In their article, “A House Divided? Christian Music in Black and White,” (Banjo & Williams, 2011) Banjo and Williams began by questioning the role of the church in integration and went on to note that just as church congregations are still largely segregated, the Christian music industry has perpetuated racial segregation, as well. According to Banjo and Williams, retail stores and music charts divide Christian music into two broad categories; gospel, which typically refers to music created by African American artists and

CCM, which generally refers to music produced by White artists. (Banjo & Williams, 2011, pp. 115-116) They found that early gospel music encompassed the ideas that had been central to spirituals, sorrow songs, jubilees and camp meeting songs. These ideas included a dependence on the sacred world in this life and hope for reward in life after death in heaven. (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 116) They believe contemporary gospel retained the connection to the earlier forms, yet embraced broader social, cultural and historical experiences of African Americans. (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 117) In contrast, Banjo and Williams say CCM linked with the evangelical church soon after its creation and therefore aligned its messages with those of the church focusing thematically on redemption, reconciliation and renewal. (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 117)

The results of their comparative analysis revealed that there were several overlapping foundational themes for gospel and CCM; such as faith in God and relationship with Christ as opposed to religion. (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 130) In contrast, CCM songs seemed to have more lyrics focused directly on God and the promises and benefits that come from being in His presence, while gospel song lyrics seemed more focused on life struggles, hardships and gaining encouragement by trusting in the authority of God. (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 130) Banjo and Williams concluded that gospel music reveals a continued presence of the history of African American oppression and a need to remain committed to overcoming related issues both past and present, and to remain joyful in the process. (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 131) CCM seemed more focused on the “everydayness of the Christian experience” and on “simply being content with God...” (Banjo & Williams, 2011, p. 131)

Spirituals Superior to Contemporary Gospel?

While Banjo and Williams saw evidence of the African American history of struggle and oppression reflected in contemporary gospel music, Obery Hendricks (2011) found Negro spirituals played that role more effectively. In his book, *The Universe Bends Toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, the Church, and the Body Politic*, (Hendricks, 2011) Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. devoted a chapter to the discussion of contemporary gospel music versus Negro spirituals. According to Hendricks (2011), the nature of Black sacred music has historically been to empower African American people with a resistant, prophetic voice that was infused with the biblical logic of justice. (Hendricks, 2011, p. 2) In Hendricks' opinion, this music inspired Black people to action, encouraging and sustaining them as they fought, marched and stood up for freedom from oppression and an end to dehumanizing conditions. He put spirituals in this category, but found contemporary gospel music fell far short. Hendricks described spirituals as music of political liberation and gospel as music of political apathy. (Hendricks, 2011, p. 4) He noted how black sacred music during slavery times was “heard only in the hush arbors” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 2) then occasionally emerged in spaces where it could be witnessed by whites who found it interesting and exotic and finally is now featured prominently nationally and internationally, much to the detriment of its effectiveness and focus. (Hendricks, 2011, pp. 2-3) He made the following statement about current black sacred music: “Sadly, in Gospel music today seldom is proclaimed the God of liberation— just the God of escape. Seldom is heralded the God who will deliver the world from evil, just a God who delivers us from reality.” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 3) According to Hendricks, “Gospel music has gained the world, but it has lost the prophetic heart of black sacred music...” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 3)

In many ways my struggle with maintaining a strong connection to Black gospel roots while sharing the music with a diverse group of participants, both within and outside of the

Gospel Ensemble, echoes some of the themes raised by Obery Hendricks. In the early days of the Ensemble there was little debate about whether the songs we elected to sing were authentically Black songs, appropriate for the group or not. We sang songs that were relevant to our experiences and since the group was all African American we gave little thought to the topic. Sometimes the selection of songs was affected by whether or not we had accompaniment and/or the skill level of the current group to master a song. Other than those factors, little else posed a challenge. Once White members wanted to suggest songs from their experiences, which were outside the realm of Black gospel, or Black members wanted to sing music that was more praise and worship oriented than the staple gospel music of the Ensemble's repertoire, new challenges were realized. Interestingly enough, Hendricks equates spirituals with the kind of authentic tie to African American heritage that I have assigned to gospel music. The Ensemble has only performed a few spirituals over the years and those were taught by guest directors. While I recognize their importance and welcomed their inclusion as another link to our roots, the sense of connection and relevance I felt to spirituals is somewhat akin to what many of the young Black students were feeling about more traditional gospel songs.

Value of Spirituals

The value of spirituals for Hendricks lies in their role within the Black community. There are others who have written positively about spirituals for the role they played with the larger society in changing perceptions about Black culture. In much of the discussion about spirituals the work of the Fisk Jubilee Singers is central. They were credited with introducing spirituals to the world. In her story, *Fisk Jubilee Singers* (Barnes, 2009), writer L. Diane Barnes (2009) cites remarks given by Booker T. Washington, who was one of the founders of the Tuskegee Institute, another one of the nations' historically black colleges and universities.

Washington recognized the valuable contribution the Fisk Jubilee Singers made in bringing Black spiritual music to the attention of the world. In an article published in 1910 in the *Independent*, Washington is quoted as saying: “if Fisk had done nothing else or more, its work in gathering and popularizing these folksongs of the race has entitled it to be remembered with gratitude by the negro people and the world” (Barnes, 2009, para. 4) Paul Gilroy (1993), in his book *The Black Atlantic: Authenticity and Double Consciousness* (Gilroy, 1993), seemed to extend Washington’s thoughts about the importance of the work done by the Jubilee Singers giving a perspective as someone from outside of the United States. He gave them credit not only for popularizing the music, but also for offering an authentic Black experience. He stated: “Black people singing slave songs as mass entertainment set new public standards of authenticity for black cultural expression. The legitimacy of these new cultural forms was established precisely through their distance from the racial codes of minstrelsy. The Jubilee Singers’ journey out of America was a critical stage in making this possible.” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 90)

John Lovell, Jr. (1972) wrote a book called *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (Lovell, 1972) and in it he made observations about the music world before and after the advent of the Jubilee singers. According to Lovell, African American men spent hundreds of years trying to overcome the false impression made on the world about Black people due to the minstrel tradition. In both the United States and in England it was accepted that the White performers in cork black face doing their impressions of negro songs were portraying this race of people accurately. And to some extent African Americans are still faced with trying to distinguish reality from stereotypical images and impressions that continue to be accepted. (Lovell, 1972, p. 411) Even when performing at a church that was supposed to make the difference between success and failure for their first and subsequent tours, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were met with a

minstrel type atmosphere. Lovell notes that reviewers of their performance, expecting a minstrel show, expressed disappointment suggesting the group should have limited their program to “nigger melodies proper” rather than performing White music. (Lovell, 1972, p. 412) The comment was even made that the singers seemed like “well-trained monkeys” when singing the White music and seemed much more comfortable when the program transitioned into the “wild darky” portion. (Lovell, 1972, p. 412) Lovell went on to observe that after years of popularity for the Jubilee singers they had made some inroads into mitigating the stigma of minstrelsy that had haunted all Black people. He shared: “Utter sincerity, beautiful songs, and singing skill on the part of real black people were driving the phonies and their baleful influences from the field.” (Lovell, 1972, p. 412)

While many extolled the virtues of spirituals there were also detractors, such as Zora Neale Hurston, who commented that despite all of the credit being given to the Jubilee Singers for popularizing black culture:

there has been no genuine presentation of Negro songs to white audiences. The spirituals that have been sung around the world are Negroid to be sure, but so full of musicians’ tricks that Negro congregations are highly entertained when they hear their old songs so changed. They never use the new style songs, and these are never heard unless perchance some daughter or son has been off to college and returns with one of the old songs with its face lifted, so to speak.” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 92)

Hurston further referred to the Jubilee Singers music as Glee Club style and not performed as those who actually made the songs. She charged the Jubilee singers with creating the spirituals they performed and said they were only accepted as authentic because they had been performed for so long. (Gilroy, 1993, p. 92)

In almost direct opposition to the praise given spirituals by Obery Hendricks, are comments documented by author Andrew Ward (2000) in his book, *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America*. Ward (2000) acknowledges that many Americans and Europeans credit the Fisk singers with introducing the world to African American culture. There are also, however, those who see them as accommodationists who were merely pawns of the White missionaries who founded Fisk University. He points out that many “dismiss spirituals as mere white crowd pleasers, anthems of helplessness and resignation, vestiges of bondage whose authenticity was muddled by the intercessions of white arrangers and composers.” (Ward, 2000, p. xiv)

In addition to thoughts about the authenticity of spirituals, Hendricks introduced another notion, referring to spirituals as counter-hegemonic. (Hendricks, 2011, p. 11) He made the point that the communal nature of the music and the very act of collective song, even if it took place in “feigned guilelessness squarely in the oppressors’ presence – helped to develop and to eventually normalize the significance of resistance themes... ‘making space for a dissident subculture,’ . . .” and what “cultural dissidence ultimately seeks is to counter the ideological claims, or ‘hegemony,’ of the oppressive power.” (Hendricks, 2011, pp. 10-11) Additionally, Hendricks described spirituals as focusing more on a collective morality, as opposed to the vertical moral behavior and individual relationship with God that is the focus of gospel music. (Hendricks, 2011, p. 19) He further charged that the focus in gospel music tends to be on performance techniques and has resulted in the relegation of audience members to the role of auditors rather than participants in a collective expression, as they were with spirituals. (Hendricks, 2011, p. 33) This point is also touched on by Angela Nelson (2001), who noted that the shift from congregational hymns to songs for ensembles, soloists and choirs had sociological consequences.

This shift created an audience role, where previously all were equal participants. (Nelson, 2001, p. 100)

I acknowledge the observations of Hendricks and Nelson, but my opinion differs slightly. One has only to attend a worship service or concert where Black gospel music is being sung and there are Black audience members present, to observe that not all of the audience is relegated to onlooker status, in fact many are active participants. Gospel music, even when it features the vocal prowess of a talented soloist or seemingly complex interchanges between vocal sections within a choir, generally elicits not only a response, but participation from the audience, especially if the setting is primarily or largely Black or African American in nature. Audience/congregation members stand and sing along with the choir. They speak out and verbally encourage both the choir and the soloists. They clap their hands along with the choir. Nelson acknowledged this when she stated: “Now, the most the congregation could do to share in these musical events was to give affirmative ‘amens,’ nod, hum, clap, stand and sway their bodies, or occasionally sing along on choruses or vamps.” (Nelson, 2001, p. 100) While Nelson and Hendricks posit this as a diminished role for members of the audience who had once been full participants, I have witnessed it as a very active role and part and parcel to the overall effectiveness of the musical event. The audience is very much a part of the delivery of gospel music. This is something I experience on a weekly basis at my church and something I encourage with congregations both white and black as I travel with the ONU Gospel Ensemble.

Musical Influences

My work with the ONU Gospel Ensemble was shaped by my own college gospel choir experiences. As an undergraduate student at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, I joined Ebony Impact, their gospel choir. Old Dominion was a predominately White institution

with a relatively small African American population. There were enough Black students on campus to support several student organizations, including several Greek letter fraternities and sororities and a gospel choir. Ebony Impact began as an extra-curricular activity and later become part of the music department. Students were given the opportunity to register for a course and gain academic credit for their participation and most did, but there were some who attended rehearsal without the benefit of receiving credit. They simply wanted to be part of the experience. When I joined the group, Terence M. Sykes was the director and accompanist. Mr. Sykes, was at that time, a music teacher in several schools throughout the public school system in Virginia. He has since gone on to found and serve as Senior Pastor for a non-denominational church in Lynchburg, Virginia, Shekijah Preparation Assembly. He was promoted to the office of Bishop and in 1996. Bishop Sykes established the End-Time Harvest Preparation Assemblies International, a covenant of churches. There are six churches in this covenant, over which Bishop Sykes presides, including Bethel Church in Port Au Prince, Haiti. In addition to his preaching and pastoral ministries he continues to be involved in gospel music. Bishop Sykes has done workshops, revivals, concerts and guest appearances throughout the United States and in Japan, England, the Bahamas and Haiti. He has written songs which have been performed and recorded by well-known gospel recording artists. (One example is Donald Lawrence, who recorded two of Bishop Sykes' songs; "And Yet I'm Still Saved" and "Uzziah.") He has also done several recordings of his own. My love of gospel music and my approach to teaching it were in many ways formed, and then transformed by my experiences with Bishop Sykes. Many of the songs the Ensemble sings are songs that were written by Bishop Sykes and were either taught to me when I was a member of Ebony Impact or taught to the Ensemble during one of his frequent visits to Ada to work with our group.

My approach to what songs would be sung by the Ensemble was influenced by my experiences prior to arriving in Ada. Little did I know that I would ever be in a position to make decisions about what should be sung by a gospel group. My knowledge of all things gospel was actually pretty limited. The only gospel music I had experienced prior to college was what I was exposed to at church, once we formed the Young People's Choir. The church my family attended was one of the oldest and most prominent in Cleveland, Ohio. It was an African American Baptist church with a congregation of about four-hundred. The building was given the status of historical landmark and though it sat right in the heart of inner-city Cleveland, many of the parishioners were affluent and drove in from the suburbs to attend service. Prior to the formation of the Young People's Choir, the choral groups at the church consisted of the Sanctuary Choir, a group of about forty to fifty adults who sang anthems and spirituals, and the Chorus, a group of about thirty older adults who sang hymns and songs that might be considered traditional gospel music. On holidays the Sanctuary Choir would perform portions of Handel's *Messiah*. The instrumentation included a pipe organ and a piano. There was never the presence of a set of drums nor were tambourines used as a part of any musical presentation. Simply stated, Antioch Baptist Church was a very conservative institution. Much like the resistance gospel music experienced from mainline churches in the early days of its emergence, some of the Antioch congregation was resistant to the introduction of contemporary gospel music into church services. In the 1970s, when I was in my adolescence, many of the people in that age group wanted a way to participate in the life of the church that allowed us to express our love for God in our own way. Despite the objections of some, the church leadership supported the formation of a choir for the youth. One of the young adults, Verness Garrett, took on the task of director and the church hired a gospel accompanist to play piano for the group. We would rehearse each

week and sing during morning service whenever there was a fifth Sunday in the month. Our repertoire consisted mainly of songs written and recorded by Walter or Edwin Hawkins. (I believe that was because Verness had an affinity to their music.) Edwin Hawkins' song, "Oh Happy Day," was a ground breaking song in the gospel music world because it was the first gospel song to cross over and receive attention and airplay from secular radio stations. It was somewhat controversial for that reason. It will always be special to me because it was one of the first songs I had an opportunity to sing as a soloist. Some of the lyrics to "Oh Happy Day" (Hawkins, 1968) are:

Oh happy day, Oh happy day, When Jesus washed, When Jesus washed
 He washed my sins away, Oh happy day
 He taught me how to watch, fight and pray, fight and pray
 And live rejoicing every, everyday; Oh happy day

The lyrics of the song are not particularly provocative. It is a song of celebration, consistent with what is expected of gospel music. The line "He taught me how to watch, fight and pray and live rejoicing every day," (Hawkins, 1968) seems almost reminiscent of a spiritual, as it appears to reference struggles and challenges that may be faced in this world and God's provision and direction for dealing with them. For those in the congregation who complained about the music of the Young People's Choir, it was not the lyrics that made them leery of having this form of music included in morning worship. It was more about the manner of delivery. The fact that the young people would sway their bodies from side to side and clap their hands as they delivered the song was problematic for some, and thought to be inappropriate for Sunday morning service. There were objections raised, but the Choir received support from the majority and they were able to carry the day. Gospel music was allowed to continue to grow and flourish at Antioch. I

have not had the occasion to attend service at Antioch in many years, but from what I understand gospel music has fully bloomed there.

With my Young Peoples' Choir experience and my love for all things Hawkins in tow, I headed off to college and as a member of Ebony Impact was introduced to a whole new world of gospel music. Bishop Sykes (then known to us as Terre) taught the group primarily music he had written. I recall the occasional request for a song that was being played on radio or widely sung at churches. Rarely would those songs be added to our repertoire. Bishop Sykes felt strongly that the songs he was teaching us had been given to him by God to be shared with us and with those with whom we shared our musical ministry. I don't recall much objection to that response. There was the sporadic comment made by some about not being familiar with the music we presented, but Bishop Sykes' music was so effective that once people were exposed to it they became instant fans.

Ebony Impact was a group of about forty members and many were experienced soloists. I had only recently found my solo voice having had one or two opportunities to sing in front of a congregation being backed by a choir. I did not dare dream that I would be given an opportunity to sing a solo with this choir. The opportunity did arrive, however. There were auditions held for various solo parts on a song called "I Won't Let Go of My Faith." (T.M. Sykes, personal communication, January, 1982) The lyrics are:

You wonder why I believe what I believe. I won't let go of my faith.

And if I fail to believe what you believe, I won't let go of my faith.

Though you push me down, yet will I trust in Him.

Though you offer up my body to be burned, I won't let go of my faith.

I can't let go of my faith. I'm holding on to my faith. I'm holding on to my faith.

I'm holding on I won't let go of my faith.

The words of this song were much more defiant and serious in nature than the songs I had sung previous to this point. As a twenty year old I had yet to face the kind of challenges to my faith that seemed to be outlined in the lyrics of this song. The line about having my body offered up to be burned was particularly poignant. We were empowered by the singing of this and other songs, however. Though we had not faced conditions as grave as those seemingly described in those particular lyrics, we were dealing with life on a campus where we were in the minority and where the environment could be less than welcoming at times. We looked upon our Tuesday and Thursday class/rehearsal times as booster shots to equip and encourage us to get through another week. The times when we were able to travel with the choir on Sundays to visit churches or share in other settings were a bonus. Just having the opportunity to sing this music and come together as a group was sustenance for us. With these experiences in my memory, I arrived at Ohio Northern and began the journey that was to become the ONU Gospel Ensemble.

The Music of ONU GE Then

One of the first songs the ONU Gospel Ensemble ever sang was one the members called "Salvation and Glory." (The name of the song is actually "Revelation 19:1," a fact we did not discover until many years later.) It was a song that many of the early members had sung in one form or another in their home churches. The lyrics to "Revelation 19:1" (LaValley, 1985) are:

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory, honor and power unto the Lord our God.

For the Lord our God is almighty, yes the Lord our God is omnipotent.

The Lord our God, He is wonderful. All praises be to the king of kings and the Lord or Lords. He is wonderful.

This is clearly a song proclaiming praise, honor and glory to God. This would be a recurring theme in Gospel Ensemble music and this particular song became the benedictory selection for the Ensemble and has been sung to close nearly every spring concert and outreach engagement throughout the existence of the Ensemble. It has become a thread that connects all of the past and present members. It is that common experience that has been consistent throughout the years, whether it was being sung a cappella or with musical accompaniment, if one has been a member of the Ensemble or participated in a spring concert, “Salvation and Glory” strikes a familiar chord. Though the song is not particularly upbeat in tempo, it is celebratory in nature. It shares “good news” proclaiming the glory of God and reinforcing the fact that He is wonderful! It is also a song that did not require a soloist and in the beginning we were a group singing without musical accompaniment, so it was important to have songs that would be well received a cappella. We learned several other songs during that first year, but when we decided we wanted to present our music in concert and invite parents and friends to come to campus to share with us, there seemed to be the need to have some instrumental accompaniment. I enlisted the assistance of a musician I met in Lima, Ohio. As is the case with most accomplished gospel musicians, Robert Gulette was able to play by ear. He attended a few brief rehearsals with the group and without the benefit of sheet music, learned the long list of songs we had been working on throughout the school year. We sang seventeen songs at that first spring concert and Robert played fourteen of them.

The program for that concert was an eclectic mix of styles. In order to consider how the music from that first concert compares to songs presented at the most recent concert of the Ensemble some twenty-five years later, I will examine the lyrics of each of the songs. The 1988 spring concert included the following musical selections: “We Came to Praise Your Name O

God Most High,” (D. Kidd, personal communication, March, 1988) a song that was suggested and taught to the group by one of the students. We sang this song to open that first concert. The lyrics are:

We came to praise Your name oh God, most high, for You're worthy
of all the praise. You died that we might have abundant life.
You died that we might have abundant life, and You're worthy
of all the praise.

This praise song, almost childlike in its simplicity, was a fitting way to begin the first concert for this Ensemble. The message was straight-forward, proclaiming the purpose of the Ensemble and the concert. “He’s Worthy” (Crouch, 1985) was the second song on the program. It was written and recorded by Sandra Crouch, sister of Andrae Crouch, another foundational figure in gospel music. The song declares:

He's worthy, God's worthy, Almighty Creator, Alpha, Omega, Beginning and the End.
Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is, and is to come. Hallelujah.
Blessing and glory, wisdom and power, God of my rock, in Him will I trust. My strong
tower and my refuge, Savior, Deliverer and Soon Coming King. Hallelujah.

This song continued the theme of praise for a God seen as worthy and deserving of honor. “Salvation and Glory,” also known as “Revelation 19:1,” (LaValley, 1985) was next on the program that day, but we have already examined those lyrics. “Behold I am the Lord” (T.M. Sykes, personal communication, February, 1988) was the next selection and it was written by Bishop Sykes and taught to the Ensemble during one of his visits to campus. The song was taught and performed a cappella.

