

Music of the Garden of Prayer Tabernacle

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Preface

The purpose of this paper, a result of fieldwork conducted in March 2002, is to draw attention to the music of the *Garden of Prayer Tabernacle* in Lebanon, Tennessee, a Pentecostal African-American church. When I attended my first service at the church I wasn't sure what to expect, and was initially somewhat ill at ease. Growing up in a conventional Catholic church, I knew, did not prepare me for a high-spirited, black Pentecostal service. Fortunately, I had arrived forty-five minutes before the service and was able to get myself acquainted with the people and surroundings. As it turned out, I was made to feel at home immediately. During each of the services I attended I was asked to stand, identify myself, and explain why I was there. Although I am used to speaking in public, this was a very different situation for me, and admittedly I was a little nervous. At the first service, on March 3, 2002, I introduced myself and then spoke briefly about one of my piano students who attends the church. I was surprised at the good ovation I got from the congregation; apparently I had said the right thing, and I was greatly relieved. Later on I realized that it didn't really matter so much *what* I said; more important was my willingness to stand and present myself to these people.

I will admit, there were a few uncomfortable moments, as for example when it came time for the entire congregation to go front-and-center for the offering. I was prepared to make an

offering, but I didn't realize I was sitting in the one seat in the church where the offering line originated. In other words, the entire congregation was waiting for *me* to stand up and walk to the pulpit first. Finally a young girl advised me ("yelled at me," would be closer to the truth) to start down the aisle. I finally got the point. During the second service I attended, I felt I was finally beginning to get into the swing of things, and understanding the general order of events. After the service I was asked to stay and enjoy some food and fellowship. Although I was at first a fish-out-of-water, I eventually came to feel that I had made many good friends at the "GOPT."

Through numerous personal interviews, phone conversations, email, etc., my informants at the GOPT remained always helpful and willing to spend time with my project and me. Invaluable to me were Ms. Jackie Waters, former choir director and pianist; Mr. Jason Waters, drummer; and Mr. Rojon Garrett, organist, pianist, and saxophone player at the church. Ms. Waters is a retired school teacher in Wilson County, Tennessee, and acts as the church historian for the GOPT. She was instrumental in my obtaining historical records of not only the church, but also the black history of Wilson County in general. Her musical insight was invaluable, especially because for many years she served as musical director for the church. Her son, Jason Waters, and also Rojon Garrett, spent an afternoon demonstrating to me different gospel musical styles on drums and organ. This was a very enlightening experience, and helped in my overall understanding of the music performed during the service. Rojon Garrett was, perhaps, the most valuable informant, since he also acted as my key contact person. Without his help in gaining the initial permission to conduct fieldwork at the church, coordinating the personal interviews, and scheduling the musical demonstration, the entire project would not have been possible.

Introduction

The *Garden of Prayer Tabernacle* is an African-American, Pentecostal church in Lebanon, Tennessee. In March 2002, fieldwork was conducted at the church in order to gain an understanding of the type of music that is being performed there, and to try to put the music into a cultural and historical perspective. The fieldwork consisted of several personal interviews with key informants, one musical demonstration session, and two church services. Sound recordings were made of most of these events, and significant documentary information has also been collected. The *Garden of Prayer Tabernacle*, or as the members call it, "GOPT," was selected for study for several reasons. Music of the type performed at the church has always been of interest to me, and I feel it is an area that warrants more research. The musical heritage of the GOPT is related to other black churches such as the *Church of God in Christ*, begun in Memphis in the early 1900's, and other Pentecostal and Holiness-type organizations. The GOPT seemed a good candidate for study because it is somewhat rural and isolated; it is not in a large metropolitan area as are many such churches. This led me to believe that, possibly, the church had retained an older, more traditional musical style than some modern churches.

This paper, along with the two CDs of recorded material collected during my fieldwork, serves to document the findings of the fieldwork done at the GOPT. Some background information about the history of the GOPT and the surrounding black community will be included in order to gain an understanding of the cultural environment.

Purpose

The main purpose of the current fieldwork project is to record and study the music of the *Garden of Prayer Tabernacle*. Another goal of the research is to begin to understand the

connections between the music at the GOPT and that of other black Pentecostal churches, and also to southern music in general. To begin the research with some sort of foundational knowledge it was considered essential to do significant reading about African-American church music, and also fieldwork methods in general. Several books were consulted, but of particular help in the area of black church music were: *Happy In The Service of the Lord*, by Kip Lornell; *We'll Understand It Better By and By*, by Bernice Johnson Reagon; and *The Music of Black Americans*, by Eileen Southern.

