2013


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Jeryl Lee Cunningham-Fleming, Student
Dr. Everett McCorvey, Major Professor
Dr. Lance Brunner, Director of Graduate Studies
“WE SANG ALLELUIA, PRAISE THE LORD!”:
AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY AND THE USE AND RECEPTION OF MUSIC
WITHIN A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
IN NEW YORK CITY, 1970 – 2010

________________________________________
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS PROJECT
_______________________________________
A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in the
College of Fine Arts
at the University of Kentucky

By
Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Everett McCorvey, Professor of Music

2013
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ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL PROJECT


The Ephesus Seventh-day Church, one of the first Black SDA churches that were formed in the New York City area during the late 1920s and early 1930s, is one church that has been faced with the challenge of maintaining traditional repertoire and musical practices, while including more popular genres and styles that lay outside the SDA guidelines. Located in Central Harlem, Ephesus is surrounded by the cultural and historical influences within the Harlem community. The Ephesus Church, based on extant hymnals and the recollections of church members, continued in the Euro-centric musical traditions of early SDA churches until the 1960s, when it began to explore African-inspired musical practices. Around 1970, close in time to the SDA 1972 Music Guidelines were instituted, a struggle between Euro-centric versus Afro-centric musical cultures became apparent. Following introductory chapters on the history of African-American membership in the SDA Church from the 19th century to the early 20th century
and early musical leaders of Ephesus Church, the musical practices of Ephesus from 1970 to 2010 serves as the focus of this study.

KEYWORDS: Music, African-American, Seventh-day Adventists, Identity, Religion

Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming
April 7, 2013

By

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Dr. Everett McCorvey
Director of Project

Dr. Lance Brunner
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April 7, 2013
Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong…
Ecclesiastes 9:11, NKJV

…let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.
Hebrews 12:1, NKJV

Though this document is an individual work, it would not have been possible without the insight and direction of many people. I would first like to thank my advisor, Dr. Everett McCorvey, for his support, along with the members of my committee: Dr. Kevin Holm-Hudson, Dr. Angelique Clay-Everett, Professor Robert Haven, and especially Dr. Diana Hallman, and Chester Grundy, for their counsel and support.

I would like to thank Dr. Dedrick Blue and the members of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church, especially the Chancel Choir, and the Music Ministry (Ron Liburd, Chairman), for their love and support. Also, a special thanks to the participants in this study: Dr. Dedrick Blue, Marvin Brown, Sandy Byrd, Everyl Chandler-Gibson, William and Laura Chesson, June Gardner, Sybil Gooden, Frances Goodine, M. H., Omar Jackson, Caroline Jones, Wessie Jones, Denise Joseph Saint-Louis, Jaime Kowlcessar, Kim Lewis, Ron Liburd, Elihu McMahon, Joseph Merriweather, Jake Nixon, Jr., Renee Nixon-Simmons, Harold Stenbar, Dr. Lonieta Thompson-Cornwall, Gloria Waithe, and Eugene Washington. A special thank you to Greg Hodges and the Ephesus Communications Department for the photos and recordings of various church events.

I would like to give special acknowledgement to Chester and Ann Grundy, my home away from home. Thanks for your editing help, your constant encouragement, and especially reminding me to eat and rest. I would also like to give special thanks to La’Shelle Allen for her transcription help.
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Last and most important, I give praise and honor to the Most High God, the Head of my life, in whom I live and have my being. Thank you for birthing this thing in me and for guiding me through the most awesome experience of my life!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Descriptions and Goals of Study

The Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) is a Christian denomination that was formed in the mid-nineteenth century, whose focus has been on evangelism, education, and community service. While the Millerite Movement reached other areas of the United States, most of its influence was within the northeastern region of the United States – New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, and surrounding states. Since its formal establishment in 1863, the SDA Church has grown into a worldwide ministry, encompassing 16,307,880 members in 206 countries.¹

In its beginnings, the church served predominantly White congregations, but attempts by Seventh-day Adventists to bring former slaves into the Church and to offer them the rudiments of education took place during the 1870’s; however, substantial penetration to evangelize the South did not take place until the 1890’s.² Although southern Whites accepted the message of the SDA movement, they held onto the social behaviors of that region and refused to worship or socialize with former slaves. According to Louis B. Reynolds, one of the reasons this happened was due to the fact

that the church’s membership began to consist “largely of white people from mainline denominations where blacks traditionally have been denied membership.”

In spite of this challenge, the membership of blacks grew steadily from 50 members in 1894 to 900 members in 1909. By the early twentieth century, the church saw the need for a greater representation of Blacks in its congregations and in 1910 created the North American Negro Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to oversee the evangelic work among Blacks and to aid in fostering integration within the SDA Church in the United States.

Alongside the evangelistic efforts of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, other denominations, such as the Methodists and Baptists, also sought to convert former slaves to Christianity. However, after experiencing social and racial inequality from White members within various churches of these denominations, Blacks separated from the “parent” churches and formed their own congregations. The resulting black denominations include seven that are active today: (1) African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), (2) African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), (3) Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), (4) National Baptist Convention (NBC), (5) National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), (6) Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), and (7) Church of God in Christ (COGIC). While these denominations were influenced by the White Christians who evangelized them, these new denominations grew independently and maintained their own distinct identities.

---

denominations were able to merge Euro-American traditions with their own African culture so that their music and worship experience were meaningful, and reflective of their experience as a people. These denominations share an ecumenical musical tradition that Black members of the Seventh-day Adventist church do not share.

The Adventist church, like other denominations in the 19th century, used hymns and gospel songs\(^8\) as the major musical elements for worship meetings.\(^9\) The services were conducted by “itinerant deacons who visited from time to time and brought… not only preaching but some form of worship in music as well.”\(^10\) “Advent” hymns, hymns based on the foretelling of the coming of Jesus Christ, were used not only in worship but also in social gatherings.\(^11\) A set musical structure or standard liturgy did not develop, largely because the members of the Millerite Movement were expecting the imminent Second Coming of Christ to take place. Even after the Movement’s formal organization in 1863, music and worship were predominantly determined by denominational beliefs, and less by ethnic or cultural identity.