Behold I am the Lord God of all flesh. Is there anything, anything too hard for Me?

This song differs from the selections before it because the lyrics do not express praise from man/woman to God, but are an example of God speaking of His own attributes and declaring His power. The lyrics to this song come directly from scripture. In Jeremiah 32:27 we read: “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there anything too hard for Me?” (Amplified Bible) “Psalm 8” (Smallwood, 1984), also included on the program of that first concert, is a song written by Richard Smallwood and recorded by the Smallwood Singers. Smallwood, who is a classically trained pianist, has composed many contemporary gospel songs, including this one.

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name?

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth?

Who has set Thy glory above the heavens? The moon and the stars,

Thou hast ordained. What is man that Thou art mindful of Him?

And the Son of man that Thou visitest Him? For Thou has made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor.

We glorify Your name, and magnify Your name forever and ever.

Oh Lord how excellent is Thy Name.

“Psalm 8,” (Smallwood, 1984) is another example of scripture put to music. As the title suggests, the lyrics of the song were taken from Psalm number eight in the old testament of the Bible.

“Expect Your Miracle” (Clark, 1981) was next on the program and is a song that was written and recorded by the Clark Sisters. Though this song was recorded nearly thirty years ago it is still popular. I recently heard a re-mix of the song on satellite radio. The themes of hope and faith are reflected in this song.

I'm looking for a miracle. I expect the impossible. I feel the intangible and I see the invisible. The Sky is the limit to what I can have.

Just believe and receive it. God will perform it today.

I expect a miracle every day. God will make a way out of no way.

Nicole Johnson (now Williams) taught an arrangement of “The 23rd Psalm,” (N. Johnson, personal communication, January, 1988) which was performed at the concert by a trio (two students and me.) We were called upon later to sing this song at two memorial services, as the campus mourned the death of two students killed in an automobile accident. The song was more a sacred choral arrangement than gospel, but seemed appropriate to include and was well received. This song is yet another example of scripture put to music.

The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

The next selection on the program was, “Cry On” (Jones & Stewart, 1986), a contemporary gospel song that was recorded by a group called Commissioned. (Commissioned is the group that launched the musical career of Fred Hammond, who is credited with being one of the authors of urban praise and worship music.) The lyrics of “Cry On” (Jones & Stewart, 1986) are:

When your burdens seem to weigh you down, or the road, it seems too far to carry on. Just look to the hills, you will find your help, whence cometh from the Lord. Hold on, even when you feel you can't go on, let your soul cry

out to the Lord. Cry on, God understands your tears. He knows how much that you can bear. Your faintest cry He'll hear. Cry on, when there's nothing else to say. Soon He'll wipe all your tears away. Without tests and trials you won't experience real joy. Gold without fire, it will never be pure gold. And without patience, you will never know that God can bring you through. Even when you feel you can't go on, go on. Let your soul cry out to the Lord. Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning time.

While this song does not pull directly from one passage of the Bible it draws upon a number of scriptural references. Psalm 121 (Amplified Bible) "I will lift up my eyes to the hills from whence shall my help come," corresponds with the third line in the song that references looking to the hills. The line that says gold without fire will never be pure gold is a reference to Job 23:10 (Amplified Bible) which reads: ". . . When He has tried me, I shall come forth as refined gold." The final line of the song is a reference to Psalm 30:5 (Amplified Bible): "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." This is a song of encouragement that acknowledges hard times, trials and tribulations, yet seeks to give the listener hope in God. One of my cousins did an arrangement of the spiritual "Steal Away" (V. Edwards, personal communication, August, 1977) which we performed at the concert. It gives a nod to the spiritual genre, but has a gospel music approach. Like many spirituals, the lyrics of this song hint at an end to earthly trouble to be found in the next life or life in heaven.

Steal away, steal away home, home, home. Steal away,
I haven't got long to stay here. My Lord, He calls me, calls me by the
thunder. The trumpet sounds way down in my soul. My Lord, I haven't
got long to stay here.

The song, “Never Alone,” (Hawkins, 1978) was written and recorded by Walter Hawkins.

Another song of encouragement, this song was a favorite at my childhood church. The lyrics are:

Never alone, I don't have to worry 'cause I'm never alone.

He walks beside me all the way. He guides my footsteps every day.

Never again will I be insecure anymore, never again. Never alone.

“I’m Going On” (Brooks, 1985) is another contemporary gospel song recorded by Commissioned, which was included in the concert. The lyrics express a determination to persevere through the circumstances of life. There is a theme of hope in God and the promise of His presence, provision and heavenly reward. The lyrics are:

I'm going on in the name of the Lord. I'm reaching for my goal my eternal life reward. God is a mighty fortress in the time of storm. He'll brighten up your day, if you would only fast and pray. When confusion's all around He'll bring you up on higher ground. I'm going on in the name of the Lord. In the name of Jesus, we have victory. In the name of Jesus, demons got to flee. In the name of Jesus, the weak say I'm strong In the name of Jesus I am going on.

“All You Need Is the Lord,” (T.M. Sykes, personal communication, February, 1988) is another song written and taught by Bishop Sykes. The lyrics encourage listeners who may be experiencing trouble to trust in God for the answers to their problems.

All you need is the Savior, Jesus. All you need is the Lord.

Sometimes you feel like you're all alone. Don't hesitate, try my God.

He will lead you safely home. All you need is the Savior, Jesus.

All you need is the Lord. When you have tried everything and everything

failed, O taste and see that the Lord is good. When you've tried everything and everything failed, try Jesus. He will make your burdens light; make everything alright; open closed doors. He'll fill your heart with joy. When you've tried everything and everything failed, all you need is the Lord.

“Strange” (Hawkins, 1977) is another Walter Hawkins song that we included in that first concert. This was not a song that we sang at my church, as it was contemporary gospel with a hint of jazz and would not have been accepted as worship music with that congregation. Having been influenced by the music of Walter Hawkins from my church choir experiences I continued listening to his music and discovered this song while in college. I was part of an a cappella trio and we did an arrangement of this song. That college experience is what inspired me to teach it to the Ensemble. The lyrics bring hope, encouragement and the promise of divine assistance if the listener will put his or her trust in God.

Strange, my burden's lighter. Strange my pathway's brighter. Every [*sic*] since the Lord came and took control, I feel brand new and so will you, if you let the Lord come into your life. The mountain's not so high, and the valley's not so low. The road is not so rough, and the going's not so tough. Every [*sic*] since the lord, He saved my soul, I'm so glad that He gave me joy. Joy in place of sorrow; Hope, hope for tomorrow. Every [*sic*] since the Lord came and took control I feel brand new and so will you, if you let the Lord come into your life.

Yet another Walter Hawkins song, “God Will Open Doors,” (Hawkins, 1978) was included on the program. Once again, this is a song of encouragement. It acknowledges the challenges and struggles of life and offers the hope that God will provide the answer. The lyrics are:

When you can't see your way, and you feel that you have gone astray, doing all you

know to do. God has not forgotten you. Hold your head up and be true, for God will open doors for you. Fight on through your darkest days even though you're heavy laden and can't see your way. God will open doors, open doors for you.

When I was part of Ebony Impact we sang a song written by Bishop Sykes called, "Call On God." (T.M. Sykes, September, 1981) I taught that song to the Ensemble and we sang it at our concert. The song encourages listeners to look to God to fulfill any need they may have. The lyrics are:

Anytime, any-place you may be, any problems you seem to have clouding your mind, call on God, call God. Whether you are up or down, take a look around, for He should always be found in your heart. Call God. He's ready to hear your plea; waiting for you and for me. Oh, when in doubt, in despair, just look to the Lord in prayer.

Just keep the faith and remember to call on God. Whenever you need a friend, that you know will not fail, Call God. Remember one who was hung on the cross with nails. Call God. If you just think of His holiness and His love.

Just keep the faith and remember to call on God. Call on God. Ooh. In the morning, noon day, night, call Him. Open your heart. Look to the Lord. Call Him.

Just keep the faith and remember to call on God.

"Changed" (Hawkins, 1975) is one of the most popular of the Walter Hawkins songs. It has become a gospel classic and is still widely sung and enjoyed. The song extols the virtues of a life transformed by a relationship with God. The lyrics are:

A change has come over me. He changed my life and now I'm free.

He washed away all my sin and he made me whole. He washed me white as snow. He changed my life complete and now I sit, I sit at his feet,

To do what must be done. I'll work and work until he comes. A wonderful change
has come over me. A wonderful change has come over me.

“God is Worthy” (Smallwood, 1984) was the final song on the concert that year. Written by
Richard Smallwood, it is a song of praise and adoration to God. The lyrics are:

Praise God. God is worthy to be praised.

God is worthy to be praised. Praise God!!

As I reflect on the lyrics and even the styles of the selections performed at that first
Gospel Ensemble concert I see a number of themes. I see a tie to the resistance themes
Hendricks attributes to spirituals. Several of the songs talk about fighting on, holding on, going
on. The theme of hope in God is consistent throughout. I also see lyrics to several of the songs
that are consistent with contemporary praise and worship music. From the opening song, “We
Came to Praise Your Name,” (D. Kidd, personal communication, March, 1988) to the Crouch
song about mid-way through the program that proclaimed God is worthy to the closing song
written by Richard Smallwood that simply commanded everyone to praise God. There was a
consistent message that God is worthy to be praised. In her look at Urban/Contemporary Gospel
music, Angela Nelson examined the lyrics of composers from the two foundational gospel
groups she credits with pioneering the sub-genre. Her analysis identified four themes that were
consistent throughout their music. She recognized those themes as: 1) testifying about the
goodness of God (His desire to heal and protect), 2) the “good news” of Jesus, 3) faith and hope
in God, and 4) showing that liberation, redemption and self-affirmation are available in God.
(Nelson, 2001, p. 114) Not all of the music Gospel Ensemble sings is considered
Urban/Contemporary gospel music, yet there were some selections featured in that first
Ensemble concert that were actually written and recorded by some of the artists Nelson has

labeled as the pioneers of the form. Considering the lyrical content of all of the selections from that first concert, we see examples of each of the themes Nelson identified.

Two examples of testifying of God's goodness can be found in "He's Worthy," (Crouch, 1985) which declares God as strong tower, refuge, savior and deliverer and "I'm Going On," (Brooks, 1985) which proclaims God is a mighty fortress in the time of storm. We hear the "good news" of Jesus being declared in "We Came to Praise Your Name O God Most High," (D. Kidd, personal communication, March, 1988) where the lyrics affirm that He died that we might have abundant life. Another example is found in "All You Need is the Lord," (T.M. Sykes, personal communication, February, 1988) which highlights the promise that Jesus will make your burdens light, make everything alright, open closed doors and fill your heart with joy. Faith and Hope in God are evident in the Clark Sisters' song "Expect Your Miracle," (Clark, 1981) which tells us God will make a way out of no way. The Walter Hawkins song "Strange," (Hawkins, 1977) credits God with giving joy in place of sorrow and hope for tomorrow. Finally, liberation, redemption and self-affirmation are identified in "Changed," (Hawkins, 1975) which declares a wonderful and complete life change which is credited to God and the Commissioned song "I'm Going On," (Brooks, 1985) where the lyrics proclaim in the name of Jesus the weak say I'm strong and that victory is not only available, but has already been achieved.

The Music of ONU GE Now

If we fast-forward to spring 2013 we find a program for the ONU Gospel Ensemble annual concert that contains those same themes. We began the concert with the song "Joyful, Joyful," (Warren, 1993) as performed in the movie *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit*. The song was performed, complete with choreography, which was done by a White student who was not a member, but a friend of the group. There were White and Black students who actually

performed the steps. The lyrics of the song are much like the traditional hymn. We omitted the rap portion, which is performed in the movie.

Joyful, joyful Lord, we adore thee; God of glory, Lord of Love. Hearts unfold
like flowers before thee hail thee as the sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and
sadness drive the dark of doubt away. Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with
the light of day.

The next song we sang was one that I wrote. The words are based on a verse of scripture, which can be found in Jeremiah 29:11 (Amplified Bible): “For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord, thoughts and plans for welfare and peace and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome.” The song is called “A Word From the Lord” (A. T. Bradshaw, personal communication, April 2002) and the lyrics are:

I want to live a life that’s pleasing to God, yet sometimes I fall short of the mark.
The things I should not do are the things that I’m drawn to and when I pray to take
a stand seems like temptation takes hold of my hand. And I wonder did I miss God.
Did I take a wrong turn in my life? What I need is a word. I’ve just got to have a
word, if I could only have a word from the Lord. By faith I’m living within the will
of God and I know it’s the safest place to be. But there’s trouble in my home and
frustration on my job. Sometimes I feel like giving up. Seems help is nowhere to
be found. They say that trials only come to help to make you strong. What I need is
a word. I’ve just got to have a word, if I could only have a word from the Lord.
For I know the plans I have for you says the Lord; says the Lord. Plans for
peace and not for evil, to give you hope and a future. For I know the plans I
have for you says the Lord. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh

in the morning light. Our thoughts are not His thoughts and our ways are not His ways. No matter how things look right now in the end God will be glorified. For I know the plans I have for you says the Lord; says the Lord. Plans for peace and not for evil, to give you hope and a future. For I know the plans I have for you. For I know the plans I have for you. For I know the plans I have for you says the Lord.

This is a song of encouragement, acknowledging that in life there will be problems, but that God has a plan for good for every life. Following that song on the program was one in a more traditional gospel style. The song, “My Mind is Made Up,” (Kee, 1994) was recorded by John P. Kee. The lyrics relate a story of satisfaction with God proclaiming nobody can do what Jesus does. The lyrics are:

Since I met the Lord my mind is made up to go with Jesus all the way. I’m on the right track. There’s no turning back. I’m satisfied with God. Nobody can hold me. Nobody can mold me. Nobody can show me, like You, Jesus.

What followed this selection was a praise and worship song that was a favorite of the Ensemble. The song, which was recorded by Joe Pace and the Colorado Mass Choir, is called “Lord Have Your Way.” (Pace, 2007) It is a song of surrender. The singers humble themselves before the Lord. The lyrics are:

Here we stand once again seeking Your holy presence. Lord reveal Your glory in this place. For only then, once again, in Your holy presence can we feel the power of Your grace. Humbly now, Lord we bow. Whatever You require we surrender today. Lord, have Your way. Have Your way in this holy temple.

At this point in the program the Ensemble was joined by members of the Philippian Missionary Baptist Church Choir. They participated in a workshop with the Ensemble and a guest director and they joined the Ensemble for a portion of the concert. The first song we sang together on the concert was called “More Than Anything,” (Campbell, 2000) and is also categorized as praise and worship music, although it was recorded by Lamar Campbell and the Spirit of Praise prior to the recent popularity of the genre. It is a love song to the Lord. The lyrics are:

I lift my hands in total adoration unto You. You reign on the throne for You are
 God and God alone. Because of You my cloudy days are gone. I can sing to
 You this song, I just want to say that I love You more than anything. Love
 me in Your arms; You are my shelter from the storm. When all my friends
 were gone, You were right there all along. I’ve never known a love like this
 before. I just want to say that I love You more than anything. I love You Jesus.

I worship and adore You. Just want to tell You, Lord I love You more than anything.

The combined group did another selection together. This one was written and recorded by Israel Houghton and is one that both the Ensemble and the Philippian choir sing separately. The song is “You Are Good.” (Houghton, 2004) It is a worship song that declares God’s goodness to “people from every nation and tongue.” The lyrics are:

Lord You are good and Your mercy endureth forever.
 People from every nation and tongue, from generation to generation,
 we worship You. Hallelujah! We worship You for who You are.
 You are good! You are good all the time. All the time You are good.

A couple of the Ensemble members wanted to do a special selection since this was to be their final concert with the Ensemble. They were to leave ONU at the end of that term. Christopher

Jordan was a graduating senior and his sister Alexandra was planning to transfer to another school. They joined with Lewis Jones, a junior music education major and his sister, who is not an ONU student, but is a frequent guest and friend of the Ensemble and the four of them did a selection which had been taught to the Ensemble by Bishop Terence Sykes, “It’s Gonna Be Alright.” (T.M. Sykes, personal communication, April 2012) The theme is one of hope proclaiming a better and brighter day ahead. The lyrics are:

Someday, God is going to show us a brighter day. It will be worth all our trials, tribulations, for I know it will be alright. Someday, God is going to wipe all our tears away. It will be worth all our heartaches, disappointments, for I know it will be alright. Things will get better just wait and see, better for you and better for me. Oh-h-h-h, Someday soon, morning, night, or noon, I know it will be alright.

For the duration of the program we had a guest director, gospel recording artist, Minister Chris Byrd. For two days prior to the concert Byrd led the group in a workshop where we concentrated on music he had written. Most of the songs Byrd writes are considered praise and worship music. At the concert we sang: “Lift Him High,” (Byrd, 1996) “Feel Him Movin’,” (Byrd, 1994) “We Give You the Highest Praise,” (Byrd, 1996) “We Love To Sing,” (Byrd, 2012) followed by an impromptu praise song “Our God is an Awesome God.” (Smith, 2000) By impromptu, I mean a song that had not been rehearsed with the group and was not one that Chris had written, but was one that was familiar to members of the choir and the audience, so almost everyone was able to join in and sing along. The lyrics to “Lift Him High,” (Byrd, 1996) encourage the listener to praise and worship God. They are:

Glorify the Lord. For He’s worthy to be praised. Lift Him high and bless His name.

For He’s great and He is Lord. Come on let’s praise His name. Lift Him high, glorify

Him. Lift Him high. Praise His name. I'm going to lift Him high. I'm going to glorify. I'm going to magnify the name of the lord. Lift Jesus. I'm going to lift Him high. Praise Him. Lift Him high. Praise Him!

“Feel Him Movin’,” (Byrd, 1994) is a simple song with very few lines. The words express the emotional and physical reaction to connecting with the Spirit of God. The lyrics are:

I can feel His Spirit movin’ inside of me. I feel Him in my hands;
feel Him in my feet; feel Him movin’ all over me.

The title of “We Give You the Highest Praise,” (Byrd, 1996) tells the whole story. This a song of adoration and worship. The lyrics are:

Lord, I worship and adore You. Lord I bow down before You.
Great is Thy holy name. Your name is holy. To You I give glory.
You are my God and I'll always give You the highest praise.
Hallelujah is the highest praise. Hallelujah!
We give You the highest praise.

“We Love To Sing,” (Byrd, 2012) is an up tempo praise song with a simple melody and relatively few words. The theme is the joy experienced by praising God in song. The lyrics are:

Oh how we love to sing, sing Your praise. We sing praises to Your name.
Every day we love to sing praises to Your name. We love to sing Your praise.
We love to praise You. We love to sing Your praise!

“Our God is an Awesome God.” (Smith, 2000) is a praise song written by contemporary Christian recording artist Michael W. Smith. This song is popular with choirs, praise teams and congregations across racial and ethnic lines and Christian denominations. It declares the attributes of God. The lyrics are:

Our God is an Awesome God. He reigns from heaven above, with wisdom,
power and love. Our God is an awesome God.

At this point we moved back into the planned program with “Draw Me Nearer” (Byrd, 2010), “You Reign Forevermore” (Byrd, 2012) and the final selection with Chris Byrd, “Mighty God.” (Byrd, 2012). “Draw Me Nearer” (Byrd, 2010) is a plea to God for a closer relationship. The lyrics are:

How I long to be in Your presence, daily walking close to Thee. Draw me nearer,
into Your presence to worship. I hunger and thirst after Your
righteousness. My heart and my soul desires to drink from the fountain of living
water, to worship. Draw me nearer into Your presence to worship.

“You Reign Forevermore” (Byrd, 2012) is a simple declaration of the power and authority of an almighty God. The lyrics are:

You are mighty. You are holy. And You reign forevermore.

The final selection led by Chris Byrd was “Mighty God.” (Byrd, 2012) The song asserts the uniqueness of God, and shares examples of His power and might. There are references to the Old Testament Bible story in Exodus chapter 14 (Amplified Bible) where the Israelites are fleeing from Pharaoh and God, through Moses, parts the Red Sea allowing them to escape from the Egyptian army. The lyrics are:

No one like Him. No one like our God. We serve a mighty God.
No one can heal all of our souls diseases. No one like our God.
No one can stand against the power of Jesus. No one like our God.
We serve a mighty God. He’s the Lord, strong and mighty.
There is none like Him. There’s no measure of His worth.

I searched high and low; all throughout the earth.

No one can save, heal. There is none like Him. None can compare to the greatness of our God. Split the red sea waters; all of Israel crossed over;

No more Egyptian bondage. He's a mighty God. All the horses and the king's men got drowned in the red Sea God hath triumphed gloriously.

He's a mighty God. Mighty!