Research was also conducted into the history of the GOPT church itself and the community of which it is a part. A most helpful source was *In Their Own Voices: An Account of the Presence of African Americans in Wilson County*. This work, which contains much of the black history of the county since the nineteenth century, will be discussed later in some detail. Also enlightening was the *Constitution of the First Born Church of the Living God*. Although the GOPT split from the national *First Born* church organization in the mid-1990's, many of the tenets of the two religious organizations are similar.

Historical Information

History of African-Americans in Wilson County, Tennessee

In 1999 the book, *In Their Own Voices: An Account of the Presence of African Americans in Wilson County* was published to correct a serious error of omission. When earlier history books were written of Wilson County—and Lebanon, which is the county seat—very little mention was made of the residents of African-American origin. The Wilson County Black History Committee was created in 1994 for the sole purpose of putting together an account of the black people of the county. The book chronicles the goings on in the black community since before the civil war, and

much of the historical information in this paper about the black community and churches was obtained from it. Because the church was, and still is, one of the foundations of black society, a large part of the book focuses on the history of eight churches in the area. One of these churches, which opened its doors in 1942, was the *Church of the Living God, Inc.* now called the *Garden of Prayer Tabernacle*.¹

In Their Own Voices states that in 1860 there were 8,285 blacks in Wilson County, out of a total population of just over 26,000. Of course many of these blacks were slaves, but some were free blacks working for hire at the mills in Lebanon. Apparently two Negro communities sprang up, one in the northern part of Lebanon, and the other in the southern section. Of course, there were many more black farmers who lived in the surrounding counties of Trousdale, to the northeast, and Smith, to the east. At the end of the civil war, many blacks became sharecroppers, some even working the same land they had worked before as slaves. Black churches began to spring up all throughout Wilson County, and especially in the town of Lebanon.

History of the *Garden Of Prayer Tabernacle*

In 1936, a woman named J. R. Stanford came to Lebanon with a vision to begin a church. According to Jackie Waters, the unofficial church historian at GOPT, Mother Stanford came from Kentucky with just her daughters; her husband and son remained behind to work and save money. Mother Stanford and her daughters rented a room on the “colored block,” of Lebanon, above Jake Hellums’ “tea room.” As Ms. Waters says, “We all knew they weren’t serving tea in there.” Stanford began preaching the gospel around town, and in 1941 bought some land with an existing house. At some point during this time Mother Stanford’s family was reunited, and in 1942 the house became the first church building. Mother Stanford at first wanted the church to be non-

denominational, but eventually decided to affiliate with a national organization called the *First Born Church of the Living God, Inc.*, headquartered in Waycross, Georgia. That organization had been established in 1913, and the doctrine of the faith, as presented in the church constitution, is apparently similar to many other Pentecostal and Holiness churches.

According to the official church history Mother Stanford held tent revivals and services that would “sometimes last to one or two o’clock in the morning.”² In 1959 the land on which the church stood was bought by the city for housing projects, so a new location was needed. Before the church deacons were aware, Mother Stanford had taken the money and bought land on Trousdale Ferry Pike. A small, white concrete-block building was erected on the site, and this served as the church building until 1999, a period of about forty years. As Jackie Waters said to me, referring to the condition of the building on Trousdale Ferry Pike; “Sometimes the rain would just invite itself in.” A major event in church history occurred in 1999 as members of the GOPT triumphantly marched from that old block building to a beautiful new church facility on Bluebird Road.

Mother Stanford retired in 1971, and her brother Elder E. T. Samuels became the new pastor until he passed away in 1974, while preparing to leave for a church conference. For a few years after that his wife, Mother E. E., Samuels stepped in and led the church. In 1979 Bishop Joseph Thompson moved to Lebanon to accept the job as new church pastor. During the time Bishop Thompson was leading the church, the congregation was finally given a name of its own. Up to this point it was actually just named after the national organization, *First Born Church of the Living God, Inc.*, in Lebanon, Tennessee. Bishop Thompson felt it was important to have an identity for the church and so it came to be known as the *Garden of Prayer-First Born Church of the Living God*. The church still retained its national affiliation, however.