As the denomination grew and the membership became more diverse, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists provided a general guideline for the use of music for service in the early part of the 20th century; nonetheless, debates arose during the 1960s and 1970s over what constituted sacred music, and which genres are acceptable for an Adventist Christian to perform and to listen to within the church service. While ideals and various individual philosophies of music in worship were discussed in various

\(^8\) Gospel songs during the 19th century were considered songs that express personal, spiritual, or a communal belief regarding Christian life, unlike today’s understanding of the term that incorporates the aforementioned description in addition to musical style.
\(^10\) Pierce, 1.
\(^11\) Ibid.
denominational publications between 1928 and 1960, general guidelines for the use of music in the service began to appear in the 1970s. The impetus for such guidelines came from a desire by central bodies to control expanding repertoire within various congregations within the United States.

The Ephesus Seventh-day Church, one of the first Black SDA churches that were formed in the New York City area during the late 1920s and early 1930s, is one church that has been faced with the challenge of maintaining traditional repertoire and musical practices within the 20th century, while including more popular genres and styles that lay outside the SDA guidelines. Located in Central Harlem on the corner of West 123rd Street and Lenox Avenue, Ephesus has been, and continues to be, surrounded by the cultural and historical influences within the Harlem community.

Ephesus Church, based on the evidence of extant hymnals and the recollections of church members, upheld the Eurocentric musical traditions of early SDA churches until the 1960s, when it began to explore African-inspired musical practices. Around 1970, close in time to the SDA 1972 Music Guidelines were instituted, a struggle between Euro-centric versus Afro-centric musical cultures became apparent.

The musical practices of this church from 1970 to 2010 will serve as the focus of this study. It will represent a case study that will attempt to answer the central questions:

1. How did a church, whose members are of African descent, move from a Euro-centric music and worship culture towards a set of practices that encompass Afro-centric ideals and culture?
2. How did these new musical practices and repertoire reflect a changing ethnic identity, or an “embracing” of ethnic identity, among individual members of this Black Seventh-day Adventist Church?

To answer these questions, this project will trace and assess musical and cultural adaptations within Ephesus SDA Church in response to the external environment as well as within the church during several decades.

*Need for Study*

Little study has been done on the incorporation of African-influenced idioms in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Ephesus SDA Church is being studied for three reasons. First, Ephesus, one of the oldest congregations within the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, is considered a model for musical performance practices of regional churches in the United States. Second, the church is located in Central Harlem, an area that is known for its historical developments of the arts. Third, the church’s membership includes not only African-Americans, but also other ethnicities of the African Diaspora. While many of the predominantly Black churches within the SDA denomination are not as diverse, Ephesus offers insights into the modifications of musical practices within churches in the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, as well as the varied forces and agents that affected these changes, particularly the efforts of musical leaders within the Church.

The study will also provide a more detailed history of this relatively new church with a relatively new denomination, adding to the history taught within Adventist institutions and the literature on Adventist history.
Limitations of the Study

Although this research project touches on social, cultural, and political developments in the United States that likely affected the musical practices of Ephesus Church during the decades in question, it does not attempt to be a comprehensive sociological study. Whereas multiple factors can affect social-cultural practices and perceptions within a community such as Ephesus, this study, in its concentration on ethnicity, will not raise questions based on considerations of class or gender, for example. Furthermore, the project is not intended to be an in-depth ethnomusicological study, although it does rely strongly on ethnographic research to construct a history of musical practice and changing ethnic identity.

In its use of archival records of Ephesus Church to provide information about the music and ethnicity of its members, the project has been limited by the absence or unavailability of certain types of data. First, statistics on the ethnic breakdown of the congregation are non-existent. Upon speaking to the Head Clerk of the Ephesus Church about this lack, I found that the desired information was non-existent due to the fact that the SDA church did not request that ethnic identity be reported on baptismal forms. Only since 2004, when statistical records for the denomination began to be recorded online, has this type of data been available for the researcher. However, the question of ethnicity on the current forms is offered as an optional category only.

Another limitation has to do with incompleteness of church records, or more specific, minutes of the Ephesus Church Board. Although Ephesus Church has been in existence since 1924, the official church minutes are available only from 1960 to the present. What happened to the records? Several scenarios could have taken place.
Firstly, in the past, a secured, designated space was not available in the church for the Clerk and church records. The Head Clerk would store the minutes and any correspondence at his/her home. The Head Clerk’s position is not a salaried position; so it is possible that some records could have been misplaced or lost in transfer, especially when new officers were elected. This office space for the Clerk’s Department recently became a reality. Secondly, the records could have been lost in the fire that destroyed the church in January 1969. To date, no one with whom I have spoken can verify the whereabouts of the lost records. Thirdly, there was a lack of information in the minutes from 1980 to 1990. The records during that period were very sparse, if any were taken at all.

Another challenge was the lack of other primary resources, such as bulletins and flyers. There was a time at Ephesus Church when certain materials were saved for later use, perhaps because those who kept the service bulletins, posters, and funeral bulletins did not realize they were responsible for archiving. Church functionaries likely kept the materials that they deemed the most important. However, as the years go by, personnel changes and new leadership come into the church. In an attempt to exercise their newfound role, they discard the old materials—the materials that could be used as artifacts—thus erasing a part of Ephesian history that has been difficult to retrieve. Realizing that I would not be able to acquire some of the materials that I was looking for from the church, I decided to contact some of the senior members of the church to ascertain whether or not they had retained any programs, bulletins or notices from the church. After some inquiry, I found out that many of these senior members have been forced to downsize their homes, many due to illness and having to be hospitalized or
placed in nursing facilities; thus, they were forced to move their stored records elsewhere. I was able to find information about the Ephesus Church, as early as 1930, in the archives at Oakwood University. Oakwood, considered the repository for Black Adventist history, had this information only because some members of Ephesus sent the material to the institution for archiving.

Along with the unavailability of written materials, there was a lack of accessibility to the audio and video recordings of church services from 1980 to 2000. The master copies of these materials were stored at the home of the leader of the Tape Ministry. His home was destroyed by fire in 2008. The only copies available are those that were purchased by individuals.