We closed the concert with our traditional benedictory song, “Salvation and Glory” (“Revelation 19:1”) (LaValley, 1985) This concert contained an equal number of musical selections as the first ONU Gospel Ensemble concert in 1988. When you consider the lyrics of the selections, there was much more of a focus on praise and worship in this latest concert than the first one, though the themes of resistance and hope in God are still evident. Of particular note was the recounting of the Bible story of Pharaoh's army being drowned in the red sea, in the “Mighty God” (Byrd, 2012) song led by Chris Byrd. That particular story is one included in several spirituals and the reference to victory in battle is a recurrent theme in spirituals hymns and gospel music. The fact that we had a guest director who has fully embraced praise and worship music obviously affected song selection. Whatever the cause, the outcome is clear. There are definitely more songs in the 2013 concert than in 1988 concert that are focused on the nature of God rather than the circumstances of man or woman. When we examine these lyrics and compare them to the themes identified by Angela Nelson as prevalent in the Urban/Contemporary gospel music she analyzed, we find some evidence of theme one, testifying about the goodness of God (His desire to heal and protect.) “More Than Anything” (Campbell, 2000) makes reference to God being a shelter from the storm and “My Mind is Made Up” (Kee, 1994) declares that no one can provide like the Lord. Both “A Word From the Lord” (Bradshaw,

2002) and “It’s Gonna Be Alright” (T.M. Sykes, personal communication, April 2012) resonate with faith and hope in God, which lines up with Nelson’s third theme. There do not seem to be examples of lyrics that fit with Nelson’s themes two (the “good news” of Jesus,) or four (showing that liberation, redemption and self-affirmation are available in God.) Based upon this comparison it would appear praise and worship music has some distinct differences from Urban/Contemporary gospel music. Because the 2013 concert had such a high concentration of praise and worship songs there are clearly differences in the breadth of themes covered in the music. Praise and worship music is predicated upon the singer already having a relationship with God. Thus, there are no lyrics that inform listeners about the salvation message of Jesus sacrificing His life to pay for the sins of the world. It is assumed the listener not only knows that, but accepts it. Since the “good news” of Jesus, as it relates to salvation is not proclaimed in praise and worship songs, can they be considered gospel music?

So What Qualifies as Gospel Music?

Those who participated and those who were in attendance at either the 1988 ONU Gospel Ensemble concert or the one given in spring 2013 would undoubtedly say they had been to a gospel concert. The music, however, could be categorized in a number of ways depending upon who was answering the questions. So what is gospel music? William C. Banfield, author of the book, *Cultural Codes*, describes gospel music as “gassed up” spirituals with stylistic elements of blues, jazz and pop music. (Banfield, 2010, p. 151) He goes on to say that gospel revolves around spirituals, and borrows stylistically from congregational singing, hymns, popular music and call and response. (Banfield, 2010, p. 152) Author, performer and student of music, Trineice Robinson-Martin, echoes and expounds upon that description in her article about gospel music performance styles. She defines gospel music as a type of Black American sacred music which has its roots in spirituals, work songs, slave songs, White Pentecostal hymns, and

evangelistic congregational songs and integrated characteristics of blues, jazz, rock, soul, country and even classical music. (Robinson-Martin, 2009, p. 595) Both Banfield and Robinson-Martin talk about the use of personal testimony in this form. Banfield says: “One of gospel’s most salient distinctions is the textual emphasis placed on “personal testimony.” And as the urban experience became sometimes unbearable, Jesus, just as in the slave’s spirituals, was able to deliver.” (Banfield, 2010, p. 152)

Hendricks, who compares contemporary gospel to spirituals and finds gospel music to be sorely lacking in several important areas, does concede that both the spirituals and gospel music have hope as a major theme. He refers to descriptions given by gospel pioneers Mahalia Jackson and Thomas Dorsey, often called the father of gospel music, who define the music by pointing to that theme. Mahalia calls them songs of hope that deliver people from their burdens.

(Hendricks, 2011, p. 16) He quotes Dorsey as stating: “We intended Gospel to strike a happy medium for the downtrodden. This music lifted people out of the muck and mire of poverty and loneliness, of being broke, and gave them some kind of hope anyway.” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 16) That hope was central to gospel music, as far as Dorsey was concerned. According to him gospel means good news and if the music included anything besides good news it ceased to be gospel. (Hendricks, 2011, p. 20)

So if the definition of a gospel song is that it should bring good news and share some word of personal testimony, are there praise or worship songs that meet those requirements? One in particular comes to mind. It was included on the program for the 2013 Gospel Ensemble concert and is also a favorite of the Philippian Missionary Baptist Church choir. The song “More Than Anything,” (Campbell, 2000) is basically a love song to Jesus. Within it, however, is personal testimony and words of hope. One line declares: “Because of You my cloudy days

are gone.” (Campbell, 2000) This would seem to be the statement of a hopeful outcome.

Another line says: “You were my shelter from the storm.” (Campbell, 2000) Still another goes

on to say: “When all my friends were gone You were right there all along.” (Campbell, 2000)

Those would seem to be personal testimony statements about life’s conditions and God’s provision.

Is the Music Relevant?

While Hendricks believes spirituals to be of more value to the continuing fight for social justice than gospel music, there are those who do not view spirituals or even older more traditional gospel music to be particularly relevant for the present. Paul Gilroy makes an observation about the shift in political receptivity of black people. Gilroy says: “The Christian slaves applied the Exodus story, whose end they knew, to their own experience of slavery, which had not ended...Blacks today appear to identify far more readily with the glamorous pharaohs than with the abject plight of those they held in bondage. This change betrays a profound transformation in the moral basis of black Atlantic political culture.” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 207) In Hendricks own work he quotes Cheryl James, of the 1990s rap group Salt-N-Pepa, on why she relates more to contemporary gospel than spirituals and appreciates the fact that it does not focus on themes of resistance and liberation. She says: “It’s not about slavery and the old ways.” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 37)

This desire for music that is not viewed as being about the “old ways” is explored by Deborah Smith Pollard in her book, *When the Church Becomes Your Party*. (Pollard, 2008) Smith Pollard devotes a chapter to the genre of praise and worship music. In it she recounts discussions with pastors and leaders of various African American churches that have incorporated or are working to incorporate this genre into their Sunday morning worship experiences with their congregations. In some cases it was adopted in response to lackluster

reactions from the congregation to traditional practices, such as devotional service. Devotional service, also referred to as devotion, is one of the opening activities in traditional worship services at many and various African American churches across denominations. This portion of the service is typically led by older male church members who read scripture, pray and lead congregational singing. (Pollard, 2008, pp. 21& 22) While devotion is widely practiced, it is associated with tradition and “old ways” and in some cases is struggling to be seen as relevant today. Smith Pollard quotes a pastor who talked about signs that devotion was not resonating with members of his congregation anymore. He said: “In the traditional devotion, people would almost purposely come late, just to avoid it, and quite frankly, it became boring. People didn’t enjoy it ...” (Pollard, 2008, p. 23)

Smith Pollard relates the decline in interest in traditional worship among younger black church members to a similar level of disinterest among White church going youth, which dates back to the 1970s and connects with the introduction of praise and worship music in the white evangelical church. (Pollard, 2008, p. 24) Smith Pollard cites two major influences for creating this change in worship style. The first was the deliberate creation of a nonreligious environment within worship services to allow an alternative setting for presenting the gospel message. These were called seeker services. Research on the habits and preferences of baby boomers led to the development of this unconventional method of presentation in an attempt to better attract and engage with this large demographic. (Pollard, 2008, p. 24) The second influence, according to Smith Pollard, was the charismatic praise and worship movement, where a typical service would begin with twenty or thirty minutes of music with the congregation being encouraged to participate by singing, raising their hands, clapping and even dancing. (Pollard, 2008, p. 24) The songs were shorter and more single theme focused than traditional hymns or choir songs,

allowing the congregation to concentrate more on forming a bond with God rather than being distracted with excessive words and complicated formats. (Pollard, 2008, p. 24) Out of the seeker services and the praise and worship services grew the genre of praise and worship music that is ever increasing in popularity and acceptance in both white and black Christian churches and others.

Much like the leaders of the devotional service, praise and worship leaders are expected to encourage participation by the congregation. Smith Pollard describes their purpose this way: “Their mission: through example and exhortation, to move congregants from passive observation to active participation in the worship experience so that they might usher in and experience the presence of God.” (Pollard, 2008, p. 17) Casanova Green, an alumnus of ONU and former member of the Gospel Ensemble is a praise and worship leader at his church and has served in that capacity for multiple congregations. In fact, while he was a student at ONU and still actively participating in Gospel Ensemble, he started another outreach ministry called *People of Worship*, which was a group that focused primarily on praise and worship music. Green commented, “All praise and worship is today is devotion time back in the day. It’s modern day devotion service,...” (C. Green, personal communication, July 30, 2013) In his church, as in many African American churches, there is a blending of praise and worship music and gospel, so that the needs of multiple groups are met. Green says: “I primarily do praise and worship music, but I throw in gospel because it’s all connected to the same source. Without gospel music there would be no praise and worship music, especially in the black church.” (C. Green, personal communication, July 30, 2013)

In my own church, we have traditional devotion, which is led by the deacons and immediately following that, praise and worship is led by the praise team. This kind of inclusive

model that combines the traditional with the contemporary is what Smith Pollard observed at the majority of the African American churches she surveyed in her research. (Pollard, 2008, p. 30)

At my church devotion is led by the deacons, a group of men mostly fifty and above, who serve the church and the pastor in a variety of ways. Among their weekly responsibilities is the charge to lead the devotional period on Sunday mornings. They give a few words of personal reflection, or testimony about some way they have experienced God. They lead the congregation in prayer and song. One of the songs that is frequently sung is one of our pastor's favorites. It is a song that has been passed down through the generations, though no one seems quite sure of its origin or authorship. We sing an arrangement created by the pastor. The song is called "I Woke Up This Morning" (B.L. Monford, personal communication, October, 1990.) The lyrics are:

I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on Jesus. I woke up this morning with
my mind stayed on the Lord. I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on Jesus.
Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah.

This song is sung by the congregation in the participatory style Obery Hendricks highlighted as being so powerful in the delivery of spirituals. Similarly, it is single themed and lyrically simplistic, as is a characteristic of praise and worship music. Soon after the devotion, the praise team leads the congregation in song. One of their staple selections is "Because of Who You Are" (V. Yohi, 2003) written and recorded by contemporary Christian artist Vicki Yohe. The lyrics are :

Because of who You are I give You glory. Because of who You are I give You
praise. Because of who You are I will lift my voice and say, Lord I worship You
because of who You are. Lord I worship You because of who You are.
Jehovah-Jireh, my provider; Jehovah-Nissi, Lord You reign in victory;

Jehovah-Shalom, my prince of peace Lord I worship You because of who You are.

In contrast to the devotional song, this song is more complex. For one thing, it includes terminology not traditionally familiar to most of the congregants. Smith Pollard talks about the inclusion of what she calls “ancient terms from the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible” (Pollard, 2008, p. 20) The use of terms like Jehovah-Jireh or Jehovah Shalom can serve as a barrier to some, much as the traditional nature of the devotional songs serves as a barrier to some of the youth and others with a preference for more contemporary styles.

Besides being uncomfortable with unfamiliar lyrics, Smith Pollard sought to ascertain what else might be causing resistance to praise and worship music and contributing to the view that it is eclipsing traditional devotion. Part of what she discovered was in many ways there was a marked difference in sound and instrumentation with praise and worship music. (Smith Pollard, 2010, p. 31) She spoke with church musicians who complained that it was difficult to play these songs because they are so different in style than music they are used to playing. She also spoke to musicians who shared how they had remedied the situation. She quotes one musician who explains:

We make it our own by changing a little bit here, making it a little bit more soulful there, so it's praise and worship with a little Black Church soul... You add a little extra drums here when they [in the White Church] just have strings and piano.

We add some drums, and we add some bass and some guitar, and we add some climaxes, some key changes. (Smith Pollard, 2008, p. 31)

In a recent conversation with gospel legend and foundational figure Bishop Rance Allen, he discussed the practice of black musicians taking white music and making it their own. Bishop Allen is the leader and founder of the Rance Allen Group, which was the “first modern gospel

group to take secular songs and secular performance practices and recast them with religious lyrics.” (McNeil, 2005, p. 8) This allowed the group to “cross over to the soul charts and proved influential in what was referred to as the contemporary Christian music movement, epitomized by crossover artists such as the Winans and Andrae Crouch.” (McNeil, 2005, p. 8)

The Rance Allen Groups’ recording career spans over four decades. They first recorded in 1969 with a small independent record label. Subsequently, they moved to a Memphis based soul label, Stax Records, which developed a gospel subsidiary, Gospel Truth, specifically to distribute the groups’ recordings. During the 1970’s the group released three albums on this label which included gospel versions of the Temptations “Just My Imagination,” Stevie Wonder’s “For Once in My Life” and Archie Bell’s “There’s Gonna Be a Showdown.” (North, 2010) They were even part of one of the defining moments in Black music history. Stax Records sponsored an all-day music festival in the Los Angeles Coliseum, which was labeled the black Woodstock. This festival, called Wattstax, reportedly drew over 100,000 people and “Amidst the sounds of Isaac Hayes, Johnnie Taylor, the Staples Singers, the Bar-Kays, the Dramatics, Rufus Thomas and others, was the Gospel message from the Rance Allen Group.” (North, 2010, para. 42)

The group went on to record for Capitol Records, Myrrh, Bellmark and finally Tyscott Records with whom they are currently under contract. Over the course of the years they have had five singles place on the *Billboard* R &B charts. (McNeil, 2005, p. 8) “In 2004, the group was nominated for a Grammy for their *Live Experience* album, which featured guest appearances by contemporary gospel stars Fred Hammond, LaShun Pace, and Kirk Franklin.” (McNeil, 2005, p. 8)

With the success of the *Live Experience* recording the Rance Allen Group has continued to be in demand for concert performances and other guest appearances. When major gospel recording artist Marvin Sapp was asked to comment on Rance Allen's voice and stage presence he said: "It's a known fact that nobody wants to follow him on stage." (North, 2010, para. 1) "Mainstays such as John P. Kee and Kirk Franklin have made it a point to include Allen on their projects. Several in the mainstream music circuit credit Allen with 'blowing them away'." (North, 2010, para. 4) The Rance Allen Group has clearly had a big impact on gospel music and has made a lasting impression on singers, musicians and lovers of music both within and outside of the gospel arena. When I asked Bishop Allen about his thoughts on what is being perceived by some as the adopting of white praise and worship songs, by black artists, he described it as a long standing practice.

A lot of the music that black folks sing, that we would argue until the sun came up is authentic black music, if you really trace it back, somebody black heard somebody white singing this song and they just brought it across the field over here to the black folk. And now we did such a job on it until you would think it was ours, when really it started out it was theirs. (R. Allen, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

The song, "Because of Who You Are," (Yohe, 2003) was recorded by Vicki Yohe, one of a few white artists whose praise and worship music has been adopted by African American churches and listeners. The song was written by Martha Munizzi, who has also recorded music that has been embraced by the African American gospel music community. Munizzi, in fact, was the first white artist to win a Stellar Award, which is an award designed to honor black gospel music. (Pollard, 2008, p. 33) She has authored and recorded several songs now considered to be classics in praise and worship. (Pollard, 2008, p. 33) Munizzi and Yohe are two white artists

credited with having a particularly soulful delivery style that is believed to contribute to the acceptance of their music within the black community. (Pollard, 2008, p. 32) Another artist that falls into the soulful delivery style category is Israel Houghton. Israel, who is a worship leader and recording artist who has won multiple awards for his unique style of praise and worship music, describes himself as a: “black kid who grew up in a white family in a Hispanic church.” (Pollard, 2008, p.36) Drawing from all of his cultural experiences, Houghton produces music that he calls “The Sound of New Breed Worship.” (Pollard, 2008, p. 36) He and those with whom he partners to produce his music acknowledge that they are looking to include every generation, every culture and every “tribe” and intentionally trying to attract the ears of the youth who are “not listening to older versions of gospel stuff; they’re listening to the new stuff, which is not that cultural.” (Pollard, 2008, p. 36)

My experience bears witness to this statement. In my work both with the Gospel Ensemble and as a program host on WONB Radio, the Ohio Northern University campus radio station, I have noted a shift in preferences. For nearly two decades I have hosted a gospel music program on Sunday afternoons. I receive call in requests from students, faculty and staff on campus, but also from listeners in Ada and nearby Lima, Ohio. Early on I noted that most of the requests I received from Lima listeners were for more traditional gospel songs, mostly southern, male quartet music. Students would request more contemporary choir or group music. Most of my callers were African American and the music I played was almost exclusively black gospel. In recent years I have received more calls for praise and worship music from on campus and Lima. The requests include music by non-black artists and those with a non-traditional approach, among them Israel Houghton. The popularity of his song “You Are Good” (Houghton, 2004) is underscored by the fact that it is performed by church choirs from various

ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, my church choir includes this song in their repertoire and the ONU Gospel Ensemble has often sung it, as well, and it was included in our spring concert. In an interview with one of the Gospel Ensemble alumni members, it was suggested that the Ensemble should be keeping pace with current musical tastes and the music of Israel was specifically mentioned.

The African American tradition has changed so. And so, at the time it was relevant music at the time I was at Gospel Ensemble, because it was in the mainstream. Now, if you're still singing those same songs, really you should get with Israel or you should be singing something else, like Donnie McClurkin or something different. I would be disappointed if the same songs are being sung now that were sung then,...

(confidential personal communication, July 21, 2013)

A sentiment made even more poignant when a current member of the Ensemble, an African American student, made it a point to tell me that young people don't sing in the "hard gospel" style evident in the original versions of some of the songs we were attempting to learn. This became an issue as the group rehearsed a song called "Now Behold the Lamb." (Franklin, 1995) This song was recorded by Kirk Franklin and the Family and one of the soloists is Tamela Mann. Mann has a very strong, alto voice and sings in a style which might be considered traditional gospel style. The comment made by the Ensemble student was an explanation for why his approach to the solo was going to differ from Mann's. He proceeded to make the solo "his own" and his style was considerably gentler and less traditional than the original.

Relevance is Relative

Israel Houghton's approach to music might be considered culturally expansive, younger generation friendly. This is exemplified in his song, "I Hear the Sound," where he declares: "It

ain't a black thing. It ain't a white thing. It ain't a colored thing. It's a kingdom thing.”

(Pollard, 2008, p. 36) Several of Houghton's songs declare a difference in the way this current generation will approach giving praise to God. Israel affirms: “We're going to praise God in a way our forefathers did not.” (Pollard, 2008, p. 37) Gospel music artist and worship leader, Chris Byrd, gives another dimension to the “kingdom thing” focus. Byrd is the recording artist, producer, songwriter and singer we referenced earlier, who did a workshop with the Ensemble and performed with them and the members of the Philippian Church Choir at the spring concert in 2013. He has worked with John P. Kee, another well-known name in the gospel music industry, and at one point traveled with him working as music director for his group. He currently serves as music director for the Rance Allen Group, a position he has held for many years. He has recorded multiple albums working with Tyscot Records, Pulse Records, and finally on the label he created, Minstrel House Music. In addition to his own projects he has produced numerous other artists with several of the albums and singles garnering Stellar Award and Grammy Award nominations. In addition, he has done corporate work writing jingles for radio stations and other businesses. Byrd has had music videos receive heavy rotation airplay on the *Bobby Jones Gospel Video* show, a gospel music industry standard television program hosted by Dr. Bobby Jones, a legend in the promotion of gospel music. Byrd continues to produce music which receives national airplay and he maintains a heavy tour schedule, in addition to performing his duties as Minister of Music at a large church in Toledo, Ohio. (Byrd, 2010) Byrd has fully embraced the praise and worship genre and believes it is going to continue to grow in popularity. He believes it is the vertical focus of the music, the centering of God that makes the difference. In a recent interview Byrd shared these thoughts:

I always think about when we get to heaven we're gonna be singing songs of praise

and worship. It won't be testimony. It won't be songs where we are trying to share and encourage people, because we won't have no problems. It's gonna be all about Him. That's why I believe it's coming to the forefront because when we get to heaven that's what we're gonna be doing. It's something powerful about praise and worship songs in my opinion because when you sing songs of praise and worship then not only here on earth people can join in, but heaven can join in as well. When we sing songs that talk about our situations and problems the angels really don't relate to that. The Heavenly hosts they can't join in and sing 'cause they don't have no problems. They can't relate to what we're saying. But when we talk about God and we sing praises, then they can join in, as well. I believe that's where a lot of us experience a mighty move of God, through songs of praise and worship because you've got heaven and earth speaking the same language on one accord. They're able to sing along with us. (C. Byrd, personal communication, July 18, 2013)

Byrd believes singing this kind of music lines up with the scriptures. He stressed that our purpose when we gather for corporate worship in the church is to praise and worship God. Embracing this kind of music, Byrd states, is essential to the church being able to grow and move forward. It is understandable, in his opinion, that the African American church would have sung songs of struggle and of pain, as those songs were birthed out of the experiences of the people. Perhaps this is part of the reason that praise and worship music was more common in the church services of other cultures long before becoming an accepted part of African American worship services. There may have been less of a focus on life's circumstances for cultures where pain and struggle were not as prominent a part of their day to day existence.