In the mid-1990's there was a split in the national organization of the *First Born Church*, and many of the congregations went their own way. The Lebanon church was one of those that were called to leave the national organization and, along with their new pastor, Bishop Alfred Howard, they started a new affiliation called *Worldwide Abundant Life Fellowship*. The senior bishop of this national organization of approximately twelve churches is the same Bishop Howard. Now, of course, the Lebanon church has dropped the "First Born" part of their name and are now called; *Garden of Prayer Tabernacle-Worldwide Abundant Life Fellowship*, or just GOPT.³

History of the GOPT Choirs

At the current time the GOPT has two choral groups, the "Sanctuary Choir" and the "Youth Mass Choir." According to Jackie Waters, the first organized choir at the church was started in 1958 by Mother Mary Frances Coggins, and was called "Busy Bees." Mother Coggins, who is Ms. Waters mother, began the group with eight young girls ranging in age from five to eight years. However, Mother Coggins states that there was a Busy Bees choir long before the 1958 version, and that her group was "the second Busy Bees." In any case, the tradition was passed from Mother Coggins, who led the choir for several years, and then passed leadership to her daughter. Eventually the members of the Busy Bees grew up and felt that they needed a more appropriate name. The group went through a few name changes, but finally came to be known as the Sanctuary Choir. In 1980 the choir recorded an album entitled *Spreading the Good News*. The group remains all female to this day, and some of the 1958 Busy Bees are still choir members, including Kathy Robertson, Josephine Ashworth-Satterfield, Jackie Coggins-Waters, and Mary Thompson-Moore.

The "Youth Mass Choir" has a long history as well. In 1982 the church had a "Junior Choir" of thirty-six members, ranging in age from two years to fourteen. This group was split in

1988 to become the “Gospel Pearls,” ages two to ten, and the “Clefs of Faith” for the eleven to fifteen year olds. Of course, as Mother Coggins says, there were children’s choirs going way back almost to the founding of the church in 1942. Eventually, the ranks of the Gospel Pearls thinned, and so in 1994 the choirs were recombined into the current group, the Youth Mass Choir.

The position of “Minister of Music” (or director of music) at the GOPT is an important one, and it seems to have been passed down with care. The current director, James Neuble, age twenty-four, has had little formal training, but is a fine organist, pianist, and singer nonetheless. He learned music, literally, at the knee of his aunt Jackie Waters. Both Neuble and Waters explain that as a very young child he would bring his small electronic keyboard and sit next to aunt Jackie as she played for the service. Over the course of time, using the trial-and-error method, he learned the standard repertory. Waters herself learned music mostly by playing in church, although she did have a limited amount of formal training from music teachers in Lebanon. Her mother, Mother Frances Coggins, was the choir director before her, so obviously she was able to learn much of the traditional music directly from her. Details about the overall musical tradition of the GOPT, along with discussions about instruments used, specific songs performed, and connections to other black church music will be presented later.

Musical Analysis

The music of the GOPT is derived from a variety of sources. As Mother Mary Coggins, one of the oldest members of the congregation, states, many of the older songs are not sung anymore. However, she clearly remembers when standards such as “Get Away Jordan” and gospel songs like Thomas A. Dorsey’s “Precious Lord” were performed regularly.

For the very early music of the GOPT, my main source of information was Mother Coggins, who as has been said, was the choir director in the 1950's and '60's. Mother Coggins came to the GOPT in 1947, at the age of twenty-three. She recalls the early days by saying: "At that time we didn't have a lot of music. It was a lady, our pastor, and it was more or less drums and joystick. . . [and] bass drum. Mother Stanford played guitar, her husband played joystick, and her daughters played the drums." The "joystick" that Mother Coggins refers to is described by both she and her daughter, Jackie Waters, as basically being a four- or five-foot long metal pole with a piece of wood attached on the bottom, and several tambourine jingles attached. The joystick was hit on the floor in time with the music, and according to Jackie Waters, the rhythm played was as shown in example 1.