Methodology, Sources, and Demographic Results

Historical documentation for this project was gathered from various sources: church board minutes, printed programs, flyers and bulletins, audio and video recordings of various church services and musical programs, along with personal interviews from past and present musicians, choir members, and various members of the congregation.

In compiling historical evidence and conducting interviews, I have acted as a researcher with “insider” knowledge of the Church, having been a member for over forty years and a participant in church services as a choir member and vocal soloist. As “observer-participant,” I offer both “emic” and “etic” perspectives, as I bring my own biases and understanding of the musical practices of Ephesus to this research. Moreover, my acquaintance and close relationships with some of the members that I have interviewed have undoubtedly affected the ways in which I addressed questions to them,
and the ways in which some questions were answered. In some cases, I believe I was able to elicit information that a more “distant” observer may not have succeeded in obtaining.

How were the personal interviews gathered? Potential respondents were recruited using two methods: (1) by advertising in the church bulletin, and (2) by personal verbal invitation based on the respondents’ past and/or present role in the church.

For each participant, a script was read to them regarding the nature of the study. Upon receiving verbal permission, a letter of consent was distributed, reviewed, and signed by each participant. Out of a congregation of 1,231 members, 125 people responded to the study: 5 responded to the announcement in the bulletin, while 20 responded to personal invitation.

Each participant was asked a series of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The purpose of asking these questions was to get demographic information as well as personal opinions and recollections of the participants’ experiences at Ephesus Church. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the exception of one, which was conducted via Skype. While the interview was scheduled to last for an hour, most of them lasted for two or more hours.

Of the 25 participants, 12 were male and 13 were female (see Figure 1.1). The majority of the participants were between 65 years of age and older (see Figures 1.1 and 1.3). Why was this the largest group? There are several reasons. One reason is that the senior participants had more disposable time than the participants in the other age categories, and they were the most willing to participate. The second reason is that this senior group

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12 This number is based on a statistical report received from the Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, compiled on January 26, 2012. See Appendix A, page__.
met once a week at the Ephesus Church, the place where the majority of the interviews were taken. The most important reason was that the senior participants were able to provide background information about the origins of the church. Many of them were around from the beginning of the church and were able to recall specific events that were crucial to developing a more comprehensive history of the church.

The question of ethnicity brought interesting results. Some participants, although they were of mixed ethnicities, considered themselves to be African-American. One participant, in particular, had roots in Africa, the South, and the Caribbean; however, he connects mostly with his African-American heritage. There were four participants who considered themselves Caribbean-American. One participant considered herself Haitian-American, while another participant with roots in Costa Rica considered herself African-American (see Figures 1.1 and 1.3).

Out of the 25 participants in the study, 13 of them have graduate degrees – 11 masters degrees and two doctoral degrees. Only one participant had an education level under the high school level (see Figure 1.3).

While all of the participants are baptized members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 12 were not always part of the denomination. Ten of them came from other mainline churches. One participant had experimented in non-Christian religions (Buddhism, Islam) and had also considered himself an atheist and an agnostic. One participant held no membership in any particular church, but attended services in various churches, including the Jehovah’s Witnesses (see Figure 1.2).
Figure 1.1: Demographics of Participants’ Gender, Age, Educational Status, and Ethnicity

Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th># of People</th>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 to 34</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
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</tr>
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<td>65 and over</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Caribbean</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haitian</td>
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<td>African</td>
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<td>Spanish Origin</td>
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Figure 1.2: Demographics of Participants’ Church Affiliation and Participation

Demographics of Participants

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDA MEMBER</th>
<th># of People</th>
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</tr>
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<th>ALWAYS AN SDA</th>
<th># of People</th>
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<tr>
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<td>12</td>
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<th>OTHER FAITH/RELIGION</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopalian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah Witness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musician/Music Dept.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir Member</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deacon/Deaconess</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Office</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.3: Age Range, Ethnicity, and Educational Status of Interviewees

Demographics of Participants

Age Range

Ethnicity

Highest Education Level
All of the participants at one time or another have held a church office or participated in one or more ministries of the church. Out of the group interviewed 16 of the 25 participants served as choir members, while eight out of the 25 have worked in the Music Ministry of the church as either a musician (choir director, organist, or pianist) or in an administrative capacity (see Figure 1.2).

Literature Review

Since the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in relation to other mainline denominations, is a relatively young church, scholarly publications about the church did not appear until the early 20th century. Most of these studies, including both historical and theological dissertations, dealt mainly with the history of the church, education, and ministry within the denominational system. There are a handful of scholarly sources available that address the use of music of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In 1959, Melvin S. Hill wrote a dissertation entitled, “A History of Music Education in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Western Colleges.”¹³ The 1970s yielded two dissertations that were related to music and worship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: (1) “A History of Music and of Music Education of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,”¹⁴ by Charles L. Pierce in 1976; and (2) “An Investigation into the Role of Music in the Sabbath Morning Worship Service of Seventh-day Adventist Churches,”¹⁵ by Merle Judson Whitney in 1979. As recently as 2008, Wayne Bucknor, current chairman of the

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Music Department of Oakwood University, completed a study entitled, “The Changing Face of Music in the Liturgy of the African-American Seventh-day Adventist Church: Guideline for Improving its Qualitative Use”\textsuperscript{16} This dissertation is the only source to date that deals with issues pertaining to the cultural shift in music used in the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America and his perceptions on improving and integrating Black cultural elements within the service music of the church. Among studies that discuss connections between socio-political developments affecting African Americans within the United States and more localized changes within the SDA Church is the book \textit{Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement}\textsuperscript{17} by Samuel G. London, Jr.

While there are a limited number of sources that deal specifically with the use of music within Black churches within the SDA denomination, there are, however, numerous books and articles that discuss the elements of the music and worship experience within the African-American church. \textit{African American Christian Worship}\textsuperscript{18}, by Melva Wilson Costen, and \textit{Let Mt. Zion Rejoice: Music in the African American Church},\textsuperscript{19} by James Abbington, discuss the origins of many social and musical elements of the African-American culture as it relates to sacred music in the church.