Fred Hammond has become one of the most popular praise and worship leaders in the field. “He made it his personal quest to deliver praise and worship music with an urban flair, and utilized funk grooves, gospel vamps, and other techniques to rework many of the emerging standards in worship repertoire... These recordings built upon the tradition of West Angeles Church of God in Christ (COGIC) in introducing this genre into the black community.” (McNeil, 2005, pp. 172-173) The West Angeles Church of God in Christ choir is credited with being the first African American church choir to fully embrace the praise and worship genre. They released a series of recordings beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s featuring their unique worship music and it became popular with choirs throughout the United States and in Europe. (C. Green, personal communication, July 30, 2013) Much like Fred Hammond and the West Angeles COGIC choir before him, Chris Byrd also brings music from other cultural traditions to the African American church. In addition, he seeks to make his musical messages accessible and attractive to all cultures. Byrd has expressed that he never wants to be confined to the Black church sound only, but wants people of all races and cultures to be able to find something in his music to which they can relate. He has spent a good portion of his career writing, playing and performing traditional gospel quartet style music with the Rance Allen Group and others. In line with his desire to break out of the traditional mode he has written, recorded and performed music that would not typically be associated with an African American gospel singer. One such song can be found on his *Vessel* CD and it is clearly a rock song. Byrd cites his appreciation for the music of Casting Crowns as the influence for the song “Follow Me.” (Byrd, 2010) Casting Crowns is described as a Christian pop band whose musical style is considered light rock. I asked Chris if rock music was something he grew up listening to and if that was a part of his experience. His reply was that he grew up listening to primarily soul,

rhythm and blues and traditional gospel music. His appreciation for rock music did not develop until much later as he began to be exposed to other kinds of music. While he says he has written other songs with a rock feeling, “Follow Me” (Byrd, 2010) is the first rock styled song he has included on a project that has been released to the public. In addition to rock, there are selections on *Vessel* that are considered urban contemporary, traditional, rhythm and blues/soul, and praise and worship music.

In the summer of 2010 in Toledo, Ohio, I had occasion to attend the concert presented in celebration of the release of the *Vessel* CD. There were several performers featured on the program. In many ways this was a typical Sunday evening gospel concert at a large church. In other ways it was a departure from the norm. There was the kind of variety of music and diversity in age among the performers and those in attendance that is desired, but not always achieved by gospel music concert promoters. It has been my experience that gospel music fans, especially church goers, are notoriously loyal to the style of music they prefer and not often open to others. Traditional gospel lovers are often less than enthusiastic about contemporary styled songs and music that appeals to older listeners is generally not of interest to the younger crowd, yet on that day at that particular event there were children, teenagers, young adults and senior citizens all gathered in the same auditorium and seemingly there was something on the program to appeal to each of them. And perhaps most amazing of all was the fact that the crowd seemed to stay for the entire concert rather than leaving once they had heard from the group most appealing to them. The crowd was overwhelmingly African American, but not exclusively.

The concert opened with selections from the church praise team. Following the praise team there was a soloist who sang a song which seemed to be a mix of praise and worship music and traditional church hymn. The next selections were presented by a gospel quartet and they

were very much in traditional southern style. Then there was a surprise appearance by the popular Rance Allen Group. They presented a song that was originally recorded with gospel music superstar, Kirk Franklin and has become a modern day standard sung by choirs, ensembles and groups all over the country. The popularity of the group and the song, “Something About the Name Jesus,” was apparent by the reaction of the crowd. It practically became a congregational hymn as all across the auditorium people were on their feet singing along, hitting every note and not missing a word. Following the Rance Allen Group presentation, Chris Byrd, the featured performer was introduced and as he and his group performed several selections from his new project and they were all well received. There seemed to already be a familiarity with the music, as many sang along. People responded positively to each song though they were each very different and distinct from each other. At the conclusion of the concert attendees had the opportunity to purchase copies of the CD and there seemed to be great interest in doing so. There seemed to be as much appreciation for the rock styled song as there was for the traditional songs and the praise and worship selections.

This aspiration to use music to reach beyond the borders of race, age, ethnicity and other categories that generally separate people is one shared by many. Martha Munizzi is another artist who is having success in that endeavor. She is quoted as saying: “My deepest desire is to transcend cultural, generational, boundaries and to bring all people together through worship.” (Pollard, 2008, p. 34) Munizzi, Fred Hammond and other praise leaders who have made strides in reaching beyond borders with their music have participated in an event in Detroit, Michigan that has been referred to as the “spiritual Super Bowl.” (Pollard, 2008, p. 35) This event was created by the leadership in one of the African American mega churches in Detroit. The Straight Gate International Church began in a small store front building, with a small black congregation

and has grown to a church with nearly five-thousand members, including those of other races. (Pollard, 2008, p. 35) The pastor, Bishop Andrew Merritt, incorporated praise and worship music and brought in a variety of worship leaders of various racial and ethnic backgrounds to share with the congregation. As this grew in popularity they decided to offer the opportunity to the larger community and established the *One in Worship* event. This event was held in the Ford Field where the seating capacity is seventy-thousand. The event was broadcast by Total Christian Television, Christian Television Network, Daystar, the Miracle Network and Trinity Broadcasting giving the event a potential international television audience of four hundred million. (Pollard, 2008, p. 35) This was clearly not just a “Black thing.” According to Bishop Merritt: “Diversity is a reflection of the core of Christ, out of one blood made He all nations,...Arabs will participate, Greek, French, Hispanics. But no cultural names, no denomination will get in the way of what people are coming here to do, and that is to worship as one body.” (Pollard, 2008, p. 35) Obery Hendricks maintains that gospel music can become more important in the African American struggle by moving beyond:

...preaching Jesus to preaching what Jesus preached; it must move beyond spirited singing to Spirit-led song that proclaims to all—and moves them to proclaim in turn: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor . . . to proclaim release to the captives . . . to let the oppressed go free.” Amen. (Hendricks, 2011, p. 39)

Perhaps this move toward the incorporation of praise and worship music and broadening of styles in the presentation of gospel music is the realization of the potential Hendricks described.

Chris Byrd refers to himself as a minstrel and he has been compared to the biblical psalmist, David. I asked him about the significance of the term minstrel. He explained that in

his study of the Bible he was drawn to the role of the musician or minstrel. He talked about the fact that the minstrel was someone who could change the atmosphere with his music. This was not just a matter of skill, but of a spiritual gifting, so that this musician played out of his spirit, as well as his talent and skill. He made reference to kings and rulers calling for the minstrel in times of illness or depression and having the music of the minstrel bring a physical change to their conditions simply by playing music. Specifically he cited a passage where King Saul called for the minstrel David to play for him because he was afflicted with a demonic spirit and when David played, the evil spirit released King Saul. This powerful image greatly affected Byrd. He identified with and aspired to this role and adopted the term minstrel to describe himself.

The power of music described by Byrd and by Hendricks is not confined to one genre or one style of musical presentation. The spirituals made and continue to make valuable contributions, yet that does not preclude the role of traditional or contemporary gospel nor disqualify praise and worship music from playing an effective role. In the Old Testament of the Bible Exodus 3:6 states: “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Amplified Bible) Smith Pollard explains that this verse has been interpreted by some to mean though God has remained the same over time, each of the patriarchs, or fathers of the faith, experienced Him differently and responded to Him in their own way. (Pollard, 2008, p. 30) Each revered and worshipped Him in the way that resonated with them, making none superior or inferior, but all unique. If no one tradition is superior, there should be room for all.

Each generation experiences circumstances and spirituality in unique ways. Israel Houghton says this generation will praise God in ways past generations have not. In the early days of gospel music the Rance Allen Group’s tactic of combining so called secular music with spiritual themes was a different approach; one which was criticized by some. The incorporation

of praise and worship music is gaining acceptance, but does that mean it will eliminate the use of spirituals, traditional or contemporary gospel songs in worship services? Bishop Allen commented:

I guess I would say while praise and worship music is okay, doesn't matter that it comes from white or black folk, just don't forget where we come from. To do praise and worship today simply means there's never an opportunity for you to hear Precious Lord Take My Hand and I don't think that should be. I don't care how much progress we make in that area, there ought always to be room for Precious Lord Take My Hand or Edwin Hawkins' Oh Happy Day. (R. Allen, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Many of the pastors interviewed in Smith Pollard's work would echo those remarks. One in particular refers to a verse of scripture that admonishes us not to destroy old landmarks. He believes completely removing traditional music from the worship experience is a mistake. He is open to making changes to stay current, as long as there is a place for tradition. His belief is that the incorporation of the new styles actually creates more understanding of and appreciation for the traditional. (Pollard, 2008, p. 50)

We began this chapter with a quote from Bishop Terence Sykes about the power and anointing of music. Bishop Sykes referenced a story from the Bible involving King Jehoshaphat. In the Old Testament of the Bible in second Chronicles chapter twenty we read that the enemies of Judah are sending armies to destroy them. Judah will be out-numbered and practically defenseless. King Jehoshaphat prays and receives assurance from God, through a prophet, that the battle will be won for him and his army will not even need to fight. In response to this prophetic word, King Jehoshaphat commands the people to praise God. As a sign of their faith

in God and faith in the assurance that He would deliver them, the army marched forward, led by choirs of people singing praises to God. In the end Judah was victorious and never had to lift a finger. Their weapon was praise in song.

So what of Obery Hendricks assertion that gospel music is not living up to its potential to be an important and contributing tool in the struggle for social justice for African Americans?

In *The Art of Protest*, T.V. Reed talks about “the diffusion of movement culture back into mainstream culture” and cites this as one of the most important contributions social movements can make. (Reed, 2005, p. 297) This diffusion can be responsible for “publicly enacting images that confound existing cultural codings...” and in Reed’s estimation “...altering cultural codings is one of the most powerful ways social movements actually bring about change.” (Reed, 2005, p. 297) In one of the chapters of *The Art of Protest*, we read about scholar and activist, Bernice Johnson Reagon. An integral part of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Reagon was the founder of a singing group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, which provided much of what might be considered the sound track of the movement. So integral was music to the civil rights movement that it became a force of its own. Based solely on what were called freedom songs, a group of Freedom Singers was formed and they toured the country telling the story of the movement and raising funds. This group was instrumental in getting young people involved as they traveled north to college campuses and helped recruit students to the movement. Reed states: “The forms of culture most central to the civil rights movement were undoubtedly music and religion. The freedom songs ...mobilized both.” (Reed, 2005, p. 2) Reagon described the importance of the music this way: “freedom songs are one of the best records we have of the transformation of consciousness in the ordinary people, the masses, who took part in the movement.” (Reed, 2005, p. 14) Reagon also described the physical nature of singing the songs and the affect it had. “The

sense of personal power felt in the act of singing in full resonance among a mass of fellows translated into movement power on the front lines.” (Reed, 2005, p. 29).

Gospel music is largely participatory music, especially as compared to other more presentational forms. There has been, however, a focus on performance, which Hendricks references, that in some cases challenges this notion. Hendricks refers to “clowning” and “Trickeration”

(Hendricks, 2011, pp. 28-30) when describing techniques employed by some gospel soloists and choirs to entertain audiences and move them to emotional highs. These techniques, such as “vocal gymnastics,” repetitive arrangements and choral choreography, are associated with contemporary gospel music, according to Hendricks, and are part of what keeps it from being useful to the audience who become observers rather than participants. (Hendricks, 2011, p. 33)

While there is a place and a following for this presentational style of gospel music, there is also a place for more participatory styles as well, and these seem to be more prevalent. Praise and worship music is designed to involve the audience rather than entertain them. As Woods and Walrath point out in their book, *The Message in the Music*, “...the body of Christ is too diverse to ever settle on just one style of music as appropriate for worship.” (Woods & Walrath, 2007, p. 15)

Hendricks suggests there is a way for gospel music to move toward usefulness in the movement for social justice: “...it can marry the emotional appeal of Gospel music with the prophetic consciousness and resistance sensibilities of the Spirituals to produce a new generation of resistance music, music that moves Black people, indeed, all people, not just to emotional frenzy, but to that divinely inspired action that is the struggle to establish God’s kingdom of justice – on earth, as in heaven.” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 39) Could it be that this is exactly what we are seeing with the advent of this new generation of gospel singers and this growing focus on

praise and worship music? Could praise and worship music and a multicultural approach to delivering and receiving it be the resistance music for this time? My look at the music revealed some of the subtle differences in approach that are connected to race. In Chapter Five I will look at some of the possible challenges race poses when multicultural worship is the goal.

CHAPTER 5.

WORSHIP IN BLACK AND WHITE

Black church takes forever! I grew up going to White church, man, you know? Service starts at ten, at ten-thirty we're at IHOP already enjoying our breakfast. I remember the first time I went to Black church. I didn't know. I was just sittin' there, you know, and I was like, why is it takin' so long? And then I finally realized half way through the service why it was taking so long, because when you go to church with White people, man, we don't say nothin'. When the preacher's talkin' we shut up and we listen. If someone tries to talk while the preacher's talking we tell 'em: 'Shhh!; Zip it and focus; two more songs and we are outta here.'...I didn't know when you go to a Black church, I didn't know that when Black people agree with what the preacher's talking about, don't wait, they yell it out right there, they agree. See, I didn't know, so I was getting upset with the other people in the pews 'cause I thought they were bein' disrespectful. I was just sittin' there and: 'Preach on it!' Are you serious? You're just gonna talk while he's talking? Why don't you zip it and focus, man? It's one-thirty! I'm ready to go home!...Another song? Why's she singing Alicia Keys? That has nothin' to do with Jesus. You guys have a step team? Are you serious? The First Baptist Steppers? It's six o'clock! I wanna go. I'm starving! I didn't eat breakfast!!

A poet? You have a poet? This is a freakin' talent show!...(JordPaul1, 2012)

In the opening chapter we referenced Dr. Martin Luther King's quote about the eleven o'clock hour on Sunday mornings being the most segregated hour in America. In his book *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, Gerardo Marti references that same quote and in reply shares:

"...the Sunday at eleven o'clock racial segregation of the American church is no longer acceptable." (Marti, 2012, p.3) Marti comes to this conclusion based upon his research of multi-racial church congregations and the pastors and worship leaders who seek to make them work. He further quotes Dr. King who as a young pastor expressed a desire for integration within the church. King said: "I was convinced that worship at its best is a social experience with people of all levels of life coming together to realize their oneness and unity under God," (Marti, 2012, p.3) King believed this integration was not only the mission of the church, but was to be a reflection of the unity that is and will be in heaven. Our "ultimate allegiance" is to God, said King. (Marti, 2012, p.3) Marti's own research revealed a discussion about racial integration of the church on a variety of levels including seminary courses and workshops for church leadership where homogeneity within individual church congregations was being referred to as "unbiblical," "unspiritual" and even considered a form of racism. (Marti, 2012, p.4) These comments imply that "[h]ealthy churches are supposed to be able to cross all racial and ethnic divides." (Marti, 2012, p.4) Marti's research points to the critically important role music can play in the cultivation of these much desired diverse congregations. (Marti, 2012, p.4) As in Marti's research, my project examined themes of racial integration and Christian worship and the key role of music. At issue was how to balance racial unity and specific cultural traditions. In the case of this particular study, I considered attempts at maintaining the practice of African American gospel music by a racially mixed ensemble with primarily racially homogenous church congregations. The fact remains that there are cultural differences and preferences. A one size fits all approach to worship or even worship music is likely to satisfy none. The excerpts at the opening of this chapter are from a comedy routine performed by Gary Owen. Owen created the routine based on his experience at a black church service. His observations are funny because, as

exaggerated as they may be they are based in truths with which anyone who has attended both a “Black” church service and a “White” church service can relate. There is no denying they are very different experiences. So if the goal is a more integrated worship experience for the masses on Sunday mornings in America, how can this be accomplished taking into account cultural differences, preferences and perceptions of an authentic worship experience? Clearly this is a discussion going on at a much broader level than will be considered in this project. For the purposes of my study I will consider this at the local level centering my thoughts on the ONU Gospel Ensemble.

In Chapter Three I discussed how the Gospel Ensemble served as a source of support for African American students as they integrated the ONU campus community. I discussed the fact that the Gospel Ensemble helped integrate the religious life program at ONU as they were the only “deputation team” to have African American student participants. I also looked at the integration of the Ensemble itself as the racial make-up of the group transitioned from all African American, to a racially mixed group, to a majority White group. In this chapter I look at how a mixed race Gospel Ensemble singing Black gospel music integrates the worship experience for participants within the Ensemble and those congregations with whom they worship. I also explore how these experiences affect perceptions of authenticity for those involved.

Multi-Racial Worship

Marti's research reveals that it is more common to combine White people and people from Asian or Hispanic backgrounds in multiracial churches than White and Black. He found that attracting African Americans to multiracial congregations was more difficult. (Marti, 2012, p.53) Groups other than African Americans seem to assimilate more easily to the worship style of the White church. In an interview with an Asian worship leader Marti discussed the perceived lack of definition of an “Asian style” of worship music and affinity for White worship music among

Asians. These perceptions were attributed to the recognition among Asians and others that there is a “power dynamic between racial groups in American Society.” (Marti, 2012, p. 43) This Asian male speculated that Asians intentionally line up with White culture in an attempt to avoid stigma and gain prestige. Marti quotes this worship leader’s explanation: “Let’s be real here. You move to America, you’re not going to try to be like African Americans. You’re going to try to be like the White man, so they connect to his culture, the type of music...” (Marti, 2012, p. 43)

So far this discussion has been rather binary in nature focusing on the perceived assimilation of other cultures to White worship practices and the difficulty, real or perceived, of integrating Blacks into White worship styles. While not ideal, it is appropriate that the discussion take such a focus in this project, as the White and Black dynamic is what is most prevalent in the ONU Gospel Ensemble and in their interactions with church congregations. The challenge identified by Marti that lends itself to a binary discussion on this topic is tied to the perception of African American worship as superior. Despite the recognition of racial power dynamics and the professed desire of others immigrating to America to curry favor with the dominant culture, the area of worship and worship music is thought to be one where African Americans have an advantage. Marti interviewed people from various backgrounds and there was an almost universal acceptance that the symbols of "true worship" involve Blacks singing gospel music and engaging in uninhibited praise. (Marti, 2012, p. 53) Overwhelmingly, people who were interviewed spoke of how central gospel music was to "black worship": "And all perceived ‘black worship’ to be superior." (Marti, 2012, p. 52) The perception of authenticity related to African Americans singing gospel is thought to be connected to the history of African Americans’ experience with slavery and the related suffering. Marti explained it this way:

“...because blacks are the only group to have experienced slavery in the United States, they are believed to have a deep connection to suffering and therefore a deeper connection to the mercy and grace of God in comparison with other groups.” (Marti, 2012, p. 62) Sentiments such as these suggest that only Black people can achieve a certain level of authenticity. They also tie into thoughts shared by cultural theorist, Stuart Hall. In an interview with Hall, conducted by University of Massachusetts Professor of Communication, Sut Jhally, Hall talked about the importance of the classification of Black as a political rather than biological category. In that interview, speaking about why Black political arguments have significance, Hall stated:

The reason why it matters is not because of what's in our genes, it's because of what's in our history. It's because Black people have been in a certain position in society, in history for a long period of time that those are the conditions they are in and that's what they are fighting against and of course that matters, but then Black, the term Black, is referring to this long history of political and historical oppression. It's not referring to our genes. It's not referring to our biology...so I want people to take politics more seriously and biology a bit less seriously. (kruger97, 2009)

This interview was a precursor to a lecture Hall gave about race as a floating signifier, rather than a fixed classification based on biological differences. As the racial and ethnic demographics grow and change within the student body at Ohio Northern University it is likely there will be students associated with other racial classifications who may be attracted to participate in the Ensemble. Participation of this kind could expand our discussion on race and gospel music to incorporate other races. Discussion will likely always incorporate a focus on Black participation, or the lack thereof however, based on the political and historical ties of

African American people to this specific genre of music. There is a particular dynamic associated with the history of African American people and their relationship with White people in this country and that makes the focus of this current project, though admittedly binary, significant.

With so much focus on African Americans, how do people feel about White and Black people singing Black gospel music together? My research uncovered data on a very local level, in answer to this question. There was a range of opinions and perceptions among the individuals I interviewed and surveyed. Some were clearly of the opinion that the racial mix found in the Gospel Ensemble was helpful to the delivery of the music and lines up with God's desires. Others were unable to perceive any difference between a mixed race group and an all African American group. Chris Byrd spoke of the mix as being ideal:

Bringing people of God together of all races just creates a sound that crosses cultural barriers and denominational barriers and all of those different strongholds that have kept people divided. I think that having a mixture of races really helps. Not only do you hear it, but you see it and you see where this is what it's all about as far as God's kingdom and what we were made to do. We were made to glorify Him no matter who we are, no matter what race. We're supposed to be united. One thing about music, music unites people because we are all singing the same thing making a joyful noise unto Him and making one sound, so it makes us united.

(C. Byrd, personal communication, July 18, 2013)

Congregants from the Hope United Methodist Church of Franklin, Ohio, Verona United Methodist Church of Verona, Ohio and the Village Church of Toledo, Ohio, responded to the survey question: "Do you believe the racial mix of the ONU Gospel Ensemble has any effect on

the music they produce? If so, what is (are) the effect(s)?" Their responses reflect a range of opinions about the music Gospel Ensemble delivered when visiting their churches.

Hope UMC Congregants.