Ex. 1. "Joystick" Rhythm



As told by Jackie Waters, the joystick was actually played by Elder Samuels, *brother* of Mother Stanford, not her husband as stated by Mother Coggins. In the following quotation Ms. Waters adds to the understanding of how the music was performed in the 1950's:

My first remembrance of music at the church here was when I was a little girl [ca. 1955]. A deacon would play the scrub board, and he would keep it in time. Then Elder Samuels had what he called a 'joystick'. . . sometimes he hit it and danced around it, and we thought it was just fascinating. We had a big bass drum, Mother Tellis [played it], one of the big ones like in a marching band. Mother Tellis [had] part of a broom handle, that's the way she would play it. Then Mother Stanford played guitar, and Mother Samuels would play the piano. It sounded so good, that washboard going and Mother Stanford on the guitar.

Also, Waters says that there was a lot of foot stomping and handclapping, as one would expect in a black Pentecostal church. Waters relates a very interesting story about how the “double clap” came to be used at the GOPT. This handclap was, apparently, learned many years ago at one of the church assemblies in Waycross, Georgia. Waters says that the clap was “exciting to us, it was something new.” The exact date for the described event is unknown, and the original source of the double clap is also a mystery of sorts. However, the rhythm is seemingly related to Afro-Cuban rhythms and, by association, to rhythms found in Africa itself. To illustrate this rhythm and its relation to those stated above, we will first compare it to the rhythm heard in *Blow Gabriel*, from the CD, *Sounds of the South: Negro Church Music/White Spirituals*. Examples two and three are transcriptions of the music in question, and as can be seen, both show handclaps on beats two and four. Of course, this is known to be a standard practice in many African-American churches. However, the rhythms added to this basic beat are what we are investigating, primarily. The “stamped rhythm” of the St. Simon’s Island Singers, example two, is what is commonly referred to as a Cuban “son clave.” Actually it is only one-half of the true clave, since the figure is normally two measures long, and has quarter notes on beats two and three in the second measure (the entire pattern can be reversed, however). Example three, Jackie Waters’ “double clap,” shows a very similar beat. Note that the top part, labeled “hand claps #2,” is the actual double clap rhythm. The only difference between the GOPT rhythm and that of the example from *Blow Gabriel* is the anticipation of beat four.

The rhythms in examples two and three could both be called “one-measure claves” or “one-measure timelines.” The term “timeline” is often used to describe the basic beat structure in Africa, and elsewhere. Generally, it is a repeated rhythmic pattern that serves as the basis for the rest of the music, a rhythmic riff, or ostinato of sorts. Writings on the theory of African rhythms

Ex. 2. *Blow Gabriel*-St. Simon's Island Singers

Ex. 3. Jackie Waters' "double clap"

abound with explanations of the timelines and clave. One of the best efforts at illustrating this feature (actually, in particular reference to mnemonics) is offered by Gerhard Kubik in his chapter entitled “Central Africa: An Introduction,” from the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. It is important to understand that the timeline can be moved forward or backward in relation to the basic pulse of the music. This is to say, it need not start on beat one, but may be begin anywhere in the measure. However, once the timeline is established, in theory it does not change for the duration of the piece. Kubik simplifies the way of thinking about this by representing the beats not in measures, but in groups of eight. This is a very helpful innovation, one that facilitates the understanding of the backward or forward movement of the rhythm as compared to the basic pulse. Example four shows Kubik’s transcription of an Ngangela beat pattern.

Ex. 4. Central African Rhythm as Presented by Gerhard Kubik

$$\textcircled{8} \left[\begin{array}{cccccc} \cdot & \mathbf{X} & \cdot & \cdot & \mathbf{X} & \cdot & \mathbf{X} & \cdot \\ \cdot & \mathbf{X} & \cdot & \mathbf{X} & \cdot & \mathbf{X} & \cdot & \mathbf{X} \end{array} \right]$$

In Kubik's system, each dot represents a beat with a rest, and an "X" is used to display a beat on which an instrument (or handclap) is played. Thus, in the above example we would say that the rhythms both begin on the second beat. The similarity between Kubik's example and that of the St. Simon's Island Singers, and even more strikingly that of the double clap of the GOPT, is significant. If one considers the bottom rhythm in Kubik's example to be the same as the basic handclaps on beats two and four of the earlier examples, the picture becomes clear indeed. Aside from the obvious difference, that Kubik's top line rhythm is one beat delayed from those in examples two and three, the double clap of the GOPT is exactly the same as that of the Ngangela. Of course, the exact connection between these two rhythms will probably never be known, but the similarity is intriguing. In any case, it can certainly be said that the GOPT church here uses a rhythm that is very African in essence, and is likely derived in some way from an African or African-American source.