There are books and dissertations that focus on the SDA church and how it relates to people of varied ethnicities. \textit{The Theory and Practice of the Music in the Seventh-day


\textsuperscript{17} Samuel G. London, Jr., \textit{Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).


Adventist Church in Papua New Guinea,20 by Jennifer J. Jones, is a study that gives the history of the SDA church and the use of traditional music in the churches in Papua New Guinea. This study is important because it discusses the acculturation process that took place in the music and culture when the Adventist movement spread to Papua New Guinea. Perspectives: Black Seventh-day Adventist Face the Twenty-First Century,21 edited by Calvin B. Rock, discusses various issues that face African-Americans in the SDA church in the new millennium. In this collection of essays is Alma Blackmon’s article, “Black Seventh-day Adventist and Church Music,”22 in which Blackmon gives her perspective on Blacks and their relationship to the cultural shift in the music within the SDA church.

Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church is also the subject of a dissertation written by Neil Reid, former Youth Pastor of the Ephesus Church. His document entitled, “Target Youth: Toward a New Paradigm to Nurture Holistically Black Urban Youth Within the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church,”23 is based on a study he did on the restructuring of the Youth Church in order to meet the current spiritual and social needs of senior youth at the church in the 1990s. Some of the restructuring affected the music ministry at the Ephesus Church; however, these effects on music were not documented in his study.

23 Neil Reid, “Target Youth: Toward a New Paradigm to Nurture Holistically Black Urban Youth Within the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church” (D. Min. diss., United Theological Seminary, 1997).
Chapter Overview

Although Ephesus Church is a predominantly Black congregation within the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist denomination, the Church has had to choose between these ideals: the abandonment of its African American musical culture through the acculturation of a Euro-centric worship style and musical culture, versus the acceptance of an ethno-musical culture that encompasses its African-American identity. The exploration of the Church’s musical practices that point to shifting dynamics and conflicts between these two ideals will be underpinned by preliminary discussions about the liturgical, musical, and ethnic-based traditions of the Church.

In Chapter Two, background history of the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be discussed, beginning with the origins in the Millerite Movement, and organizational expansion in the Northern and Western regions of the United States. Proselytistic and educational efforts in the South and African American membership growth will also be discussed, in addition to the beginning of urban ministries in New York City.

Chapter Three gives a general overview of the use of music and musical repertoire within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States, including the emergence of African American repertoire and performing styles within various Adventist churches. Social-political developments and their effects on the African American culture, music, and identity within the SDA church will be discussed.

Chapter Four outlines the historical and musical origins of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church. Information about the musical culture at the Church before 1970 will be highlighted.
In Chapter Five, the author will discuss developments and musical practices that have occurred at the Ephesus Church between 1970 and 2010, highlighting various changes in musical leadership, musical education, and incorporation of various genres, along with the organization of various choirs and ensembles. Chapter Six will summarize the findings of this project.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

History of the Organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has its roots in the Millerite Movement, one of the many religious movements that were prominent during the Second Great Awakening in the early 19th century in North America. The Second Great Awakening, a Christian revival movement that began around 1800, focused on remedying the evils of society in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There are several denominations and sects in addition to the Seventh-day Adventist Church that were established as a result of this movement:

- Church of Christ
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Cumberland Presbyterian Church
- Evangelical Christian Church (in Canada)
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); and
- Jehovah’s Witnesses

Most of the teachings expressed during the Second Great Awakening were based on the ideas of Joseph Arminius, a Dutch theologian, who believed that:

- Election (and condemnation on the Day of Judgment) was conditioned by the rational faith or non-faith of man;
- The Atonement of Christ, while qualitatively adequate for all people, was efficacious only for the person of faith (who believes);
• No person is able to respond to God’s will without the aid of the Holy Spirit;
• Grace is not irresistible; and
• Believers are able to resist sin but are not beyond the possibility of falling from grace.²⁴

The Second Great Awakening brought millions of new members into various denominations through the use of tent revivals and small group meetings at homes and churches. This movement stimulated the establishment of a collection of reform movements that hoped to cure the evils of society before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, in which the reformers fervently believed. Out of this era came William Miller, the founder of the Millerite Movement.

William Miller was born on February 15, 1782. Although raised in a Christian home, he rejected Christian beliefs for deism – a popular religious philosophy of the latter 18th century that states that reason and observation of the natural world, not Christianity, can determine that the universe is the product of an all-powerful creator. Miller’s deistic views changed sometime after his service in the War of 1812, and he began to study the Bible. George R. Knight, in the book entitled, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, states that Miller, “like many of his generation… felt impelled to study the Bible, and, also like many, he was converted or reconverted to Christianity as the Second Great Awakening revitalized the American churches.”²⁵

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Based on his intensive study of Daniel 8:14, Miller believed that the Christ’s return to earth would be around 1844. The message that Miller preached was unpopular and went contrary to the spirit or philosophy of the times:

There was a sense of unease, for the idea that the history of the world was approaching its final culmination was popular. Most people, however, expected this ending to involve the progressive perfection of the existing world rather than its annihilation. The Millerites warned of destruction at the very time that most Americans anticipated progress. It was an unsettling combination.26

In the midst of the jeers and taunting, Miller heralded the end of the world, and the need for people to be ready for the cataclysmic event that he predicted would occur on October 22, 1844.

When the end of the world did not materialize at that time, many followers of the Millerite Movement experienced great disappointment. Some returned to their former churches while others left Christianity all together. Yet in their disappointment, there was a remnant of followers who delved into the Scriptures and searched for an explanation as to why the end of the world did not take place in 1844. As a result of intense study, the remnant members of the Millerite Movement refocused on their spiritual beliefs and the importance of religious evangelism throughout the world.

Black Involvement in the Millerite Movement

While many of the followers of the Millerite Movement were Caucasian, there was also a Black contingency of followers. According to Louis B. Reynolds in his book entitled, We Have Tomorrow, “[t]he Advent Awakening of the 1830s, initiated by the preaching of William Miller, attracted numerous free Negroes to well-attended camp

meetings in various sections of New England.”