- It's a wonderful blend of style and beautiful voices!
- No.
- Yes. It has had an effect on all music; beat, subject matter, & reference to Bible
- It makes you realize there is no prejudice. We are all equal and God's children.
- Not sure – I thought they sounded wonderful! But I do feel that the energy and music is a little different than all African American groups.
- I love that they blend so well
- Probably. "Soul" can be presented by anyone who has a heart for the music, but perhaps "White folks" are often too inhibited in their passion for the Lord or for the music itself???
- Yes – Blend the cultures
- Yes, I think that mix doesn't have the same sound, but I liked it.

(Anonymous, personal communication, March 17, 2013)

Verona UMC Congregants.

- No
- It shows when God is in the mix there is no separation. Music unto the Lord spans all Horizons
- No! They are all jumpin' and jivin' [*sic*]
- Very much so, no matter what color, we are all God's children. And if you have a voice use it. Many singers have been inspired by gospel music, like Elvis Presley

- No everyone does a good job
- No
- No. I think they all enjoyed it and believed it.

(Anonymous, personal communication, March 24, 2013)

The Village Church Congregants.

- I enjoy the racial & gender mix.
- Race doesn't matter...we are all human beings ☺
- It may make it more accessible to non-African Americans
- no
- Not sure – but I noticed this right away & liked it
- No - they sound authentic to me. I love listening to you guys!
- I'm not sure it effects [*sic*] the music but it is good to see White students performing gospel music & I assume learning more about Black heritage
- The effect is such that the audience gets to enjoy the diverse cultural influences of the members within the gospel tradition
- Yes – Positive – transcends race/gender
- No, because I have noticed that gospel music has grown/continues to grow beyond racial lines.
- I don't think it affects the music – it sounded like other gospel music I've heard. I enjoyed seeing the mix of race in this traditionally AA [*sic*] music.
- It makes me focus more on God, rather than thinking this is a Black culture, race, etc.
- Yes. Perception of authenticity comes from racial mix.
- No

- I do not believe it makes a difference
- No
- I love the diversity. It is one of the groups strengths.
- Yes

(Anonymous, personal communication, April 14, 2013)

While there were many among these three congregations who acknowledged there was some perceived difference in the music that could be attributed to race, the overwhelming reaction was that this was a positive thing. Most of the survey respondents seemed to express an appreciation for the racial mix and some even alluded to the fact that the mix allowed accessibility to the music they might not have experienced otherwise. This caused me to reflect on the earlier days when the Ensemble was all African American and to wonder if a similar survey had been done at that time what it might have revealed about the comfort level of these congregations with the group and the effectiveness of the music.

The audience at the spring concert was more diverse than any single church congregation the Gospel Ensemble visited all year. Those in attendance who participated in the survey included male and female, White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Catholic, Methodist, Mormon, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, and a range of ages from nineteen to seventy-eight. They were asked to respond to the same question as the churches. It should be noted that even though the question specifically asks about the music of the Gospel Ensemble the responses may have been influenced by the broader program. What the concert audience experienced was a bit different than what was experienced by the church congregations. At the individual churches they had a presentation by only the Gospel Ensemble. At the concert the first part of the program featured music shared by the Gospel Ensemble alone and then the second part of the program combined

the Ensemble with the Philippian Missionary Baptist Church choir and the guest soloist and his musicians.

Concert Audience Survey Responses.

- I do not feel that the racial mix of the ONU GE has any effect on the music they produce. They all sound great and no matter what race you are, as long as you're glorifying God, I don't think it matters.
- No I do not. Gospel music has no color. It is all about praising God and lifting up His name. This is a talented group of young people. God speaks through their voices.
- Yes. The name says it all, Gospel. It dosent [*sic*] matter what your color is or nationally [*sic*] if you are doing it in the name of God!
- That we are all one in God.
- No.
- I think it adds to its power
- No, again, you have someone who has Gospel roots directing
- No, the mixture bring a more diverse croud [*sic*]
- Sure. The racial mix of the Ensemble means that each member will be bringing their own faith and musical experience to the groups. I would assume many of the non-African American members were not raised in churches that celebrate God in the same way.
- The Caucasian students desire to produce music with a Gospel sound that can be heard in Black Gospel genre that is what they are working towards – that's just my thinking any way.
- Yes, I believe God blesses any time we strive to do His will – coming together is a blessing

- Yes – maybe weren't raised up listening – had more to learn more technical
- Yes the racial mix encourages you to stretch yourself to sing songs that both cultures can relate to
- No
- Yes, eclectic style and background. It's unique.
- No – It is the style of music – Again unison repeated phrases I think of a blind person – Would racial Mix mean a thing – no, but the message would be there
- Is mostly White, so no different from what music was chosen for them
- Yes, it helps to open the hearts and minds of the people to receive [sic]
- No, singing praises to God, transcends racial lines.
- No effect. You would tend to think that a diverse choir would slow the rhythm or movement down
- I think it is a great thing to involve musicians of different races participate in a great musical tradition of the African American church. A mixed race gospel choir, by its very existence bridges the racial divide in America and celebrates our racial and artistic diversity as well as our religious commonality.
- No. I was more struck by the difference age seemed to make when the Philippian choir joined in – greater depth of emotion from greater experience
- No – if I closed my eyes and listened to these songs I would never know it was a racially mixed group.
- No
- No b/c when I've come everyone is willing to learn it the way Mrs. Adriane has and or just coming to worship. [sic]

- No, Gospel is the soul of a men or women [*sic*] not their color. It all about Jesus!
- No
- The music sounds a little more contemporary than traditional gospel music.
- Yes, more active
- None – just the enthusiasm
- No
- No it's great
- No, they're diverse, so their music should be diverse.
- Yes, I think it is somewhat different because ½ or more are white students, not better or worse, just different. Vocal tones & sounds are just somewhat different.
- Yes, having more Anglo (white) students makes the music a bit different not better or worse, just different voice tone
- I think they enrich each other by the experiences they bring to each other.
- It was enlightening. Jesus was evident in all the singers. The skin color made no difference in the singers love of God.
- Yes. It was a reminder that Gospel music isn't designated to a specific race.
- Good to hear all the voices with a gospel sound.
- No (Anonymous, personal communication, April 21, 2013)

Among this group of survey respondents there seemed to be a few more who felt comfortable pointing out a difference in tone or sound quality, though each was careful to follow up with comments clarifying that this was not a bad thing. There was still a common thread through the majority of the responses that supported this racially mixed approach to the delivery of the music

produced by the Ensemble. These responses seem to reflect a variation on the superior Black worship theme that Marti uncovered in his interviews.

Race Neutral Gospel

In his observations about the use of gospel music in multiracial churches to attract and retain Blacks as part of the congregation, Marti cited one example where the church was careful not to use the term "gospel" so as not to be perceived as "too black" (Marti, 2012, pp.71-72) The implication being that they wanted to include Black people and Black music in the worship experience, but not alienate White people or others from inclusion in the service. This reflects one of the challenges associated with balancing unity and cultural authenticity. Marti commented:

All combined, the beliefs surrounding black gospel music has the potential of creating conditions for separation and difference rather than unity and togetherness.

This indicates an inextricable tension. In short, if only blacks can truly perform gospel music (e.g. they have soul) incorporating gospel music creates a tension between "black performers" for non-black audiences." (Marti, 2012, p.74)

Thus, in some ways the racially mixed Gospel Ensemble may be perceived as more effective for integrated worship than was the original Ensemble, which was all African American. Korie Edwards (2008) also did research on multiracial church congregations. In her article *Bringing Race to the Center: The Importance of Race in Interracial Churches*, she concluded that "interracial churches with a substantial white attendance will work...to the extent that they are first comfortable places for whites to attend." (Edwards, 2008, p. 5-6) This conclusion could be relevant when considering several aspects of Gospel Ensembles journey and transitions.

In *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant categorize race as the central organizing force in the United States. (Omi & Winant, 1994) Korie Edwards asserts that

religion is not excepted from this racial organization, a fact illustrated by the segregation exhibited in Christian church congregations throughout the country. Edwards makes the point that not only are churches organized along racial lines, but they are also "complicit in reinforcing the racial hierarchy that advantages whites." (Edwards, 2008, p.6) Edwards agrees with the argument of numerous race theorists that White privilege is the cultural and structural norm in American society and because of that, Whites are accustomed and even blind to it. (Edwards, 2008, p.6) Edwards goes on to state that because Whites are accustomed to this privilege any organization religious or otherwise, that intends to be racially diverse and have Whites as part of that diversity will need to accommodate them or they will not retain them. (Edwards, 2008, p.6) In other words, if concessions are not made to ensure that Whites are comfortable they will not stay. Edwards' argument for White accommodation is demonstrated in Marti's example of the church playing a game of semantics by refusing to label gospel music as gospel. It might also be exhibited by a White congregation inviting a group like the Gospel Ensemble to share their musical ministry. As a special occasion rather than an every Sunday experience this might be a less threatening and more accommodating way for a majority White congregation to experience an integrated worship experience. The current racial mix of the Ensemble would seemingly be even more accommodating, allowing for some racial integration, but not in any overwhelming or overtly threatening way. It should also be noted that having the Ensemble visit could also be seen as an alternative for those churches who sincerely desire to have more integrated worship, but who by virtue of an isolated location or other limiting factors are somehow unable to achieve more integration on an ongoing basis.

It was not the original intent of the ONU Gospel Ensemble to become racially diverse. The same might be said of the African American gospel music community at large. Both,

however, have entered into that territory and the implications are noteworthy. Considering Edwards' theory of accommodation, I gave thought to what accommodations may have been made or perhaps are being made in order to maintain the diversity of the Ensemble. Some of the practices that might be viewed by some as accommodations are tied to other justifications. For example, some may see the lack of instrumental complexity associated with the music the Ensemble delivers as a choice that would make White participants more comfortable. (It was noted earlier that a White congregant expressed concern that the group might bring "boom boxes", a comment interpreted to mean there was a fear the music would be too loud.) The Ensemble routinely sings a cappella songs, sings with just piano accompaniment or with a recorded accompaniment track. Some may see this as a compromise. In reality the lack of instrumentation is due to my limited ability to play instruments coupled with the limited availability of student musicians able to play gospel music, the lack of University resources to hire outside gospel musicians and the limited availability of such musicians in the somewhat isolated location of the University. It should be noted that once a year, for the spring concert, a guest director and musicians are typically engaged and for that concert the instrumentation is generally more complex and perhaps in keeping with what some may consider more appropriate for a gospel choir presentation. There was discussion among some of the Ensemble alumni during one interview session about the lack of an audition requirement to join the Ensemble or to secure a solo. They cited this as differing from the typical black church or college choir protocol. The discussion began with an observation that the sound of the Gospel Ensemble differed from the all African American choirs in which they had participated in other settings. The conversation went as follows:

Now in those other groups do they have to try out? That would be a good question to

ask. Do they try out, so they can get the sound that they want, whereas here you just come and are accepted?

I think so, 'cause even at my church, I would say it's 90% African American and the rest is other, but if you want to sing in the gospel choir or the praise and worship team you are trying out. You can't sing in tune, you can't harmonize they're like maybe you go to the other ministry. They're like no 'cause we cannot be havin' you up there soundin' a hot mess.

That's how it was in high school, too.

But in Gospel Ensemble you just come, you're accepted. You want to sing about the Lord. You might be off pitch, but it's okay. Everybody else will kinda over,...they'll fix it. We'll sing a little higher, a little louder. Nobody will know.

Yeah. They'll fix it.

Sing in your ear. We got each other's back.

We're inclusive and I think that's a testament to Ms. Adriane. It's indicative of how...come, no matter what you sing, Black, White, male, female, just come. It's about God. (T. Johnson, E. Roddy, E. Roberts, K. Hearn, personal communication, April 27, 2013)

In my experience, having been part of several church choirs and at least one college gospel choir, I did not audition to join any of them. I did audition for solos in the college choir. In the church choirs solos were assigned at the discretion of the director. My experiences with these choirs helped shape my approach with the Gospel Ensemble. The decision not to have auditions was also tied to a desire to encourage and boost participation in the Ensemble. Auditions present a barrier to participation for some and since the focus of the group was to be inclusive rather than

exclusive, there was no desire to put up barriers. This inclusivity was initially aimed at welcoming Black students who may have been shy about singing, but wanted or needed to be part of this small, family like community. The inclusivity eventually allowed for racial diversity, as well. Several of the current members of the Ensemble cited the lack of audition as a contributing factor for their motivation to join. Interestingly enough, the alumni members who expressed concern about the lack of auditioning implied that this made it easier for White members to join and participate. While this may be the case, there were also numerous African American students who benefitted, as several had either no previous choir experience or no previous opportunities to sing solos. As I consider the operation of the group, I do not see examples of accommodations made specifically to attract or retain White membership and participation. I do see accommodations made to maintain the existence of the Ensemble itself. Perhaps this is a twist on Edwards' theory. In this case one might theorize that in order for an African American organization to survive on a predominately White campus it must invite or at least be open to White participation.

Edwards cites Bonilla-Silva and Omi and Winant in her discussion of hegemony and how non-Whites consent to the culture and structure of institutions that privilege Whites. Might the diversification of Gospel Ensemble be seen as hegemonic complicity? In the last chapter I discussed the music of the Ensemble and there was some attention given to the trend toward praise and worship music being embraced by both White and Black and affecting the repertoire of the Ensemble. To put that further in context we explored how the trend toward praise and worship music was being universally embraced by the Black gospel music community. Might that incorporation of praise and worship music be considered hegemonic complicity, as well? In my interview with Bishop Rance Allen, he recalled a story where accommodation in his

performance of gospel was a consideration in order to gain the attention and approval of a White producer. He recounted the story:

For years when I sang with White people, and this was not their fault, it was mine, I would back away from some of the “umph” that I would put in my songs normally because I was with White people. I remember one day in Chicago, Illinois the Rance Allen Group was scheduled to play at an outside concert and the promoter made sure to come by and tell me: “Hey man, Bill Gaither is here and he’s looking for some artists that he wants to invite on his show.” And so immediately my mind said pull back a little bit and see if you can get his attention, but that day was the wrong day to do that because as soon as we walked out on stage about 3000, 5000 Black folk were out there screaming and yelling and you just breathe in the mic and they were having fits. So, I didn’t pull back. I sang like I was ... from the hood. And I never heard from Bill Gaither. (R. Allen, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

In the case of Bishop Allen, he did not make accommodations and he did not gain the opportunity with the White producer. He has had experiences where he did receive affirmation from Whites but he makes note that there is a marked difference between the support and level of sponsorship received by White gospel acts as compared to his experiences.

I think the most dangerous place that I think racism hides itself in gospel music is in the area of business. Here I been singing 42 years with the Rance Allen Group and almost 59 years by myself. All you gotta do is go to Nashville and you’ll see guys with 10 band members doing what I do, singing gospel. The only thing is I’ll pull up in a van at 60 some years old and he’ll pull up in a Prevost bus at 20 some years

old. A van cost twenty thousand. His bus cost three hundred and twenty thousand. It's a matter of who's behind you. It's also a matter of how far you are allowed to go. Sometimes you are allowed to only go so far, not because people are trying to stop you, but because circumstance stops you. You ain't got Prevost bus money, so you can't do what they do. If you notice,...I mean little simple things like on your XM radio, if the music is Black then it's gospel, but if it's White it's Christian. That to me is just another little mode of racism that we find in the gospel world. That's to say to the White listener you don't listen to gospel music. Yours is called Christian. Theirs is called gospel. (R. Allen, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Those perceptions about categorization and the distribution of power and resources line up with the comments by the Asian worship leader cited earlier about the intentional choice of Asians to align with White worship music rather than Black. Those perceptions also hearken back to the example of the pastor refusing to categorize the music produced by the choir in his multiracial church as gospel.

In a related discussion Bishop Allen talked about a gospel artist who has praise and worship music being played on the radio and being received by White and Black. He talked about being able to distinguish from the chord structure and the phrasing of his words that even though the music was being received by Black listeners, the artist was targeting a certain segment of White listeners, too. There was a time when Black recording artists were condemned by the Black community if they appeared to be seeking cross-over status; that is acceptance by White listeners. Gospel recording artists are now openly discussing their desire to attract more

diverse audiences. Interestingly, Chris Byrd, who serves as music director for the Rance Allen Group, made such a declaration about the music he produces for his own group.

I always try to make music that is in the style of it, unique to where it will capture everyone's attention no matter what race they are. When you think about music that we hear in the world, like pop music, a lot of pop music, music like from Michael Jackson or Earth Wind and Fire those songs that they do it goes beyond race, 'cause everybody love it. So, I think it's important in the church that we try to make our sound more broad so that we can capture everybody's attention and make it appeal to everybody. (C.Byrd, personal communication, July 18, 2013)

With Minister Byrd's penchant for praise and worship music and the rise in popularity of the music in the African American community it seems natural to question whether it is a move to accommodate White comfort levels with gospel music, as suggested by Edwards as being necessary to make it easier to have and sustain diverse worship experiences. Byrd seems to believe it is more organic than contrived, a point of view that appears to be shared by Casanova Green, a Gospel Ensemble alumnus and a praise and worship leader for multiple churches. Green shared thoughts about Black and White connecting and about race having an impact on the delivery or reception of the music:

Now we're living in a time where the styles are starting to mesh again and it's about having that connect. As long as you connect with the words of the song, connect with the meaning of the song the delivery doesn't matter, it's going to come out...The song "For God So Loved The World"...was actually written by a White man to be used in both Black and White churches...We're starting to mesh again, so initially [race has an impact on the delivery and reception of the

music], but as it begins to sink in and people begin to make it their own, no
[it does not.] (C. Green, personal communication, July 30, 2013)

Green's comments advance the notion that Byrd and others shared about achieving a sort of universality with the music. From their perspective the authenticity of the experience has less to do with styles and more to do with the message in the music. What about those culturally specific stylistic preferences, though? They must play some role or they would not exist.

Cultural Authenticity

In *Behind the Music*, Banjo and Morant-Williams (2012), point to studies that have shown a clear difference in religious identity between Whites and Blacks or other communities of color in that race appears to be invisible in White communities and for Blacks and others religious identity tends to be linked to historical oppression. (Banjo and Morant-Williams, 2012, p.4) They draw upon references from slavery as an example pointing to the White Christian emphasis on themes that helped condone their personal beliefs in slavery whereas the Black point of view was focused on more collective themes such as freedom and deliverance. (Banjo and Morant-Williams, 2012, p.4) According to Banjo and Morant-Williams these themes of individualism among White congregations and collective struggle among Black congregations persist in the present. Obery Hendricks (2011) lamented the lack of reflection of that collective struggle theme in contemporary gospel music and with the focus now leaning toward praise and worship music the trend seems to be moving more in the direction Hendricks noted.

Banjo and Morant-Williams' (2012) research suggests that in both gospel music, which is associated with African Americans and contemporary Christian music, which is associated with Whites, there is a spiritual connection to a shared faith and belief system (Banjo and Morant-

Williams, 2012, p.26) There is an inference that this shared faith identity should supersede other identities and unify Christians. According to Banjo and Morant-Williams, though,:

the everydayness of life, those things that we experience as human beings are getting in the way, muddying the water and distinctions are drawn between God-inspired music targeting Black audiences and music targeting white audiences. Even in Christian environments, these distinctions influence the way we engage with one another across racial lines and hinder our ability to move toward racial reconciliation." (Banjo and Morant-Williams, 2012, p.26)

This concept of everydayness is important. It includes not only life experiences, but cultural preferences and tastes. I have focused on the Sunday morning worship experience but there are six other days in every week and music is the soundtrack of life for all of those days, as well. Creators of contemporary gospel music and contemporary Christian music too, for that matter, have acknowledged the need to branch out by producing music that people can relate to outside the walls of the church; music appropriate for other life events and circumstances unrelated to Sunday morning. In the case of gospel music the sub-genres are as varied as the tastes of the listeners. There is gospel jazz, gospel rap, gospel hip hop and now praise and worship has become a sub-genre. All of these appealing to different and at times overlapping audiences. Perhaps the unifying factor with these audiences is an authentic experience with the music. It has been said that what comes from the heart reaches the heart. In my quest to find what is perceived as authentic when it comes to the delivery and reception of gospel music the most common and recurring theme among those I surveyed and/or interviewed, seemed to be that heart connection. Sheree Sykes, Co-Pastor of Shekijah Preparation Assembly Church, made this statement about what makes the delivery of gospel music authentic: "I think what may make it

authentic...is if the presenter of the gospel has a changed heart. If he or she themselves know Jesus and have an experience with Jesus it will come out in the music." (S. Sykes, personal communication, July 7, 2013) Aaron Britt, one of the early alumni members, shared:

I think what makes it authentic is that you can tell that people really feel it and you can tell by the expressions when they're singing it. And especially like the crowd that you're singing to, you can tell that it's striking something in them, too.