Since one of the goals of this research is to gain a cultural and historical understanding of the music of the GOPT, direct comparison of this music to that of other similar churches seems a potentially productive venture. The song "Power" appears on track two of *Music of the Garden of Prayer Tabernacle* CD, recorded during this fieldwork. This track contains what Rojon Garrett calls "general praise music." In all, there are five songs represented on the track in a sort of medley form; each of the songs using the same basic chords and rhythm. The thirteen-and-a-half-minute track could be looked at as basically an extended ring shout, minus the dancing. "Power" is a song that has been used in the black Pentecostal churches for many years. Although information about the source of the song was unavailable, a version recorded by Madame Mattie Wigley and Congregation was located for comparison. This recording, from the aforementioned CD, *Sounds of the South*, displays many features of the GOPT version; the two recordings of "Power" are very

similar, except for differences of style discussed below. Figures one and two are transcriptions of twenty-four measures of each of the two versions of “Power,” with lead and group vocals included. Both versions are in call and response style, with a female vocalist performing the lead part. It should be noted that in Wigley’s version the transcription begins at the start of the track, and does not indicate that the music actually takes a few seconds to gain a rhythmic pulse. The GOPT version—sung by Rita Kennedy and Congregation—starts at 11:03 into the track, due to the fact that the song is the fifth in a medley.

It probably goes without saying that both versions of “Power” have a strong rhythmic accent on beats two and four, on which handclapping is featured. Also somewhat obvious is the repetitive nature of the vocal part of response groups. As can be seen, the two versions have the same basic rhythm in the response part. Two differences should be noted, however. One, the first pitch of the second response (i.e., measures number four, eight, twelve, etc.) of each group is different. It is an “A” pitch in the Wigley version, and “Bb” in the GOPT version. Two, as the song progresses in the GOPT version, the response follows the text and rhythm more than in the Wigley version, for example, singing “power lord” in measure ten as did the lead vocal in measure nine. These are considered to be minor differences, and are well within the range of style variance one might expect.

Fig. 1. *Power* -Madame Mattie Wigley and Congregation
from *Sounds of the South: Negro Church Music/White Spirituals*, CD 3, track 7

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of six systems. The first system is divided into two parts: 'Leader' and 'Group'. The 'Leader' part is on a single staff, and the 'Group' part is on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: 'Pow - er, pow - er, pow - er, Pow - er, pow - er, er, pow - er, (etc.) pow - er, (etc.) pow - er, (etc.)'. The score includes measure numbers 5, 9, 13, 17, and 21. The music features a simple melody with a steady bass line. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Fig. 2. Power - Rita Kennedy and GOPT Congregation
 from *Music of the Garden of Prayer Tabernacle*, CD track 2, 11:03-11:26

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of six systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line for the Leader and a piano accompaniment for the Group. The lyrics are: "Pow-er, pow - er, pow - er, pow - er, pow - er lord, pow - er lord, pow - er lord, pow - er lord, pow - er, pow - er, pow - er, pow - er." The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, and 21 marked at the beginning of each system. The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and a melodic line in the right hand.

The lead vocals look somewhat different on paper, it must be admitted. However, in spirit and intent they seem much more closely related than the visual representation indicates. Perhaps the differences between the two can be partly dismissed for one basic reason: in the Wigley version the singer is at the beginning of the song and has not yet built up to any sort of high emotional level, while in the GOPT version (it is, as stated earlier, eleven minutes into the medley) the music is already at an emotional peak as “Power” begins. This explains why, in the GOPT version, Rita Kennedy is already singing in the upper part of her range with a great deal of gravel in her voice right from the beginning of the transcription. Later in the transcriptions, however, the two versions begin to converge, as is evident by comparing measures 17-20 of each version. In fact, here we see that, except for slight variations in rhythm, the two tracks are virtually identical.

While we perhaps cannot make broad conclusions based on the analysis of just this one song it is assumed, based on the evidence, that the GOPT has inherited at least some of its music from the standard repertory of the black Pentecostal churches. Not all of the GOPT music is similar in style to “Power,” i.e., shout-type songs with a very fast rhythm, performed in a highly-spirited manner. There are other songs that could probably be classified as “straight-up gospel songs.”