Reynolds names three Black Millerite preachers of this period: Charles Bowles, John W. Lewis, and William E. Foy – all in the New England area of the country. Of the three Black ministers, William Foy, a freed Black Baptist minister, receives special recognition because he was the first of three people in the Advent Awakening (Hazen Foss and Ellen G. Harmon are the other two) “to receive visions intended to stabilize believers facing the Disappointment.”

Foy’s two visions were received with criticism from the White followers:

Almost immediately criticism arose from Millerites who feared publicity concerning those in their midst who claimed to have divine revelations. Because of this, Foy was even more hesitant to tell what he had seen and heard. Also he was aware, he said, of “the prejudice among the people against those of my color.” It was a tormenting ordeal, and many times he pondered the reasonableness of his charge to relate the visions. “Why should these things be given to me, to bear to the world?” he said.

William Foy “reluctantly consented” to speak about his visions to the members of the Bloomfield Street church on February 6, 1842. Other than a brief hiatus necessitated by his lack of finances, Foy travelled extensively, preaching the Millerite message. He had a third vision that gave information about the future of the Advent Movement:

According to J. N. Loughborough, Adventist historian, Foy had a third vision near the time of the expectation of 1844, which called attention to

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28 The terms “Advent Awakening,” “Second Great Awakening,” and “Second Advent” all refer to the worldwide Christian revival movement that took place during the early 19th century. During this time, diligent study of the Bible brought about a renewed interest and belief in the imminent Second Coming of Jesus Christ.
29 Reynolds, 19. The Great Disappointment (also known as the Disappointment) was a major event in which the members of the Millerite Movement were disappointed when Jesus Christ did not appear on October 22, 1844.
30 Ibid., 21.
31 Ibid.
32 While the “Advent Awakening” describes interest in the Scriptures by Christians worldwide, the “Advent Movement” refers to this interest in North America between the 1830s and 1840s. William Miller and his followers (the Millerites) are the outgrowth of the Advent Movement.
three platforms and which related to a development in the Advent movement beyond 1844.33

Foy, Lewis, and Bowles were undoubtedly important to Millerite evangelism and to the recruitment and conversion of Black members, as Reynolds points out: “because of William Miller’s Negro following, one is not surprised that later, when Seventh-day Adventist churches were formally organized, throughout New England congregations that were largely White included Americans of African descent.”34

Other prominent Blacks in the 19th century had some connection or affiliation with the Millerite movement and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Frederick Douglass was moved by the Millerite message, and although he did not join the group, his daughter, Rosetta Douglass Sprague, became a member of a Seventh-day Adventist church in Washington, D. C. Sojourner Truth (c. 1797 – 1883), well-known Black activist of the 1800s, “visited two Millerite camp meetings in 1843” and “identified herself with Adventists from that time to the end of her life.”35 Reynolds notes the absence of historical data, but speculates further on her Adventist connections:

There’s no clerk’s record of Sojourner’s Adventist membership, for all church records were destroyed when the Dime Tabernacle burned. However, statements attributed to her show her belief in temperance, in dress reform, in the Sabbath, and other teachings expounded by the Adventists. Another biographer states that in her latter years she made a great change in her religious life, which seems strongly to suggest that she joined the Adventist Church.36

Sojourner Truth is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Michigan, near the graves of Ellen G. White, a founding member of the Adventist Church, and other Adventist pioneers.

33 Ibid.
34 Reynolds, 22.
Organization and Expansion

After the Great Disappointment of 1844, the Millerite followers experienced what Richard Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf called, “a tidal wave of negative emotions…humiliation, confusion, doubt, disappointment.”37 Not only were they faced with disappointment, many were embarrassed and to avoid “jeering neighbors, … stayed sequestered in their homes.”38 However, in the midst of these overwhelming emotions, many members were encouraged and their faith was strengthened.

Between the Fall of 1844 and 1848, after some believers had left Millerite churches, the remaining remnant group fleshed out the doctrines and tenets that formed the foundation of the new denomination:

1. The imminent, personal, premillennial Second Advent;
2. The twofold ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, whose cleansing had begun in 1844;
3. The seventh-day Sabbath;
4. God’s special, supernatural enlightenment through Ellen White;
5. The duty to proclaim all three angels’ messages in Revelations 14:6-11;
6. Conditional immortality and death as a dreamless sleep;
7. The timing of the seven last plagues; and
8. The final, complete extinction of the wicked after the millennium.39

Between 1857 and 1860, a series of general conferences were held in order to create the organizational structure of the new denomination. There was some opposition by those who felt that the group should not organize. Gary Land, in his book entitled, *Adventism in American*, stated that Roswell Cottrell was “one vigorous and effective

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38 Schwarz and Greenleaf, 51.
39 Ibid., 66-67.
opponent.”⁴⁰ He strongly believed that giving the group a name was wrong because “it lies at the foundation of Babylon,” and that the “work in which we are engaged is the Lord’s and he needs not the aid of insurance companies to take care of his property.”⁴¹

The main issue that caused great controversy was choosing a name for the organization:

… the Sabbath-keeping Adventists had been referred to by many titles since their first identification as a separate group. They were designated as “Seventh-day People,” “Sabbathkeeping Advent Believers,” “Seventh-day Believers,” “Sabbath-keeping Adventists,” “Advent Sabbathkeepers,” “Sabbathday Door Shutters,” “Seventh-day Brethren,” “Shut Door Seventh Day Sabbath and Annihilationists,” “Sabbath-keeping Remnant of Adventists,” and even as “The Church of God.” The latter was a name that White and a number of others favored up to the time of the 1860 conference.⁴²

In the end, the name Seventh-day Adventist was selected because the name “would be descriptive of the basic tenets of faith of the body of believers.”⁴³

By the founding of the official organization in 1863, the Seventh-day Adventists had a publishing house, “six local conferences operating, 3500 members, twenty-two ordained ministers, eight licensed ministers, and 125 churches”⁴⁴ that spanned from the Northeast to the Midwest; furthermore, they were beginning to expand into other regions of the United States and abroad.
Efforts in the South

As the movement progressed within the United States, evangelism in the South was stymied by social and cultural behaviors that differed from those in the North or Midwest and that created apprehension among church missionaries. Even more problematic was the rise of racial tensions as the Civil War between the North and South began in 1861. Curiously, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination was instituted during this conflict, when the United States was essentially at war with itself:

The formal organization of the Adventist Church just at the outbreak of the Civil War, and their small numbers and resources, prevented them, in spite of the abolitionist background of many of their members, from joining the educational and evangelical movement sponsored in the South by the major Protestant bodies in the postwar period.45

After the War, the South remained a problematic region for evangelism. Delbert W. Baker, in a four-part series of articles entitled, “In Search of Roots: Adventist African Americans,” which outlines the history of Blacks within the denomination, states: “From the beginnings of the Adventist Church in New England and New York, the general trend of the work was westward, not southward.”46 As he describes the state of the nation after the Civil War and the response of Adventists, Baker emphasizes the most overt problems, such as the horrific practice of lynching and the beginnings of Jim Crow laws. Although he implies that such problems restricted missionary work, he also notes that the Adventist leader Ellen White thought the post-War period was ripe for it:

While the Civil War and Reconstruction provided Blacks with at least some level of liberty, it had not made them fully free. The nation’s racial problems continued with segregation, discrimination, lynching,

45 Land, 91.
sharecropping, and the draconian Black Codes, essentially a new form of slavery.

During this time the Seventh-day Adventist Church could have made a profound and historic impact on behalf of the Black race. Ellen White believed this period provided a unique window of opportunity to help a people who were at a nadir.\textsuperscript{47}

Corresponding with White’s suggestions, there were some early efforts to minister to Blacks in the southern region of the country, at least in outlying areas, but these did not have lasting effects. “During the 1870s several individual Seventh-day Adventists made transitory efforts to help former slaves obtain a basic education.\textsuperscript{48} This work, which took place in Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky, was growing until 1877, but not without racial backlash in various communities. Schwarz and Greenleaf gives an example of public opposition to the education of freed Blacks that took place in Missouri:

Public opposition may have led to the curtailing of the church’s unofficial educational work for Blacks…. Opposition from prejudiced Whites may also have contributed to the early demise of a school for freedmen begun in 1877 by Mrs. H. M. Van Slyke in Ray County, Missouri.\textsuperscript{49}

This treatment was also exhibited in Texas and Tennessee. After the failure of these attempts, the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not return to the South until the 1890s. Delbert Baker considers this period between 1844 and 1891 the “Inactive Period” (followed by the “Active Period” after 1891). (See other details from Baker’s outline of Adventist evangelism on pages 37-39 below.) He states that even though the denomination was better prepared than other religious and non-religious organizations to deal with the needs of Black people during Reconstruction, the church did very little for

\textsuperscript{47} Baker, 8.
\textsuperscript{48} Schwarz and Greenleaf, 225.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 226.
Blacks in the South. He explains that, although the Black race especially needed the Adventist message of Christ’s rescue, White Adventist ministers aimed their efforts primarily at Whites during this “Inactive Period”:

The Seventh-day Adventist teachings, while challenging in their unorthodoxy, were simple and clear, suited to be understood by the masses and ideal for Black people searching for direction.

The belief concerning the soon appearing of Christ to rescue His people from pain, injustice, and oppression especially appealed to Black people, who were typically victims of oppression. The biblical teachings of a weekly Sabbath rest appealed to many who were often grossly overworked. Not to be overlooked were the then-evolving health and temperance teachings, which provided a dramatic key to help address the physical needs of the Black race. Black people brought with them a spiritual fervency and commitment. In turn, the Adventist Church offered a complete and reliable system of truth.

Unfortunately, Black people were not to be introduced to Adventist teachings until almost a quarter century later [c. 1890]. The period following 1865 was primarily characterized by sporadic and individual efforts of lay missionaries and ministers of primarily Southern origin. During this period Adventist made little effort to evangelize Black people. Rather, White ministers…conducted evangelistic meetings for Whites in various Southern cities.50

At the biennial General Conference session on March 12, 1891, Ellen White again demonstrated her concern for ministering to Blacks, as she read an appeal to thirty leaders of the church regarding race relations and the Christian response she believed the Church should adopt:

The Lord Jesus came to our world to save men and women of all nationalities. He died just as much for the colored people as for the white race…The color of the skin does not determine character in the heavenly courts…The Lord’s eye is upon all His creatures: He loves them all, and makes no difference between white and black, except that He has a special tender pity for those who are called to bear a greater

50 Baker, 9.
burden...Sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made greater effort for the salvation of souls among the colored people.\textsuperscript{51}

James Edson White, son of Ellen White, took his mother’s message to heart. He sold his business and embarked upon full-time ministry in the South. In the spring of 1891, Edson White, Will O. Palmer, and their spouses left Michigan on the Morning Star, a steamboat that would be their home, classroom, and church for over 10 years. They made stops in Chicago, Peoria, Illinois and Nashville, Tennessee before arriving in Vicksburg, Mississippi. By 1898, Edson White established the Southern Missionary Society with the purpose of continuing to bring Christian education along with medical ministry to Blacks in the South. Many times White and his companions were faced with opposition from local inhabitants of both races. However, they persevered and the work grew. By 1901, White “moved his river steamboat and the Southern Missionary Society to Nashville. From there he directed an expanding church work for African Americans.”\textsuperscript{52} Edson White retired to Michigan in 1905 and was succeeded by George I. Butler as president of the Southern Missionary Society. By the end of the decade, work amongst Blacks had expanded tremendously: membership nearly tripled from 50 members in 1890 to 900 members in 1909.

While the Southern Missionary Society was overseeing much of the church’s outreach in the South, including educational efforts, it did not cover the rest of the country. In 1909, the Society was brought under the Negro Department of the General Conference, which was created to monitor the evangelistic work relating to Blacks in all parts of the United States. Gary Land makes clear that, at the time of this change in

\textsuperscript{51} Ellen G. White. \textit{The Southern Work} (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2004), 9-15. This book is a compilation of writings by Ellen G. White written from 1891 to 1899.
\textsuperscript{52} Land, 93.
oversight, the Society’s efforts had also been effective in the construction of Southern schools: “When [the Southern Missionary Society] supervision was turned over to the newly created General Conference Negro Department in 1909, the society was sponsoring fifty-five primary schools in ten southern states, in which over eighteen hundred pupils were enrolled.”