(A. Britt, personal communication, June 13, 2013)

Casanova Green defined the key to authenticity in the delivery of gospel music as: "The heart - A passion of the heart to sing for God." (C. Green, personal communication, July 30, 2013) Comments from several other alumni members gave similar references to the heart or feelings generated by authentic gospel music: Kayla shared: "When you can make others feel what you are feeling, projected just by the song you're singing or the way that you're saying it I think that's what makes it authentic, too." (K. Payne, personal communication, April 27, 2013) Sherman commented:

It's one thing to know the words and sing the words, but it takes gospel music to a different level when you actually feel that an individual is identifying with what they're singing... You can tell when someone felt what they were singing and truly understood and believed what they were singing. (S. Dean, personal communication, June 17, 2013)

Michael shared his thoughts on the topic:

True gospel music to me is very emotional, very scriptural, very heartfelt. Hearing a song can change your day...to me that's the authenticity of it. That's what makes it authentic to me. Your expression of it, the emotional

state you're in, how it feels to me. (M. Somerville, personal communication, June 12, 2013)

Nicole commented: "It's what speaks to you, your inner being." (N. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2013) Marcia shared: "Whenever you're singing praises to God and you feel the presence of His Spirit, that makes it feel authentic to me." (M. Hines, personal communication, July 29, 2013)

Heather Davey shared comments and an anecdote that seem to summarize the observations made by most of those I interviewed. Her thoughts connected the emotional and the spiritual defining authenticity in a way that encapsulated the elements expressed as key or central by the majority of the participants in my research. She commented:

For me it is more of a going with your heart and a feeling that you feel,...And isn't that really what is the awe or the attraction of Jesus anyway or seeing Jesus in others? It didn't matter to me what people looked like. It didn't matter to me where they came from. I had that feeling, that I could feel the presence of God. I could feel that when I was/am around gospel music.

(H. Davey, personal communication, July 10, 2013)

To further illustrate her point Heather related a story about an experience she remembered with the Gospel Ensemble:

I remember,...one of the churches we walked into was a Methodist church and they were quiet and they were very apprehensive of our Ensemble at first,... But, as we sang and as you sang and as Sherman sang you could see how God works because even the demeanor of the people ...that all changed for them. When God shows up that's where God shows through. And of course by the

time we left they were happy to have heard the songs and I don't know if they've ever invited you back, but I wouldn't be surprised ... I think they learned something because God showed up. We were there to praise God and that's what we did... You could see they went from real straight, up-tight to "Ahhh." They didn't stand up and they didn't clap when we clapped, but smiles came on faces and you could just see that God showed up. (H. Davey, personal communication, July 10, 2013)

What Davey described was bigger than merely feeling some fleeting emotion. What she described and what others surveyed or interviewed defined as confirmation of the authenticity of gospel music was an affective experience.

The Spirit of Affect

Music is an affective medium. Gospel music is particularly affective in nature and in presentation. Teresa Brennan (2004), in her book *The Transmission of Affect*, talks about "feeling" the atmosphere. (Brennan, 2004, p. 1) Brennan explains that: "the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another." (Brennan, 2004, p.3) Music and in particular gospel music seems an almost tailor-made example of what Brennan described and is further illustrated by the example Davey related. There is an affective exchange that allows what is felt in the hearts of the singers to be felt by the hearts of the listeners/receivers. Brennan further describes it this way: "the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The atmosphere or the environment literally gets into the individual." (Brennan, 2004, p.1) There is another way of explaining this kind of affective exchange in gospel music. It is a concept shared by many evangelical Christians. The concept is the anointing of the Holy Spirit

of God. In an article for Dove Ministries, Bill Subritzky (n.d.) describes the concept this way: "It is knowing the supernatural presence of God upon us, being aware of His presence with us. A physical experience where we feel the warm presence and glow of God upon our body." (Subritzky, n.d., para. 1) In another article about the anointing, this one focused particularly on singers, Ann McCraw (1998) states: "If they minister in true, Spirit-born ministry, then that which comes forth from their life will amaze those who hear it." (McCraw, 1998, para. 2) McCraw goes on to share: "The Lord is raising up singers and pouring upon them a fresh anointing...He is calling forth chief musicians who will follow His Spirit and do His bidding..." (McCraw, 1998, para. 7) In yet another article about the anointing of the Holy Spirit of God, T. Tillman (2010) describes it as much desired and needed by gospel singers "to allow God to meet the needs of his or her audience through the talent He has given. It sets the music of a Godly singer apart from all others." (Tillman, 2010, para. 1)

This affective exchange, this sharing of the anointing of God's Spirit is something talked about and experienced by many gospel singers. In a National Public Radio (NPR) music program, host Michelle Norris (2004) commented on noted gospel great, Mahalia Jackson: "What Jackson was apparently able to do better than virtually all singers before or after her, according to numerous eyewitness accounts, was take listeners to a place where they could feel the "touch" of the Holy Spirit...Transcending emotion, this spiritual 'anointing' is upheld as the pinnacle of human experience." (Norris, 2004, para. 5) Willie Mae Ford-Smith was another one of the early gospel soloists and like Mahalia Jackson, she served as one of Thomas Dorsey's model singers, helping him acquaint soloists and choirs with his brand of sacred music which he called gospel music. Ford-Smith was featured, along with Dorsey, as one of the founders of the

genre in a 1982 documentary on black American gospel music called *Say Amen Somebody*. In the film, Ford-Smith describes singing under the anointing. She says:

It's just a feeling within. You can't help yourself. I don't know. It goes between the marrow and the bone. Just makes you feel like you could – You heard me say I want to fly away somewhere? I feel like I could fly away. I forget I'm in the world sometimes. I wanna take off...I feel like I have something down inside of me that helps the people; the distressed and the downhearted and the people who feel like nobody cares. And in my song I try my best to lift the hearts of people... When the Spirit anoints that voice, that's what the world don't understand about gospel singing. It's a different singing...If you are going to sing gospel you must let it be a spell you cast on the people... (Nierenberg, 1982)

Ford-Smith makes reference to how difficult it is to explain to people not familiar with the concept of the anointing what a difference it makes in the presentation of gospel music.

The Clark Sisters are legendary, award winning gospel recording artists, who have been performing for over four decades. Their mother, Mattie Moss Clark, was an inspiration and mentor to many gospel singers and their cousins J. Moss and Bill Moss are successful gospel recording artists in their own rights. Two of the sisters, Jacky Clark-Chisholm and Dorinda Clark-Cole were interviewed on an NPR program and made comments about the anointing that highlights how the Holy Spirit works through the singer to deliver a message as well as touches the listener to receive the message.

I'm talking about that sacred moment - that moment where the power of the anointing comes upon the people and - as well as upon us. And I think that's what really makes the Clark Sisters so unique, not so much that we have great

voices, but I think that once the anointing is on us – and see, when you sing until the anointing comes in, you know that something is taking place. You know that you feel the presence of the Lord. (Lyden, 2009, para. 19)

In this passage, the Clark Sisters describe how the Spirit not only anoints the singers to deliver the music in such a way that it comes from the heart of God through their hearts, but also that the Spirit touches the hearts of the people to be able to receive it. In that same interview they go on to describe how the Spirit is able to use these experiences to meet the needs of the people, much the way Willie Mae Ford-Smith described the Spirit working through her songs to help the people. The Clark Sisters describe it this way:

There's a Scripture says that the anointing destroys the yoke. And so when you think about that, you think about, you know, something that may have, something that's on you or something that you're going through. And when you allow the anointing to affect your life or to really bless you at that moment, sometimes God will remove those things and take you out of those situations and give you relief from those things. (Lynden, 2009, para. 20)

This supernatural working of the Spirit upon both the deliverer and receiver; the singer and the listener, I believe, helps to create an authentic experience for both and may be the only thing that can temporarily suspend thoughts or concerns about the race of either the singers or the audience in the delivery and reception of gospel music.

The importance of the anointing is underscored by comments made by one ONU Gospel Ensemble alumni member who recalled times when Ensemble participants were not particularly on one accord and the result was less than authentic and not particularly effective.

I felt like sometimes at Gospel Ensemble we were just playing church, but not

always...Some years were excellent and other years it was like, wow...but the thing is, everybody was sincere... but then the great thing about the Gospel Ensemble is that the Holy Ghost can take over and so He made the difference and those were the best concerts when there was an actual spiritual experience. And that usually happened when a lot of the people that were singing were spiritual. (Confidential personal communication, July 21, 2013)

This important distinction between “performing” gospel music with the anointing and “performing” the music without the anointing reminds me of Hochschild’s notions of surface acting and deep acting. Singing without the anointing could be equated with the performance of affective labor by behavioral compliance without internalizing the feeling one is attempting to display. Hochschild talks about the response of emotional laborers desiring to move from surface acting, where their feelings do not match what they are displaying, to deep acting where they “try to pull the two closer together either by changing what they feel or by changing what they feign.” (Brook, 2009, p.12) This “deep acting” in gospel music could be seeking the anointing of the Holy Spirit, so that there is no emotive dissonance and what is sung matches what is felt. In this way the transmission of the desired affect is effectively made with the congregation and successful ministry is accomplished.

Whether or not people understand the work of the Holy Spirit or the transmission of affect they do recognize and acknowledge being drawn to and affected by gospel music. I have focused on American worship scenarios, but this is not an exclusively American experience. There was an NPR story about the popularity of gospel music in France. The correspondent described the atmosphere of a worship service in France:

The audience here is mostly white, middle class and beaming. At first people

timidly swayed in rhythm and then they joined in to clap and then you couldn't spot a single Parisian scowl. Outside the church at intermission comments from two members of the audience suggest that gospel, music at least, is winning converts." (Spicer, 2004, para. 5)

One of the participants was interviewed and had these comments to share: "What astonishes me is that I'm completely atheist. This is the only thing that will get me into a church, but then when you hear the choirs' joy and its' enthusiasm it just fills you with sunshine." (Spicer, 2004, para. 6) This atheist observer describes an emotional experience that is almost physiological. He does not simply say the music made him happy. He describes being able to hear joy and enthusiasm in the choir's singing and being filled with "sunshine" as a result of that joy and enthusiasm spilling over onto him. Brennan speaks about this kind of affect transmission. She shares: "... these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment." (Brennan, 2004, p. 3) This description allows for the inclusion of the observer/listener as a participant. Gospel music, perhaps even more so than other forms, is an audience participatory kind of music. The gospel singer intends to have the audience take an active part in the performance of the music. It is common for the choir director, soloist or praise and worship leader to encourage the audience to be active rather than passive. Participating makes the experience more effective for the listener.

Although his research did not involve gospel music, Alf Gabrielsson studied the physical reactions experienced by those who listened to and enjoyed music. He described such responses as: "thrills, shivers, and changes in heart rate...commonly associated with strong emotional arousal." (Juslin and Sloboda, 2001, p. 433) One of his research subjects described her experience:

I was filled by a feeling that the music started to take command of my body. I was charged in some way...I was filled by an enormous warmth and heat...I was dancing, whirling, giving myself up to the music and the rhythms, overjoyed, laughing. Tears came into my eyes – however strange it may seem – and it was as a kind of liberation...Afterwards I was standing there intoxicated with joy.

(Juslin and Sloboda, 2001, p. 7)

I have witnessed similar reactions from listeners and participants in gospel music both in church and in concert halls. In secular settings it might simply be considered the transmission of positive affect. In worship settings, including gospel concerts, these reactions are attributed to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Universal and the Individual

The power and presence of the Holy Spirit can bring unity to a multiethnic, multiracial group of people. Does that unity negate the cultural variety and preferences of the individuals? In his research Gerardo Marti interviewed worship leaders, pastors and congregants who acknowledged the importance of worship for bringing people together in unity. They also acknowledged that no universal worship music exists that will help to accomplish and sustain that unity. Marti explored a theory he called the Musical Buffet Theory, which seems to stand in opposition to the universal, or at least to the one size fits all approach to worship and worship music. (Marti, 2012, p. 34) Creating a musical buffet for worship involves acknowledging that worshippers from various backgrounds bring with them cultural expectations. Much like the comments I received in my interviews and surveys, many of the congregation members Marti interviewed thought of music as being a universal language and negated the consideration of race or cultural preferences. The worship leaders and those responsible for producing the worship

music week after week, however, realized musical styles and preferences were not universal and the musical buffet approach was an attempt to include music within the worship experience that appealed to the various groups, so that distinct and varied musical styles were a part of each service. Marti likened this to the difference between having a served meal with limited choices or being able to make your dinner selections from a full buffet. (Marti, 2012, p. 34) This was a way of acknowledging the individual cultures that came together to create diversity. This recognizing of individual cultures within the diversity is where many multicultural efforts are challenged. The focus on unity consumes the appreciation for the individual. Without the intentionality of making room for individual cultural imperatives the community defaults to the universal approach which favors majority cultural preferences. Those who are not of the majority culture must then make a choice to either assimilate or vacate.

The creating and maintaining of integrated worship experiences is not easily achieved, as demonstrated by the decades of struggle toward this goal since Dr. King made his statement assessing the situation nearly fifty years ago. Marti and those who were part of his research, however, are adamant about the importance of continuing efforts in this area. Marti quotes Rob Redman, a writer on contemporary worship, who states: “Worship creates community and outreach and not the other way around; it is the core ministry of the church out of which all others flow.” (Marti, 2012, p. 44) Redman feels strongly that corporate worship is the way for the church to achieve the kind of unity Dr. King suggested was essential. This kind of unity will alter the way community is built and maintained flowing beyond the walls of the church. Many acknowledge that only by the power of God will this potential be realized. According to Redman, “[w]ithout a compelling awareness in worship of the presence of the God who draws all nations to himself, there is not enough motivation in a religious philosophy of multiculturalism

to form a lasting and meaningful multiethnic Christian community.” (Marti, 2012, p. 44) Other worship leaders, who contributed to Marti’s study, advocate for expanding the musical buffet to take on a more global focus as a way of even further recognizing that the body of Christ is one, yet has many parts. (Marti, 2012, p. 45)

One of the challenges with building a multicultural experience within any church is gathering people of different backgrounds and bringing them together. Small towns tend to be fairly homogeneous and cities tend toward segregated neighborhoods. People rarely step outside their comfort zones and voluntarily seek out opportunities to have more diverse experiences. On a college campus, even one where the campus population is not very ethnically or racially diverse, there are potentially more opportunities to bring people together and to convince them to “experiment” or risk a bit of discomfort in order to experience something that might enrich their lives. Ohio Northern has been able to encourage some of this kind of experimentation. This is not to say that the religious life program does not encounter some of the same kinds of challenges faced by the local church. For example, fewer of the overall campus population seems interested in regular attendance at a weekly service, so the Chaplain, like any local pastor has to lend time and attention to attracting congregation members. When it comes to attracting diversity, however, one of the advantages of a campus is that students can create and maintain groups that appeal to a wide range of interests. With the ONU outreach teams and other religious life organizations there is the potential for multiethnic, multicultural and even interfaith experiences. The Gospel Ensemble has played a role in realizing some of that potential on campus. They have also been an avenue for cultural exchange, experimentation and development for many homogeneous church congregations over the years of the Ensemble’s existence.

In this chapter the focus has been on the challenges and successes of multiethnic or multiracial worship. I explored how authenticity was viewed, perceived and perhaps achieved in multicultural environments. In the next and final chapter I will continue the discussion of authenticity and race incorporating comparisons between the Café of the Gate of Salvation Gospel Choir and the ONU Gospel Ensemble. I will also examine the other themes that emerged from my research.

CHAPTER 6.

AUTHENTICITY

When I embarked upon this task one of the stories that confirmed for me that my project was worthy of study was that of E. Patrick Johnson and the Café of the Gate of Salvation Gospel Choir. In his book, *Appropriating Blackness*, Johnson (2003) writes about his experiences with an all-white, mostly atheist, group of Australians who sing gospel music. The description of this group seems inconsistent with what is expected when one hears the words gospel choir, yet that is what the group considers themselves to be. While it also seems unlikely that I could find affirmation for my project by reading about a group of professed atheists from another country singing Black gospel music, I found much in their journey that was familiar to me. I discovered I could identify with many of Johnson's experiences and I could relate to the sentiments of the choir participants. Their attraction to gospel music, as described by individuals in the group, derives from the universality of the struggle for freedom from oppression which is at the roots of the music. Within their story were themes that emerged in my research and were central to my project, such as authenticity, spiritual transformation, emotional fulfillment, and community. Johnson's intersectional perspective as a gay, African American, Christian man in Australia working with a White atheist choir also has application to my experience and my project. In this final chapter, I will spend time discussing the themes that emerged from the data collected throughout the course of this project and drawing conclusions where applicable.

Authenticity in Sound

A major theme for this study and for the work E. Patrick Johnson (2003) did in his project is authenticity. The definition many in my study gave for authenticity had to do with the heart-felt sincerity of the person sharing the music and with the Biblical connection of the music to the gospel message. The definition in Johnson's study included a comparison to Black gospel

choirs as a marker of authenticity. In the “Sounds of Blackness Down Under” chapter of his book, Johnson discusses how he came to be associated with an all-White, mostly atheist, Australian gospel choir. His introduction to the choir came through a former classmate of Johnson’s who immigrated to Australia and in search of gospel music stumbled upon The Café of the Gate of Salvation. After listening to recordings of the choir sent to Johnson by his friend, Johnson applied for and received a grant to travel to Australia to do research on the choir. Johnson made several trips to Australia eventually conducting gospel music workshops and becoming somewhat of a celebrity there appearing often in the media and making numerous personal appearances across the country.

Johnson approached his first meeting with the choir with a healthy dose of skepticism. He wrote about that cynicism: “Although I had listened to the choir’s recording and was amazed by the power of their voices,...I was still dubious about the effectiveness of this choir.” (Johnson, 2003, p. 162) During the first choir rehearsal Johnson attended he was initially impressed with the choir’s sound. The choir sang a song that was familiar to Johnson and he remarked that if he closed his eyes he could be transported back to the church of his childhood. After subsequent encounters and upon further reflection, however, he expressed somewhat different sentiments.

Although I thought they had a great sound and, to some extent had mastered the gospel idiom, I nevertheless felt that something was missing ...I was waiting to hear an ‘authentic’ voice in their music. Because I did not hear this ‘authentic’ sound, I did not fully appreciate the Café’s music – or should I say, I did not allow myself to appreciate it fully. My initial response was one of admiration coupled with skepticism. I admitted the choir’s performance as an approximation,

yet I dismissed it as definitely not the ‘real’ thing.” (Johnson, 2003, p. 163)

This notion of the “real thing” is one that would continue to haunt Johnson as he interacted not only with the Café choir, but with other citizens of Australia. He would do numerous television and radio interviews, conduct multiple gospel music workshops and participate in many performances and in the process of these activities he would be cast in the role of gospel music expert and authenticator of the “real thing.” He actually lamented at one point that the label of gospel expert was given to him not because of his level of education or even his newfound status as a celebrity, but simply because of the color of his skin. In fact, at one point he noted that the only African American woman to ever take part in the Café Choir was assumed to be an authentic gospel singer, as well, because of her skin color. Australians credited her natural talent to her upbringing in the church and her long experience with gospel music. The reality was that this woman had been raised in the Catholic Church and never sang gospel music until she connected with the Café Choir.

Like E. Patrick Johnson, at times I felt I was being cast in the role of authenticator of the “real thing.” My role was somewhat different than Johnson’s, however, since in the United States there is no shortage of people who know what “real” gospel music is supposed to sound like. In Australia both the singers and the listeners looked to Johnson to pass judgment on what was being performed by the Café Choir and to label it an authentic or inauthentic sound. In the case of the Gospel Ensemble many audiences and participants already had their own ideas about how authentic the sound of the Gospel Ensemble was or was not. They looked to me to lend authenticity to the overall sound of the group by adding my voice to the mix. Like Johnson, the color of my skin and perhaps in my case my gender and physical appearance seemed to factor in quite often. Whether consciously or subconsciously the image of Mahalia Jackson or other black

female gospel singers comes to mind when many think of gospel music. The expectation, even before I opened my mouth many times, was that I would be a great gospel singer because I fit the phenotypical description. When the group was made up of nearly all White students, my presence insured that there would be a connection to the roots of the music. When the Ensemble was few in number, had no instrumental accompaniment or had a shortage of students willing to sing solos, my improvisational embellishments or a cappella solo selections would help round out the program and seemed to be read as authentic to the members of the Ensemble and the congregations. The interesting thing for me was that this was not a role I was accustomed to playing prior to working with the Ensemble. In the predominately Black settings in which I had grown up, my church, my schools, I had always been a member of the choir rather than leader or soloist. In this new environment, by virtue of my race, my gender, my background and perhaps my willingness I had stepped into a new role. It has been said that necessity is the mother of invention and perhaps this was an example. Put another way, in the Old Testament of the Bible in the sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah the eighth verse says: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (New International Version) This became part of my "reasonable service" to God and to this community. It was a faith walk; an adventure.