Interviews

Mother Mary Frances Coggins

Mary Frances (Thomas) Coggins was born on April 27, 1924 in Smith County, Tennessee, the county just to the east of Wilson County where the GOPT is located. Her family moved to Lebanon when she was two or three years old, and first attended *Pickett Ruckers Methodist Church*. In 1947 she became a member of the *Garden of Prayer*, and has served as church

secretary, church treasurer, youth choir director, hospitality chairman, and as a member of both the deaconess board and the 4-Way Club.

Mother Coggins is one of the oldest surviving members of the congregation and was helpful in recreating some of the early church history. Because of her musical involvement, as director of the Busy Bees as described earlier, she also was able to fill in some gaps in the knowledge of her daughter, Jackie Waters. When I initially questioned her about it, Coggins was unable to remember some of the earliest songs sung in the church. However, she did eventually say that “Precious Lord” was “number one!” She also remembers singing “Come Out of the Corner, You Can’t Hide” and “Get Away Jordan.” Mother Coggins still keeps a book of songs that the church used for many years. The collection contains the words to a variety of songs, such as:

“Little Church on the Hill”	“Jesus I’ll Never Forget”
“A Little talk With Jesus”	“Jesus is My Aeroplane”
“Precious Lord”	“We’ll Understand it Better By and By”
“On the Jericho Road”	“The Milky White Way”
“Farther Along”	“Get Away Jordan”

Unfortunately, the first few pages of the book are now missing, so the publisher and date of printing are unknown. Coggins recalls the early days of the Busy Bees singing group:

We didn’t have music for them, I put them together and I knew the songs, and taught them to sing and all of that. Then they started growing up and started to be able to go out into the community and sing. I remember when we would carry as many as eleven or twelve to Kentucky. . . Bowling Green, Kentucky to sing. We’d drive in an old ’49 *Chevrolet*.

One of the members of this group, her daughter, Jackie (Coggins) Waters, was interviewed at length during this study.

Jackie Waters

For much of the historical information about the GOPT, a key informant, Jackie Waters, was consulted. Because of her unique role as both GOPT pianist for twenty-six years, and also as church historian, she is a wealth of information. Ms. Waters talked willingly about the GOPT and its music, and, in addition to one interview of length, participated in several short, follow-up phone interviews. Biographical information and portions of interviews with Ms. Waters are included here in order to give a sense of continuity.

Jackie Waters, born in 1952, grew up in the GOPT church. She was class president of Wilson County High School, and graduated as valedictorian. At the time, Wilson County was in the last stages of integration, and Waters' was the last graduating class from the all-black high school. She then went on to earn her associates degree at Cumberland University in Lebanon, where she was the second black person to ever receive a diploma. She remembers her anxiety at being in a college general assembly and seeing "five hundred Caucasians and one African-American." To complete an undergraduate degree in education, Waters attended Middle Tennessee State University in nearby Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Since graduating she has been an important member of the community in general, having taught fourth grade in Lebanon public schools for twenty-seven years.

In 1956 Mother Samuels, then acting as both the preacher and the church pianist, asked several young people in the church if they would take piano lessons. Jackie Waters, four years old at the time, agreed to do so. At first the only instruction the young pianists received was from Mother Samuels herself. Eventually, however, Waters took lessons from Margaret Hastings, pianist for another local black congregation, *Cedars of Lebanon Primitive Baptist Church*. The following exchange between Ms. Waters and myself explains how harmony was taught.

JW: Mother Samuels called us together and gave us the basic chords. Mother Samuels called it ‘first change, second change, third change.’ And that’s the way she taught us, you know, the ‘C’ chord, that’s the first change.

RR: And what would the second be?

JW: It was still the ‘C’ chord, but let’s see, the first chord was ‘C,E,G’, then the second change was ‘G,B,D’. I think I’m right, I haven’t played it in so long. . . After that she taught us to take a scale and put it in a song, like. . . [sings] Amazing Grace.