During the years that Edson White and the Southern Missionary Society were doing their work independent of the General Conference, there were other individuals and organizations that were also making strides in the South. One individual who was instrumental in the proselytizing efforts in the Southern and Western regions of the United States was Charles M. Kinney. Kinney was born into slavery in Richmond, Virginia in 1855. At the end of slavery, Kinney was “one of the millions who wandered from place to place in search of his family roots and of a place that he could call home.”

His travels landed him in Reno, Nevada. Delbert Baker discusses Kinney’s evangelistic contributions in the third part of his four-part series entitled, In Search of Roots:

As the first Black person to be ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, and the first church worker and spokesperson among Black people, Kinney can rightfully be called the father of the Black work. Moving West after the Civil War, Kinney ended up in Reno, Nevada, where he attended evangelistic meetings held by J. N. Loughborough. Won to the truth through the preaching of Loughborough and Ellen White, Kinney ever held dear his acquaintance with them and the fact that he learned the Adventist truth from them.

Independent in thought, Kinney became the first to articulate the concerns of Black Adventists in the areas of race, church polity, and organization equity. For two decades Kinney labored throughout the South on behalf of Blacks, preaching to any person who would listen to his message. He believed that Black people needed to grow in three
areas to reach their potential: education, experience, and economic development.

An avid belief of his was that Seventh-day Adventist doctrine could provide for the spiritual needs of Black people or any disadvantaged people. Therefore he did everything in his power to see that his people received a knowledge of the truth and that the Adventist Church did all it could to advance the Black work.55

Charles Kinney’s work is evident, especially in the state of Kentucky. He was responsible for establishing Black churches in Bowling Green, Murray, Louisville, and Lexington during the 1880s and 1890s.

The Establishment of Oakwood University

The significance of Charles Kinney within Adventist missions and the growing importance of evangelism in the South also figured in the establishment of a school in Huntsville, Alabama, which would eventually become the denomination’s center of higher education. Kinney is credited with finding this location for Oakwood Industrial School, or Huntsville Industrial School, later known as Oakwood College and, from 2008, Oakwood University. Dr. Mervyn A Warren, author of Oakwood! A Vision Splendid: 1896-1996 states that:

To some degree the area [Huntsville, AL] could be said to have been tested and prepared by the evangelistic work of Elder Charles M. Kinny [sic], reputedly the first black ordained to the SDA ministry, who since September 24, 1894, had lived in and sown gospel and educational seeds in Huntsville…. It is believed that earliest recommendations favoring Huntsville as the location for the Oakwood school might have begun with Kinny [sic].56

In the book, *Thou Who Hast Brought Us*, the late Charles Dudley describes several historical connections to the site that made it an ideal choice for Oakwood’s campus:

In 1894, Elder Kinney went to Huntsville, Alabama, in search of a suitable site on which to establish a school for the training of the children of former slaves to share the gospel message with their own people. When Elders Olson and Butler arrived from the General Conference, he carried them to this area that had served as the Jacobs plantation before the Civil War.

It was also a historic site, for Andrew Jackson, one of the presidents of the United States, had made many visits to the Old Mansion for festive occasions; Dred Scott, the former slave, had served on this plantation for more than 18 years. He was one who helped to change the direction in history when the courts of Missouri denied him his freedom. This was a meaningful location. Ellen White stated that this was the very spot that the Lord had shown her in vision and that it would serve as a place for the training of Black youth. It was here that the Huntsville Industrial Training School (presently Oakwood College) was established in 1896.57

The curriculum at Oakwood Industrial (or Huntsville Industrial) in its beginning stages was different from the curriculum at the other Adventist institutions. The purpose of the early school was not merely “proselytizing Blacks to the church”; it laid down “an important basic in the church’s philosophy of education.”58 Mervyn A. Warren writes:

Learning to read, write, and figure is so indispensably a practical fundamental for living amid a civilized culture until it precedes certain religious indoctrination. Real practical living transcends religion that is “compensatory” other-worldly escape from life, a recurring description of early Black religious belief.” True Christianity educates a person to live in this life as well as in the life hereafter as summarized by Ellen White when she wrote that true education “has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”59

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57 Dudley, *Thou Who Hast Brought Us... Book One*, 122.
58 Warren, 47.
59 Warren, 47.
Creating an educational facility for Blacks was new territory for the denomination.

Though Edson White had made progress with Blacks in the South, “the Morning Star schools who, as they completed elementary grades, had need of more advanced training to prepare themselves for teaching, nursing, Bible work, the ministry, and related fields.”\(^{60}\) The denomination needed an educational plan. The curriculum at Oakwood or Huntsville Industrial was structured after Booker T. Washington’s curriculum at Tuskegee Institute, a school for Blacks established in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1881:

The manual arts, emphasized by Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, had seemed an essential part of any program in education for Negroes, and this aspect was not left out of the reckoning. Edson White had advocated this also because so many had expressed the fear that schools for Blacks would unfit them for practical everyday encounters; the feeling was that an educated Black man would not work; hence the [W]hite man would have to take care of him.

Moreover, the idea that Blacks should be taught chiefly to farm and work railroad beds and perform domestic chores was prevalent throughout the South, as one readily observes in institutional names such as Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical College, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College, and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College. Tuskegee Institute was the most famous leader in the work ethic, and since its graduates were assured of jobs wherever they went, Adventists followed the development of Tuskegee with growing interest.\(^{61}\)

When Oakwood Industrial School opened on November 16, 1896, there were 16 students. By 1904, the school was renamed Oakwood Manual Training School. In 1917, the school again was renamed Oakwood Junior College and had more than 100 students enrolled. Oakwood received its accreditation in 1943 as a four-year institution and in 2008 received university status.\(^{62}\)

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\(^{60}\) Reynolds, 190.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 190-191.