As I have already discussed in previous chapters, when the ONU Gospel Ensemble began to enjoy a demographic shift from all African American to a group where the majority of the singers were White, questions of authenticity began to be raised by others to me and by me to myself. African American students, both those who were participants and those who were not, questioned whether the group could still call the music it performed gospel. (Although I must admit some of the reservations on the part of Black students seemed more connected to the lack

of instrumental accompaniment than to the racial mix of the group.) Guest musicians and directors expressed concern over the effectiveness of the sound. Even I began to have reservations about whether I was doing a disservice to the tradition and the music by opening up this experience to students who were not Black. Had I embarked upon this study during those early years when the shift was first beginning or even during the middle years when it became apparent this was not just a passing fad, I believe the data would be slightly different than what I collected recently. I recall past conversations with individuals whose comments were different now as I interviewed them, than they were in the past. I realize being formally interviewed and going on record can cause one to censor or edit thoughts and statements so as not to appear in a negative light, but for the most part I believe participants shared genuine thoughts and feelings. I attribute part of the change in opinion to having had years, even decades to live with this new reality. What may have been alarming or jarringly different twenty years ago may seem more common place now. That has been my personal experience. While initially I was concerned that the influx of white students might alter the effectiveness of the experience I now realize it has, and I now recognize that as beneficial in many ways. I also believe with the passing of time we have seen a change in the racial climate in American society and on campus and this has contributed to the tempering of some of the opinions I remember being voiced years ago about the changing racial dynamic within the Ensemble. In the introductory chapter I quoted Horace Boyer who spoke about the college gospel choir being the one visible sign that there were Black students on predominately white campuses. He said the Black students were not participating in the other campus organizations, groups or ensembles, but felt a connection to the gospel choir as a means of expression. (Jackson, 2004, p. 134) Since I did not do a survey of gospel choirs on other predominately White campuses, I cannot speak to whether Boyer's observations are still

true country-wide. At Ohio Northern University, however, I have observed slight changes. We do have Black students participating in choral and instrumental groups on campus. We have Black students involved in the student government and on the residence life staff. The number of participants is small, even relative to the small percentage of African American students at the institution, but there is participation. At the same time involvement in the Black student Union (BSU) has declined. The number of Black students on campus is larger than it was twenty-six years ago, but the number that regularly attend BSU meetings or take part in their planned activities is smaller. Speculating on why this might be, I have a couple of thoughts. One observation is that in recent years the football team has aggressively recruited African American players from Florida and California. Those recruits account for a large percentage of the Black student population, yet they are generally not involved in any other campus clubs or organizations besides the football team. During the 2010 and 2011 academic years we had a football player from Florida join and participate in the Gospel Ensemble. He was the exception and had to work exceptionally hard to maintain membership in both groups. Another observation is that overall student apathy towards opportunities for involvement on campus has increased. The student government has struggled for several years to fill positions so that every residence hall and academic area would be fully represented. There were also more years than not during the last decade when the race for president and vice president of the student government was uncontested. Perhaps this tells us that student participation and interest in traditional activities is down in general at ONU and that the Black population is just mirroring the overall. Definitive answers to why fewer Black students are participating in both the BSU and the Gospel Ensemble are recommended topics for future study. Suffice it to say the Gospel Ensemble at ONU is not, as Boyer expressed, the one visible sign of Black students on campus,

or their only means of expression. Additionally, while one might expect to hear comments about the lack of authenticity of the poorly attended BSU or the mostly White Gospel Ensemble I am not aware of such comments about either.

In the early days of the Ensemble all of the music was performed a cappella, with the exception of very special occasions when there were guest musicians to accompany the group. The choice to sing a cappella served two purposes, it harkened back to the roots of the musical form and therefore produced a feeling of authenticity (at least for me) and it was a necessity because there was neither budget to employ a permanent accompanist nor the ongoing availability of someone with that particular skill set. Judy Backhouse, wife of Tony Backhouse, the founder of the Café of the Gate of Salvation Gospel Choir (also referred to as the Café Choir) spoke at some length about her preference for a cappella music as opposed to singing with musical accompaniment. After his conversations with Judy about this, Johnson wrote:

Judy's focus is on the tension between what is perceived as 'real' and what is viewed as 'performance.' In Judy's eyes the musical accompaniment and technique of gospel choir performance bespeaks 'theatricality' as opposed to the intimacy created by the a cappella quartet sound – an intimacy that lures the audience in, close enough to see the 'sweat on everybody's faces.' The implication here is that a cappella music is pure because of its simplicity, understated sound, and lack of accompaniment; the focus is solely on the voice and the body of the performer.”

(Johnson, 2003, p. 193)

There were comments from one of the survey respondents at the ONU Gospel Ensemble's spring concert where similar observations were made about the preference for less instrumentation and more focus on the voices. The partiality for a focus on the voice expressed by that audience

member and Judy Backhouse reflects a desire for the simplistic in a genre of music that can present as complex and multi-layered.

The Café Choir still preferences a cappella music. The Gospel Ensemble sings most songs with musical accompaniment these days. Over the past few years there have been students enrolled who have the skill and experience to provide musical accompaniment. Both the student participants and the congregations for whom we perform really respond to the accompaniment and it must be said that a skilled keyboard player can provide a sound and create a mood that is a short cut to reading a song as “authentically” gospel. I always insist, however, that we keep several a cappella selections in the Gospel Ensemble repertoire. For me it is as much about keeping that historical connection to the tradition as it is about attempting to create an authentic sound and experience.

Authenticity in Performance

In Judy Backhouse’s comments on her preference for a cappella music, she made reference to gospel choir performances having an air of “theatricality.” Obery Hendricks (2011) makes similar comments in his comparisons of gospel music to spirituals. In his chapter on gospel music he has a section called the “Advent of ‘Clowning’ ” where he describes a shift from what had been the dignified comportment of gospel singers to “trickery” which involved “actions or phrasings undertaken primarily for their entertainment value.” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 30) Hendricks ties clowning and trickery to the widely accepted goal of gospel music to move audiences to “heights of emotional pandemonium.” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 30) This he sees as the beginning of separation between audience and performer in gospel music, relegating those who were not in the singing group to mere spectator status, rather than co-performer as they had been with spirituals and early gospel music. I see connections between these comments and

observations made by Gospel Ensemble members who talked about the performance of gospel music in two ways. In my interviews with alumni Ensemble members, two of the settings involved small groups rather than one on one interviews. In one of those groups they made reference to the lack of “praise breaks” where someone on an organ spontaneously plays music and people dance in the Spirit. This is a regular practice at many Black churches and some of the students have become accustomed to it and noted its conspicuous absence in the campus setting. Since Gospel Ensemble rarely had organ accompaniment or participated in services where “praise breaks” were the norm, alumni members noted this being a missing element. This component can be directly linked to the “emotional pandemonium” Hendricks referenced and the theatricality mentioned by Judy Backhouse, yet for many church going African American people this is an integral part of their worship experience. I have witnessed this and it is a part of my current church going experience, but was not part of the experiences I had growing up in the church my family attended throughout my childhood and adolescent years. There the atmosphere was much more reserved and akin to the “dignified comportment” with which Hendricks equates early gospel music.

The other associated reference was in the discussion about a difference in sound between the ONU Gospel Ensemble and some of the Black church choirs or school choir the students had heard. In our interview discussion they talked about Black church choirs having auditions to insure that those who participate have an ear for music, can sing on key and harmonize. In their opinion this insured a certain level of performance for the choir. They compared this to Gospel Ensemble where people are allowed to become members without auditioning. While they were very positive about the inclusivity this practice encouraged, they wanted to acknowledge that the level of skill within the Ensemble suffered at times and that this may have impacted the kinds of

songs the group was able to perform. In many ways, the introduction of praise and worship songs, as discussed in chapter four, intersects with this conversation. In the Neto article we read:

Since the Praise and Worship style is characterized by congregational songs, the singers usually possess common, ordinary voices, not too distant from the untrained person. As opposed to Gospel singers, Praise and Worship artists usually do not possess extreme or potent voices. The songs in general have a limited range, rarely going beyond one and a half octaves, and do not require virtuosity or agility. The Praise and Worship style does not make large use of ornamentation or improvisation.” (Neto, 2010, p. 196)

It has been acknowledged by numerous gospel music practitioners, several referenced in this study, that African Americans tend to embellish and augment this music just as they have made a practice of adapting musical genres to fit. That having been stated, the adoption of praise and worship music by the gospel music community as a whole may be a reflection of the desire for the masses to have access rather than just the talented few who are cast as performers being selected to sing in the choir. While I have struggled with what to include and exclude from the repertoire of the Ensemble over the years in an effort to be true to the roots and purpose of the group, I find the lines are not so strictly and clearly drawn anymore. The adoption of praise and worship music by the ONU Ensemble can be seen as further support for encouraging a ‘who so ever will’ approach with membership allowing all to sing and selecting music that allows them to participate. And perhaps the augmentation of the material to fit with African American tradition performs the function of keeping the group connected to its roots.

The Gospel of Transformation

Another theme in the Johnson project that emerged as a theme in my work is that of spiritual or transformational experiences. E. Patrick Johnson discusses dialogic performance and

the performance of possibilities, which he applies to experiences with the Café Choir and I believe are appropriate for consideration with the ONU Gospel Ensemble, as well. According to Johnson, three subject positions comprise dialogic performance: the audience, the performers, and the subjects being performed. Dwight Conquergood's theory is that dialogic performance allows a performer to "know himself or herself by performing the Other." (Johnson, 2003, p. 208) This is exactly what the members of the Café Choir said was their experience with gospel music. D. Soyini Madison theorizes that:

In the meeting between self and Other in performance, the performer... "is transported slowly, deliberately, and incrementally, at each rehearsal and at each encounter toward knowledges and life-world of the Subject," and thus "creatively and intellectually taking it all in internalizing and receiving partial 'maps of meaning' that reflect the subjects'" consciousness and context. (Johnson, 2003, p. 209)

Madison adds that if the performer "is 'taking it all in' he or she cannot help but be transformed." (Johnson, 2003, p. 209) Johnson goes on to relate three scenarios involving Australian's encounters with singing gospel music, which bear out the theories of Conquergood and Madison by showing how the performer is transported and transformed.

In one scenario an elderly Australian woman had been greatly discouraged from singing in her youth and though she had a passion for music the harsh criticism she received as a young girl by her teacher kept her from singing for decades. She was so inspired by the gospel music that Johnson shared that she began to sing again and found her voice. She began by copying the sounds she heard and as her body responded she found her own voice. Johnson says: "When Judith placed those sights, sounds, and rhythms in her body, her body responded in ways that empowered her to find her own voice by singing with and through Others' voices. Her

‘transformation’ was emotional, psychological and physical...Her ‘broken’ voice was ‘healed’ through the ‘miracle’ and power of gospel.” (Johnson, 2003, p. 210)

A second scenario relates how Judy Backhouse witnessed the transformation of her voice in a public performance. Though a professed atheist, Judy was in a church in New Orleans and was called upon by the song leader to come forward and sing a solo. She was mortified and declared that she was not a soloist. She protested and refused to go forward, yet in the end felt compelled to. Against her better judgment and for reasons even she could not explain she began to sing “Precious Lord,” an old gospel hymn written by a man known as the father of gospel music, Thomas Dorsey. As she began to sing, according to Judy, she sounded like someone on their death-bed gasping for breath, but as the congregation and the song leader encouraged her she became bold and by the end of the song she was really singing. Judy commented on the experience: “I was singing it and I just thought what it gives the performer, just makes you feel like you’re in Heaven.” (Johnson, 2003, p. 211) Johnson stated: “Clearly, Judy was transformed by this experience...The encouragement of the audience whose art and cultural history was being performed helped Judy to ‘travel’ into their world and, thus, provided her with a sense of belonging such that ‘by the end of the song, [she] was singing it, instead of just gasping it and panting it.’ “ (Johnson, 2003, pp. 211 - 212)

Both these scenarios paint dramatic pictures of transformational moments. There have been experiences where students who never considered themselves singers gained the confidence or felt secure enough within the safety of the Gospel Ensemble to lead the group in song. I dare say those moments were not as intense or vivid as the situations described by Johnson. They were transformational, all the same, as the students realized what had been, up until that time,

unrealized potential and in many instances Black audiences affirmed and embraced White soloists singing songs that were staples within the Black gospel community.

According to Madison's theories on the performance of possibilities the above examples are key because they demonstrate that: subjects are "made and makers of meaning, symbol, and history in their fullest sensory and social dimensions." (Johnson, 2003, p. 212) They also show how important it is for our existence to be acknowledged in the eyes of others. Madison cautions, however, that "there must be a move 'beyond the acknowledgement of voice within experience to that of actual engagement.' " (Johnson, 2003, p. 213) Madison says "Performers and their audiences must engage the Others' political, social, and cultural landscape, contextually constituted subjectivities within contested spaces." (Johnson, 2003, p. 213) According to Madison and Johnson "In the performance of possibilities, when this sharing of two worlds occurs both the subjects and performer benefit..." (Johnson, 2003, p. 213) This is illustrated by the third and final scenario Johnsons shares. This one involves the Café Choir on their tour of Black churches in America. Johnson attended a performance by the group at a small, storefront church in New York City on Easter Sunday evening. Johnson was curious as to how the choir would be received by the congregation and how the choir would react to whatever reception they received. No paraphrased version could do justice to Johnson's own account of this performance.

The congregation appreciated the first few numbers, but I had a sense that the choir was not really reaching them. They clapped along in affectionate tolerance (the ways parents encourage their children's bad piano concerts or dance recitals). Then something broke. The basses set an upbeat tempo, their heads bobbing in time and their faces lighting up. The tenors, altos, and sopranos joined the basses in harmony

and rhythm. Soloist Tracey Greenberg stepped up to the microphone and launched into “You Brought the Sunshine,” a song by the Clark Sisters of Detroit that was popular in the early 1980s. The church pianist began to play, and there was uproar as the congregants rose to their feet and began to sing along...The choir beamed as the congregation’s enthusiasm intensified in shouts of “Hallelujah!” and “Saaaaaannnnng choir,” syncopated by clapping hands, rocking bodies, and stomping feet that shook the church’s creaky, wooden floorboards. At that moment, as the melodious voices lifted in the air, the Baptist House of Prayer fell under the spell of the spirit that moved the foundation of the church. (Johnson 215)

This experience hearkens back to the discussion about affect and the power of the Holy Spirit in chapter five. The dynamic of a mostly White, mostly atheist choir singing gospel in an African American church is full of incongruous images. Though atheist members of the choir might attribute the effectiveness of the choir’s performance and the reception of it by the audience to sheer emotion, Johnson is clear that it is the Spirit that moved through the church. He states the following as he describes the transformational nature of the performance of the group in New York:

During the proceeding dialogic performance, and specifically within the performance of possibilities, performer, subject and audience are transformed. Each comes away from the performance changed. They traverse the world of the Other, glimpse its landscape, and this “sighting” leaves a lasting imprint on the consciousness of all who experience this symbolic journey. Indeed, in Madison’s words, they enter “albeit symbolically and temporarily, in [the Others’] locations of voice within experience”. The performance...of it

demonstrated their commitment to, investment in, and reverence for gospel music. The choir's performance competence initiated genuine dialogue in that contested space where identities and subjectivities conjoin, converse, commune, and contrast. According to Madison, "performance becomes the vehicle by which we travel to the worlds of Subjects and enter domains of intersubjectivity that problematize how we categorize who is 'us' and who is 'them' and how we see ourselves with 'other' and different eyes." (Johnson, 2003, p. 215)

The experience Johnson and Madison describe allows choir participants to get a glimpse into the world of the "other" and thus gain a new perspective of themselves. This is the kind of experience spiritual leaders desire for their congregations. It is the kind of experience in which Gospel Ensemble engages on a regular basis in their encounters with various congregations. As I look back over the years I see a continuity in experience despite changing variables. There has been and continues to be involvement of the Spirit which helps bring about a transformational experience for Ensemble members and congregation members as the Ensemble travels from church to church. When the Ensemble was all African American and traveling to White churches the transformational moment was sometimes reflected in the opened eyes of congregation members to the humanity of people with whom they found more similarities than they might ever have guessed would be the case. As more White students joined the group the area of transformation shifted slightly to focus on how Black students and White students and in many cases international students could all come together and share this gospel experience. Congregation members seemed to see this as a sign that there was hope for the kind of unity in the world we sing about on Sunday mornings in our separate church services. As the group

became mostly White there was an initial expression of surprise at the racial make-up of the group, yet a sense of comfort in relating to the group as a whole. The transformational moments seem tied to the permission given by the racial composition of the group for this White congregation to take part in this African American tradition to worship God freely with clapping of hands and patting of feet and singing full voiced along with the Ensemble. Congregation members at nearly every church the Ensemble visits comment on how much they enjoyed this new and different experience. At every church someone jokes that the Ensemble should come back the following Sunday and subsequent Sundays to lead their church in the kind of joyous and energetic worship they enjoyed with us on that day. This point ties directly to another theme that emerged in this study, which is the joyous feeling people get from participating in the singing of gospel music. Both the members of the Café Choir and the participants in the Gospel Ensemble describe a level of emotional fulfillment that attracts them to the experience.

The Joy of Gospel Music

Part of Johnson's research in Australia involved determining why members of the Café Choir, despite their lack of Christianity, chose to sing gospel music. He received a variety of answers, which included the following thoughts.

Many sing the music simply because of the way it makes them feel: happy and joyous. Choir member after choir member expressed to me how "uplifting" and "moving" the music is to them...Similar to the way black Americans use gospel music to lay down their burdens, members of the choir use the music as a vehicle of self-expression and psychological release." (Johnson, 2003, p. 179)

And in addition to these thoughts, Johnson shared that most of the members talked about the centrality of the music to Black American history saying that "...the joy and sharing that goes

on, is universal, even though it comes from those [slave] roots. A lot of the songs are a metaphor for the freedom that people are longing for from the oppression that they find themselves in...”

(Johnson 2003, p. 180) Johnson sums up the sentiments of the Café members with this statement: “A common thread that seems to run through these statements is that gospel is a universal language that transcends difference in order to help others overcome their own ‘personal dramas’ and adversity.” (Johnson, 2003, pp. 180-181)

Members of the Gospel Ensemble and members of the congregations who have shared their ministry made comments similar to those shared by E. Patrick Johnson and members of the Café Choir. As spectators prior to joining the Ensemble many of the members noted that they were drawn in by the joy in the music. Once they became participants they described the music, much like some of the Café Choir members, as moving and uplifting. Since this was the first gospel choir experience many of them have had they also described it as different from any past experience. Many of the Gospel Ensemble members expressed the pleasure they received from being able to express the joy of their faith in such an unrestricted way. While the atheists in the Café choir were clearly not expressing the joy of their faith, that sentiment does line up with an observation made to E. Patrick Johnson by one of the Australians he interviewed who stated: “Probably everybody who was raised as Christian in Australia has been thirsting for a more joyful way to celebrate [his or her] religion and spirituality.” (Johnson, 2003, p. 174)

Café Choir founder, Tony Backhouse, noted that singing this kind of music in this way allowed Australians to express parts of themselves they might not otherwise have an opportunity to express. Johnson quotes Backhouse statement:

Everyone wants to sing. Singing with others in harmony is a total joy. But, in our society, it seems that only a person who has been singled out early as having

some special talent, and who has gone through a certain kind of musical training, is encouraged to call themselves a “singer.” Singing is sometimes construed as “unmanly” or “frivolous” and as we become older we become conditioned to be seen and not heard. We stop making the spontaneous, joyful noises we creatively and unselfconsciously made as children. So we are no longer comfortable singing – because only the real singers are allowed to sing. This is a real shame.”

(Johnson, 2003, p. 179)

As already discussed, the approach to recruiting members to the Gospel Ensemble has been to eliminate barriers, such as auditions, so that people don’t feel they need to be accomplished soloists in order to participate. While it is not clear whether or not members of the Café Choir need to audition, it does seem the founder has a similar attitude about welcoming those who have a desire to sing. For members of the Café Choir and the Gospel Ensemble, engaging in the singing of this music gives them an opportunity to bring joy to others as they experience joy themselves.

Community / Family Building

The theme of community or family was touched upon in both the Café Choir experience and the Gospel Ensemble. There is something about the atmosphere created in a gospel choir that makes it conducive to connecting with people you might otherwise never have embraced. This point can be further illustrated by looking at the example of the Café Choir. Although they do not profess to have the Christian beliefs and connections that would be assumed with a gospel choir they admittedly practice many of the tenets and by extension, I believe, display some of the characteristics. Judy Backhouse described how the family like atmosphere flourished with the Café Choir: “Everybody’s birthday was celebrated with a cake, anyone [who] needed money got

money from the choir, we gave all the money away. It had a wonderful warm heart, ...”

(Johnson, 2013, p. 177) Another choir member added:

[T]he sense of family and community remains to this day: ‘Look, it’s my community. We’ve all had children together. We all started [it] together. We were twenty-something then, now we’re thirty-something. It’s evolved into ...a lifestyle as much as it’s a family and a community. And sometimes you hate them and sometimes you love them. And you have fallings out with some people; you adore others. We’ve had some incredibly ecstatic, joyful moments. Ten years. It’s a part of me.’

(Johnson, 2013, p. 177)

Although the Gospel Ensemble participants are part of the group for a much shorter time than the Café Choir members, they are alumni members for life and there is a similarity to the Café Choir in the way they describe their experiences. Having been in existence for over twenty years there have been several opportunities for reunion events. On the occasion of the 10th, 15th, 20th and 25th anniversary years, alumni of the Ensemble were invited back to campus to take part in weekend workshops which culminated in concerts and recordings. During those occasions members shared memories of their years in the group, recalled connections with other former members that have been sustained even after their campus years, brought children and spouses to share in the experience and made connections with current members of the Ensemble. It is truly a community, a family with a common shared experience even if it was not shared simultaneously.

During the process of interviewing alumni members, the conversation would often turn to what the overall experience meant to those who participated. As they reflected on their time in

the Ensemble and at reunion events many of the experiences they recalled spoke to that sense of family and community they felt within the group.