When she gets to the third full measure of “Amazing Grace,” where one would normally expect a four chord (in Western music theory), Waters says, “That’s the second change.” In similar fashion she designates the five chord as being the “third change.” Note that Waters seems ambiguous in her explanation of the chords used, one time describing the “second change” as a “still the ‘C’ chord,” in the second instance spelling it out as the dominant, and then finally relating it to the four chord in “Amazing Grace.” In any case the concept of the first, second, and third change seems widespread in black church music. The younger musicians of the GOPT, such as James Neuble and Rojon Garrett, use this same terminology.

Margaret Hastings taught Waters as best she could, but the student was not particularly excited about learning piano. Waters describes her teacher’s playing: “She played the original black music, and she could go all over the place. . . leg just. . . keep the beat and everything.” But, Waters was hoping that she would never have to actually take the job of church pianist. One day Mother Samuels called her to the task, in spite of what Waters describes as her “struggling.” Waters practiced and improved, and each Sunday before the service her hands were anointed by Mother Samuels. Waters says that Mother Samuels prayed that God would “increase my playing.” Eventually, Waters passed the piano chair to her nephew, James Neuble, whom she calls “Spanky.” As a very young boy he sat next to his aunt, and played along with her on his electronic

keyboard. Eventually he took lessons from Glenda Westmoreland, a member of the highly-musical Vantrease family in the Lebanon area. The *Vantrease Family Singers*, started in 1952, has remained a popular local musical group. One member of the family, Ernest Vantrease, has toured with both the Ray Charles and Buddy Rich bands.⁴

Because of her role as church pianist, and later choir director, Waters remembers many of the older church songs that are no longer sung at the GOPT. During her interview Waters spoke of several of these songs, and sung parts of a few.

“I Have Given Up All to Follow Jesus”

“Amazing Grace”

“Precious Lord”

“My Mind is Gone”

“By and By”

“I’m Going Through”

“I Haven’t Done Nothing Today to Make My Lord Ashamed”

“Running for My Life”

“Come to Jesus”

“Swing Low Sweet Chariot”

“I’m a Soldier in the Army of the Lord”

“Soon I Will be Done with the Troubles of the World”

Waters further explains that songs like “Swing Low” were not generally performed in the older spiritual style, i.e., slow and drawn-out. These were done in an upbeat, spirited fashion as would probably be expected in Pentecostal church. Waters says she sort of “picked it up” for the children to sing. However, she states that occasionally some of the older members would sing it in the older style during personal testimony.

Perhaps it is important to understand some of the terminology used by Waters when describing styles of music. She considers songs like “Precious Lord,” composed by Thomas A. Dorsey to be “spirituals.” In fact, any sufficiently old song is thought to be a spiritual. The effect here is probably similar to that of many songs by Stephen Foster now being considered by some people to be folk songs. “Hymns” relates primarily to the older hymns of composers like Isaac

Watts. She recalls her father singing them around the house, but admits she never learned to sing this style well. She sang for me part of “I Love the Lord, He Heard My Cry” in the lined-out hymn style to which she described to me. Basically, it is performed as follows: a line of text is sung by the lead voice in a very slow, and highly melismatic manner. The congregation follows the leader by singing the same line in unison, using the same melody and approximate rhythm. Needless to say, this type of performance can be very difficult, and requires both acute listening skills and cooperation by all members of the congregation.

James Neuble

James Neuble is the current Minister of Music, vocalist, organist, and pianist at the GOPT. Neuble, born on February 11, 1978, is a very talented musician who grew up in the church. His first musical experiences were sitting beside his “Aunt Jackie” (Waters) during the service and picking up the songs by rote. He feels a strong connection to the older songs, those he calls “base songs,” and works them into the service as much as possible. He explains his job at the church in the following exchange:

JN: The job of Minister of Music is to basically make sure the music is getting into the church, whether it is doing Sunday morning service, Wednesday night Bible study, any services that go on here. The Minister of Music is also responsible for getting songs for all the choirs, and making sure the choirs are functioning.

RR: Do you direct the Sanctuary Choir in Rehearsal?

JN: Yes, give out parts, etcetera.

RR: How do you learn a new song?

JN: In the choir there is a person who gets the song to me. The choir member who wants to sing the song gets it to that person. . . Then the musicians learn it and then we teach it to then choir.

RR: You listen to the tape?

JN: Over and over, it's a repetitive method. You just try to pick out as much as you can until it sounds all right to you.