You can mention how happy we were to be in Gospel Ensemble. I looked forward to Mondays. The energy carried with us throughout rehearsal and after we left. Me and Kendra used to walk around campus singing the songs... (T. Johnson, personal communication, April 27, 2013)

I think if Gospel Ensemble wasn't at Northern a lot of us wouldn't have felt included. Because you're coming from a Black church experience then you come to this all White campus and even though they're Methodist and they're very accepting, you kinda like miss that,...gotta go home on Sunday 'cause they not gonna get it in Ada. But Gospel Ensemble was an avenue of some sorts to still have that, I felt. And then just to look over to my right now and see oh, I've got White brothers and sisters that love God just like I love God. This is great. This is awesome. (E. Roddy, personal communication, April 27, 2013)

It definitely brought people together. I remember we had a few international students in there. So, it brought everyone together for that one day of the week to have fun and sing together and praise and worship Him. (T. Johnson, personal communication, April 27, 2013)

It was very beneficial and I learned a lot from it and got some valuable relationships from it. I'll never forget it. I still play my CD. (M. Lawrence, personal communication, June 14, 2013)

In addition to feelings of belonging, being part of a community also means growing and learning together. Several alumni members reflected on ways their membership in this special

community made a lasting impression.

I learned so much being in the Gospel Ensemble. You're just somebody I'll never forget in a million years. I have deep, great, total love for you. I learned a lot. I learned a lot about people. I learned a lot about God's love. I think the Gospel Ensemble was one of the best things I ever was a part of and ever did and I'm happy that I was invited. (H. Davey, personal communication, July 10, 2013)

I learned a lot, an awful lot about people and what people think and stereotypes and just how to be you and know that God is in each one of us and we have to really always remember that. (H. Davey, personal communication, July 10, 2013)

I think Gospel Ensemble gave me a lot of confidence in who I was. I think it helped me a lot with my spiritual journey...No one can ever believe,...the fact that I was in a gospel choir...But I know that helped me to be able to understand where people come from, backgrounds, understand why they culturally, have much appreciation for African American tradition. (E. Solis, personal communication, June 19, 2013)

In the Van

A key question driving this study was whether or not race is a factor in what people perceive as authentic. Though many who were surveyed or interviewed declared that race had no effect on their perceptions of authenticity in the delivery or reception of the music, race is an underlying factor in nearly all facets of American society. Throughout the years as the racial dynamics of the Ensemble have varied, discussions about race have taken different forms. There have been varying degrees of openness and acceptance within the group and in the interactions between the group and members of church congregations. Many of the "glimpses into the world

of the other” experienced by members of the Gospel Ensemble were processed “in the van.” As referenced earlier, “the van” represented a safe space for discussion about encounters, issues or circumstances that might be better discussed in private than in public. As I interviewed alumni members I asked them to recall some of the “in the van” moments from their time in the Ensemble.

Basically, in the van to us meant I’m with you, but we’ll talk about it later.

I remember the boom box comment... In the van meant, you understood and you saw what was going on, but we’re not going to talk about it right now. We’ll talk about it on the way home. Another in the van, was when we went to Toledo. Remember the Toledo experience? (S. Dean, personal communication, June 17, 2013)

The Toledo experience refers to the time the Gospel Ensemble visited a church in downtown Toledo at some point during the early days of the groups’ existence. Shortly after arriving at the church a rather disheveled White man approached a group of Ensemble members (the group was all African American at this point) and asked us if there were churches like this in Africa. Having never visited Africa we were at a loss about how to respond to the question. As it turned out, this church had a ministry that reached out to the homeless of the city and this man was one of the homeless people. Also, on this particular day there was a presentation being given by a member of the church who had recently done mission work in Africa. This was background information we did not have prior to showing up at the church, so our encounter with this man moments after arriving at the church was perceived much differently than it would have been had we known about those things. This encounter, of course, became a topic of discussion “in the van.”

An alumna from some of the years when the group was more racially mixed had the following comments to make about “in the van.”

We never talked about real issues in the van. We talked about them in your office...

We could not talk about racial issues in the van, because the van consisted of everybody, but we would talk about race issues in your office with whomever was in the circle... Your frustration was that people would tell you they were going to come and they wouldn't come and you would end up only having Caucasian people there and there were certain churches that expected... we were going to a church where there was a lot of color, the one time you were like, we want everybody to come... and not everybody showed up and you were frustrated, but you weren't able to express your frustration or your real reason for frustration, but we knew...

Race relations were not discussed in the van. (Confidential, personal communication, July 21, 2003)

Re-visiting the days when that alumna was in the Ensemble reminded me of the years we struggled with church expectations about the racial composition of the group and the level of commitment of some of the Black students to getting out of bed on Sunday morning and making it to the van. There were years when this frustration was not openly discussed “in the van.” There have been subsequent years when it has been openly discussed. I have seen an ebb and flow over the years in the subject matter of “in the van” conversations. In the very early years there was some discussion about how race impacted our worship experiences at the various churches. As the group diversified, especially when there were a few White students and more Black students there was not as much open conversation specifically about race. As the racial balance shifted and the group became more White there would be occasional discussion where

race would be the topic, but not often. (Apparently, at least according to the one alumna interview, my office became the “van” during some of those years.) It now seems we have come full circle with the group, as a recent conversation on the trip home from a Sunday morning worship experience was focused on bi-racial children. One of the Ensemble members whose heritage is African American and White was sharing a story about her family dynamics and the other students engaged her in conversation sharing their thoughts about the benefits of having bi-racial heritage. The genesis of this discussion was actually a conversation we had on the way to the church that morning about food, which is a consistent theme with Gospel Ensemble and with “in the van” discussion throughout the years. In this particular case the bi-racial student was discussing foods she enjoyed versus those she did not and one she liked was chitterlings. (Chitterlings are actually hog intestines that are cleaned and boiled. They are very popular within some African American circles and a staple “soul food.”) She did not, however, enjoy pork rinds. She was challenged on this and it became a recurring discussion throughout the day, as we discovered the small town to which we had travelled for service that morning was actually known for producing pork rinds.

Almost every outreach trip the Gospel Ensemble takes involves having a meal with members of the congregation after the service, so food is a constant topic of discussion and integral part of the experience. It has also been a constant in van discussion and an excellent way to share in the culture of a church or a group of people. From the mystery casseroles, to the regionally specific dishes to the churches where they purchase Subway sandwiches or buckets of chicken for the group, sitting down to dine with members of the congregation always adds another dimension to the visit and usually sparks conversation on the ride home. Food may actually surpass racial incidents as topics of “in the van” conversations.

African American Tradition and Other Conclusions

The other factor tied directly to race as it relates to this study is my constant mantra to keep the group connected to its roots or to African American tradition. In an earlier chapter we referenced a statement uncovered in the research done by Gerardo Marti (2012), where it was believed that one of the challenges to creating a multiracial worship community is that it is difficult to attract African Americans to White worship communities. Marti remarked that if there are only a few African Americans in a multiracial congregation it was likened to the canary in the coal mine test and that congregation is thought to be unfriendly toward Blacks. (Marti, 2012, p. 53) Yet Korie Edwards (2008), in her research noted that if the necessary accommodations for Whites are not made it becomes difficult to retain their presence in a multiracial atmosphere. Johnson (2003) found the perception of some Australians was that the Black church presents a welcoming atmosphere. Johnson shared: "...some Australians who have been to the United States feel that there is more acceptance of difference in black American churches." (Johnson, 2003, p. 174) He quoted a Café Choir member, Liz Strickland, who described her experience with the Black church. Strickland felt it was like "...‘walking into a hug.’ She found the church members welcoming and felt a sense of community generated among them that she does not find in Australian churches." (Johnson, 2003, p. 174) That same sentiment was expressed by White Gospel Ensemble members after worship and fellowship experiences at African American churches. One Gospel Ensemble alumna shared these thoughts:

I felt more of a connection to the gospel music or to God when it was an all-Black church. I don't know why, maybe because when you are in an all-Black church in comparison to a White church, ... they're not afraid to say amen, they're

not afraid to say go ahead sing, they're not afraid to support you or say how they feel or cry if you wanna cry and for me I related to that. I could connect. I felt the presence... I felt that's where I was supposed to be. It was just inside me. And I can't explain how, it just is... I feel at home there. And I've always been welcome and accepted. I just feel the presence, but that's what I like. (H. Davey, personal communication, July 10, 2013)

Pastors and spiritual leaders in the Christian faith declare the ideal worship experiences as multiracial, yet I would argue that it is also important to maintain the heritage of African American worship and the music is a big part of that. Perhaps this means implementing the music buffet approach, referenced by Marti in an earlier chapter, in multiracial congregations or communities. Perhaps it means acknowledging that there is a place for congregations and communities that are majority African American. Korie Edwards puts it this way: "promoting a social identity that minimizes the role of race in people's lives serves to reinforce whiteness." (Edwards, 2008, p. 7) The reality of the ONU Gospel Ensemble is that it is multi- or at least bi-racial. It will likely never again be a majority African American group and in many ways that is fitting, as it more accurately reflects the ONU community. Maintaining a connection to the roots of the music upon which it was founded is an important way to insure there is appreciation for key elements of the diversity it is attempting to represent. Perhaps inclusion of other traditions alongside those of the African American tradition is a necessary step to consider moving forward.

In relation to the New York performance of the Café Choir, Johnson talks about the blurring of subjectivities in the symbolic space of performance. He says: "during their performance in the Baptist House of Prayer, the Australian choir and the black listening audience

participated in the coproduction of blackness. Thus, for all intents and purposes, the Café of the Gate of Salvation, in the face of evidence to the contrary, ‘became’ black.” (Johnson, 2003, p. 216) While I appreciate the sentiment, I am hesitant to embrace that concept. Should it be the goal or even the desire of an all-White choir to become Black? Part of the reason we struggle with being a society where there are many cultures is because we have great difficulty accepting difference. We either choose to ignore or dismiss difference or to change it. Looking at the Café Choir experience in that New York church I would say what I have said about various Gospel Ensemble experiences where there was a transformational moment. I would say that preconceived stereotypical ideas about the “other” and notions of authenticity were challenged and perhaps resolved, at least for that moment. I would stop short of declaring the Café Choir Black. As I know Johnson recognizes, there is more to being Black than the authentic delivery of a song.

Angela Nelson talks about differing social and cultural contexts for Whites and African Americans being reflected in a difference in the Jesus upon whom they call. She points to the unique way African American contemporary gospel songs have of personifying God in the lyrics giving Him a human voice. This differs from the way God or Jesus may be depicted in other sacred music and could be seen as one example of how Blacks and Whites may approach their relationship to God differently. (Nelson, 2001, p. 114) These thoughts seem to relate to the “everydayness” concept highlighted by Banjo and Morant Williams, underscoring the fact that though a shared faith might be expected to unify White and Black people rather than separate them, that is not always the case. The reality is that human experiences, which cause distinctions, sometimes fall along racial lines. Nelson also cites theologian James Cone who uses the example of a member of the Ku Klux Klan and a Black person who escapes from that

Klansman having different motivations for their worship at their respective churches. He states: “Because whites and blacks have different historical and theological contexts out of which their worship services arise, they do not shout for the same reasons.” (Nelson, 2001, p. 115) Perhaps the Jesus worshipped by White and Black (as well as others) is the same, but maybe the relationships with Him differ.

When we quote Dr. King’s observation about the segregation of Sunday mornings in America it presupposes that all churches and Sunday worship services should be integrated and multicultural in nature. I wonder if that is the true desire or goal. I am firmly convinced that there is a place for my bi-racial Gospel Ensemble and for multi-racial, multicultural churches. I am equally as persuaded that my predominately Black Baptist church and choir, serve a correspondingly important purpose. In the case of the Ensemble and the multi-racial church, considerable negotiation is necessary for them to operate effectively. We referenced Korie Edwards’ theory that Whites must be appeased in order for them to remain involved in a multi-racial church. By the same token I have acknowledged that concessions with musical selections may need to be more of a consideration with Gospel Ensemble going forward if the group is to be sustainable. Homi Bhabha talks about interstices being those spaces where “the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.” (Bhabha, 1994, p.2) The appeasement Edwards speaks of and the concessions I continually contemplate may be considered examples of interstitial negotiations. Victor Turner, in a discussion of liminality describes it as the state of being betwixt and between structures or situations. (Madison, 2012, p. 170) According to Turner it is “a space of greatest invention, discovery, creativity and reflection...” (Madison, 2012, p. 170) That concept conjures images of the potential for truly effective, vibrant and transformational worship

experiences with multi-racial, multicultural groups. The cultures that feed into these diverse groups, however, have to be nurtured somewhere, so while we may strive toward diversifying our Sunday morning worship hours there may yet be room for pockets of separation. The enduring image and presence of the Black church is iconic and functional. The gospel music tradition born out of the Black church is integral and contributes to so many other elements in our society. Preservation of the institution and the tradition would seem then to be essential.

There is a story about Mahalia Jackson that has application to this point:

Again and again Jackson had to resist attempts to change her singing style.

In 1932 a Negro music teacher she consulted stopped her in the midst of her rendition of the spiritual *Standing in the Need of Prayer* and told her to stop hollering: “The way you sing is not a credit to the Negro race. You’ve got to learn to sing songs so that white people can understand them.’ Thirty years later she still recalled her reaction vividly: ‘I felt all mixed up. How could I sing a song in a formal way. I felt it was too polished and I didn’t feel good about it. I handed over my four dollars to the Professor and left.’

It was her first and last music lesson. “ (Jackson, 1995, p. 184)

Had Mahalia Jackson altered her sound to accommodate what some perceived as acceptable for the masses, would her contributions to the field of gospel music have been nearly as valuable?

W.E.B. DuBois talked about the peculiar sensation experienced by African Americans (American Negroes) of “double-consciousness,” which he described as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” (DuBois, 1961, p. 17) He describes the struggle of this “two-ness;” this challenge of being both Black and American. (DuBois, 1961, p. 17) It is

the struggle of forming a gospel ensemble on a predominately White college campus. It is the challenge of having that all African American group, be criticized by other Black people for not being Black enough. It is the audacity to take that ensemble to all White church congregations in small rural settings on Sunday mornings to share a worship experience. It is the test of maintaining a cohesive group, as students of other races begin to join that African American ensemble. It is the resolve to maintain a musical canon at the risk of alienating some and confusing others. And it is the determination to preserve that connection with your African American church roots despite the call for Sunday morning integration because you know that association feeds you and allows you to pour into that Gospel Ensemble on that predominately White college campus which travels to all White church congregations in small rural settings on Sunday mornings to share a worship experience.

In an article called, “Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic,” Pearl Williams-Jones describes the importance of preserving Black gospel music as an essential key to the conservation of Black culture. She states:

...it is to be desired and anticipated that gospel music will not abandon its significant and singular role as the dominant force in the preservation of black cultural identity. Because it is a profound statement of black culture, it is hoped that the acceptability, respectability and universal receptivity to gospel music will not eventually bring a “kiss of death” and route to the dilution of this art form. It is imperative that black gospel maintain its strong self-identity and continue as the positively crystallizing element in the emerging black aesthetic. (Williams-Jones, 1975, p. 384)

Gospel music can and does play a significant role in bringing diverse groups together. The experiences of the ONU Gospel Ensemble demonstrate how the music can contribute to building community, providing emotional fulfillment and even achieving spiritual transformation. It is possible for the music to be appreciated and performed by many and perceived as authentic even when it is delivered by people with a variety of skin colors. As Williams-Jones points out, it is also strongly linked to Black cultural identity; another important role. As the Ohio Northern University Gospel Ensemble continues to deliver this vital music, whatever the racial composition of the group or the congregations with whom they share it, may there always be proper respect and primacy given to all that this music represents.

For Future Study

This project explored how racial perceptions, which seem to be such a persistent factor in American society, might impact what individuals believe to be authentic or inauthentic about the delivery and reception of black gospel music by the ONU Gospel Ensemble. In the process I examined the significance of the music in relation to Black culture and the value of the music in building unity across cultures. The concept of multicultural worship was introduced. This is a topic which could be more fully explored in a future study. It might be particularly interesting to look at the topic in relation to the claims that we are living in a post-racial American society, which some might argue is color-blind. While some declare racism a thing of the past, most acknowledge that it still exists and as Omi and Winant have stated: "...opposing racism requires that we notice race, not ignore it..." (Omi, Winant, 1994, p. 159)

The trend toward praise and worship music was explored. There has been relatively little written about this trend, as it relates to African American gospel music creators, performers, listeners and even local church choir members. The trend continues to grow and develop and is

seemingly being well accepted in the Black community, yet I did encounter those who were not particularly enamored with the form. I engaged in conversations, which were outside the scope of my research, where comments were made by some who believed the simplicity of the praise and worship form, the reliance on unison singing where there might ordinarily be harmony and the limited range of the melodies all made for rather lack luster music. The sentiments were that this kind of music is a large enough departure from traditional and contemporary gospel music that it is of concern that it is being so widely embraced and accepted. I believe this is an area that warrants further investigation. In light of the propensity of Black musicians to adapt musical forms to fit Black cultural norms it will also be of interest to see how praise music continues to grow and develop within the Black gospel music community.

Additional study with the ONU Ensemble might explore what the potential is for future growth and development of the group. What it might take to make this group sustainable, would be of particular interest. In its current season the Ensemble is at an all-time low in membership and participation by Black students is practically non-existent. Further study might reveal what would attract more students, especially Black students to the group and capture their commitment and dedication. There are implications here for the growth of religious life programs at Ohio Northern in general and other niche student organizations on campus.

Epilogue

On the eve of the 2014 MLK holiday, it finally happened. I rose before dawn preparing for yet another outreach trip with the ONU Gospel Ensemble. This would be the first trip for the group in this brand new year. The year began with the Polar Vortex and some of the most extreme winter weather we had experienced in decades. The students had been back in classes only a week and yet some chose to take advantage of this long weekend to journey away from campus again. The Ensemble had made a commitment to worship with a small United Church of

Christ congregation in rural Bluffton, Ohio. After fighting ice and snow to free the University van from the fleet parking lot, I pulled up to the front door of the student center to pick up the group and out they walked, all three of them. On this cold Sunday morning, when the ONU Gospel Ensemble was scheduled to bring the message in song in place of a preached word by the pastor, I had only three singers, three altos, three White women altos.

They climbed on board the van and one made text contact with an alumni member who would meet us at the church. He would be the lone male with our group that day. We traveled the fifteen miles to our destination; the trip taking longer than anticipated due to snow and ice covered roads. We arrived at the Emmanuel United Church of Christ and were greeted warmly by our alumni member, members of the congregation, the sound engineer and the interim pastor. We had never been invited to this particular church before and it turns out it is the home church of an ONU student who is on the ONU Chapel staff. What kind of first impression would this small group make? Would the congregation be disappointed? Would the student church member be embarrassed? Following opening hymns, prayers and collection of an offering the time arrived for the Ensemble to lead the congregation in worship. As we approach the front of the church I begin with a disclaimer, a confession of sorts. I acknowledged that they were expecting a larger group and that I was expecting to have representation of at least three vocal parts. "Standing before you," I said, "you have three altos and two tenors. We are few in number this morning, but mighty in spirit. Are you a praying church? Pray along with us that God will add the increase."

It was an out of the ordinary kind of service; a true exercise in faith. I sang soprano, which is more than a mere notion, as my most comfortable vocal range is tenor. Our lone male sang tenor and with our three altos we did manage three part harmony. We sang three songs

with recorded accompaniment tracks and two a cappella. Our group shared scripture readings and personal experiences as we introduced the songs. We concluded our portion of the service with our traditional benedictory selection, "Salvation and Glory." The congregation applauded. Following the service, as the Ensemble joined the congregation for lunch in the fellowship hall we met individuals and had conversation. Without exception, everyone was complimentary and seemed genuinely touched by our music and time of sharing. The pastor remarked that he had attended a gospel music convention in Cincinnati with large gospel choirs from all over the country and he felt sure our group with only five voices could hold our own with any of them. The gentlemen who served as sound engineer confessed to us what his first impressions had been upon our arrival. He said when we walked into the church his first thought was: "This is the gospel choir?" We laughed and I shared with him that I was actually doing a project on perceptions about race and gospel music. His next comments seemed to speak directly to my research questions. He said: "I expected you to have a powerful voice. I was surprised by the rest of the group. They kept up with you."

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APPENDIX A. CONSENT LETTER



DATE: February 22, 2013

TO: Adriane Bradshaw

FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [407226-2] Dissertation Research Project #1

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: February 21, 2013

EXPIRATION DATE: February 7, 2014

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 300 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on February 7, 2014. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

APPENDIX B. CONSENT LETTER

March 22, 2013

Dear Adriane,

The Institutional Review Board at Ohio Northern University has received your research proposal entitled "*The role race plays in the way gospel music in the African-American tradition is performed and received.*" This protocol has been granted Expedited Review status. After careful review of the proposal, the IRB of Ohio Northern University has approved the protocol. Protocol approval is good for one year after the date of submission. Any revisions or changes to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB and approved prior to their implementation.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please contact the Institutional Review Board at Ohio Northern University.

Scott C. Swanson
Chair, Institutional Review Board