It should come as no surprise that the choir and musicians learn all the material by ear, as opposed to reading music; this is often the case in African-American churches. In fact, this is the learning method most used in blues, rhythm and blues, soul, rock, country, and other genres of American music.

Neuble is a great asset to the church, both in terms of his musical ability and also his teaching skills. He is very interested in helping a new generation of musicians learn the songs of the church, and is currently working towards developing a curriculum toward that end. He has been especially important in helping to develop the skills of Dupre Dye, Jason Waters, and Rojon Garrett, the rest of the musicians currently at the GOPT, who are six to eight years his junior.

Rojon Garrett

Without the help of Rojon Garrett this fieldwork would have been much more difficult, or even impossible. In addition to performing on piano, organ, and saxophone, Garrett holds the job of Assistant to the Minister of Music. James Neuble says that Garrett is "a little bit ahead of me in music." Neuble and Garrett are cousins and both call Jackie Waters, "Aunt Jackie."

Garrett is currently a music student at Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee. Because of impaired vision he attended the Tennessee School for the Blind, in Nashville. So, from a very young age he was forced to take a long bus ride from Lebanon to Nashville every day. This required him to be away from home from about six a.m. until five p.m. on a daily basis. In sixth grade he made a decision to stay on campus at the school, in order to avoid so much traveling. This allowed him to have the free time to practice saxophone, which he had begun to play in the school

band, and later on piano. He realized that playing only saxophone was going to limit his church playing at the GOPT and elsewhere:

Say if somebody calls for a musician, and they're probably not going to call for me because they say, well, "he just plays saxophone." But now, "he plays saxophone *and* piano" That's one of the main things I'm known for, is being able to play with most anybody, hopefully trying to.

Garrett also began to play in the jazz band at the school for the blind. In the group, under the direction of Joseph Gregory, songs such as "Georgia on My Mind" and other standards were performed regularly.

Garrett expresses admiration for James Neuble's ability to come up with alternate chords for the songs played at the GOPT. He says, "It's the same song, he just uses different chords and makes them fit. The song sounds almost the same, but you can hear the difference." However, Garrett is a fine young musician in his own right as can be heard on the CD *Garden of Prayer Tabernacle: Musical Demonstrations and Discussions of Form, Style, Harmony, and Song Usage*. On this CD he, along with Jason Waters, performs several basic songs used in the GOPT service, and explains how and when they are used. Also included on the CD are informative between-song discussions. Garrett studied forensics in high school, and did a project on African-American call and response. Thus, he understands some of the historical underpinnings of songs like "Power."

Garrett sees a gradual change in the music being performed at the GOPT. He states that in the early 1990's many more traditional songs, like "Amazing Grace," were performed regularly. From his point-of-view, tomorrow's trends in Gospel music can be found by looking at the popular rhythm and blues music of today. He points to the fact that there are now gospel-rap songs being performed at black churches. Additionally, he notices that the use of electronics such as, sequencers, vocoders, and synthesizers, is much more common now than just a few years ago. Even though this may seem a reversal of cause and effect to some researchers in the field of

rhythm and blues and gospel music, there may be a lot of truth here. Many writers have claimed that gospel music fueled the musical engines of rhythm and blues and soul music, and of course, one would be foolish to not see the validity of this viewpoint. However, Gospel-Rap did not precede Rap music in general to my knowledge, and neither did electronics first appear in the gospel scene and then make its way into the secular world. So, Garrett has a valid point, and at least one could say that there is a cross-pollination going on between black religious and secular music.

Garrett shares the feelings of James Neuble that education of the next generation of musicians at the GOPT is important in the continuance of the tradition. He says that the musicians at the GOPT never get paid, and that they are all family members. “That’s one of the reasons I’m going into music education, to make musicians out of the people I know, to make it better. The Minister of Music’s job is to lift up the band in the church, [to] try to upgrade it to a higher level.”

Notes

¹ *In Their Own Voices*, Wilson County Black History Committee (Wilson County, TN: Lebanon Democrat), vii-xiv.

² *Ibid.*, 51.

³ *Come Celebrate: The 50th Anniversary of the Garden of Prayer First Born Church of the Living God 1942-1992*. Information about the history of the GOPT church was either acquired from the booklet or directly from current church members.

⁴ *In Their Own Voices*, 329.

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