Today, Oakwood University has 2,006 students\textsuperscript{63} enrolled and is still considered the “Mecca” of Black Adventism where students “enter to learn” and “depart to serve.”\textsuperscript{64}

\textit{From Rural to Urban Evangelism}

As stated earlier, most of the expansion of the Seventh-day Adventist church in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century took place in the northern and mid-western regions of the United States. While most of the proselytizing and expansion took place in small, rural communities, not enough emphasis was placed on reaching people who lived in densely populated areas – namely, the cities. Land discusses basic evangelical methods used within urban communities:

The original Adventist city mission was not directed toward welfare work for the underprivileged but was concerned with attracting interested persons from all walks of society to Adventist beliefs. The normal plan was to establish a mature couple in a respectable residential area and gradually add to this “home base” others especially interested in working in city evangelism. Door-to-door selling, loaning, or giving away of Adventist books and pamphlets provided an introduction. As these canvasses found interested persons, they made appointments for Bible instruction. At meetings held in the homes of prospective church members, the Adventist mission worker directed systematic study of some religious topic through the consideration of numerous Bible texts. In this way Adventist churches were established in many major cities where there had been none before.\textsuperscript{65}

From 1874, when Merritt E. Cornwall and Elder Dudley M. Canright held evangelistic meetings in Oakland, California,\textsuperscript{66} the Seventh-day Adventist church started

\textsuperscript{63} There were 1,953 undergraduates, 23 post-baccalaureates, and 30 graduate students in Fall 2011: \url{http://www.oakwood.edu/zpublic/institutional-effectiveness/statistical%20data/Enrollment-Statistics-Fall-2011.pdf} (accessed September 20, 2012).
\textsuperscript{64} Motto of the school. \url{http://www.oakwood.edu/zpublic/institutional-effectiveness/bulletins/bulletin-2009-2011.pdf}.
\textsuperscript{65} Land, 88-89.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 88.
to expand into urban areas. By 1888, the General Conference had established 22 evangelistic centers, as well as a religious training school in Chicago.\(^{67}\)

In 1884 the General Conference established a mission training school in Chicago to improve the preparation of workers for urban areas. During the next few years this school gave in-service training to over one hundred people, who then scattered throughout eighteen states and six foreign countries. Meanwhile, these students had converted over one hundred people to Adventism in Chicago.\(^{68}\)

Cities, with their potential for prosperity and convenience, had become a haven for the poor. Rural ministry, which entailed an individual or one-to-one approach, had its challenges, but none like the challenges of urban ministry. In order to reach urban residents on a spiritual level, the Adventists realized that they had to meet their immediate needs. Land describes the Adventists’ adaptations:

During the 1890s, Adventist city missions underwent a dramatic change in emphasis. This began in 1893, when Kellogg acquired the Chicago Mission Training School and transformed it into a branch of the Battle Creek Sanitarium. At the same time, he organized a welfare-type mission at the south end of the Chicago Loop. This “medical mission” included a free dispensary a laundry, an area for baths, and visiting nurse services for the poor and unemployed in the area. Begun later were a penny lunch counter, free kindergarten for working mothers, and an educational program designed for mothers struggling with the problems of child rearing.\(^{69}\)

The work in Chicago was very successful; however, the early evangelistic attempts in New York City were not as effective. In 1901, Stephen Haskell, along with his wife and some helpers, came to New York City to implement the community-oriented methods that had brought good results in Chicago:

The Haskells and a number of helpers...initially had success using the old door-to-door method of distributing religious literature and soliciting prospects to take Bible studies. Through one success they were able to

\(^{67}\) Ibid.
\(^{68}\) Land, 89.
\(^{69}\) Ibid.
rent a large hall in mid-Manhattan…. Six months after starting the
program, Haskell secured the services of a female physician, Dr.
Carolyn Geisel of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, to give health lectures
and run a cooking school. Opportunities also developed for special
work among Blacks, Jews, and Germans in Brooklyn.70

Though the Haskells were making strides in proselytizing New Yorkers, they were faced
with “the ugly demon of race prejudice.”71 They were forced to have separate meetings
for Blacks and Whites, “a move that drew criticism that would hamper their work.”72 By
the time the Haskells left New York City in 1902, there was a small, consistent group of
Black Adventists – a remnant of eleven members that would eventually grow to 600
members: these original eleven members were the progenitors of what would become
Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church.

*Black Membership in North America*

Though there was an African American presence in the Millerite Movement, as
discussed above, the Seventh-day Adventist church chronicles the growth of Black
membership beginning around the 1890s with 50 people, mainly in the South. Adding to
the historical background of Adventist inroads in the South given in the previous
sections, Calvin Rock gives further insight into Black membership growth in the late 19th
century in his dissertation entitled, “Institutional Loyalty versus Racial Freedom: The
Dilemma of Black Seventh-day Adventist Leadership”:

> In the pre-Civil War days and, in fact, until separate Black churches
were organized in the early 1870s, Black Seventh-day Adventists, being
small in numbers, worshipped and traveled (though often second class)
in the same facilities as their White counterparts. But, between the
1870s and 1880s, the evangelism of Blacks in the South by various

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70 Ibid, 90.
71 Land, 91.
72 Ibid.
White missionaries caused their numbers to escalate and there soon developed the need and desire for racially separate congregations. As many as sixteen of these were established in the 1870s, fourteen in the 1880s, twelve in the 1890s, so that by 1900 there were no less than 42 Black S.D.A. churches in the United States.  

Upon first observation of this statement, one could be led to believe that Rock and Baker are contradicting one another as it relates to the size of growth from 1870 to 1900. However, while Rock accounts for every evangelistic effort that was made on behalf of former slaves, individual and corporate, Baker main focus was on the corporate or governing body of the SDA Church. While the Church may have granted individuals to proselytize in the South, she gave little financial or physical support to those willing individual who toiled in that field.

As stated previously, Black membership within the denomination grew from 150 members to over 1,000 members. This growth prompted the General Conference to establish the Negro Department to help facilitate the evangelistic work that was being done on behalf of Blacks. Delbert Baker describes the growth of the Black work in the fourth part of a Black History series entitled, “In Search of Roots” published in the Adventist Review. In addition to the succinct descriptions of the denomination’s inactivity (1860 – 1890) and activity (1891 – 1910), Baker also identifies eight additional stages of the denomination’s Black evangelistic growth:

1. Independent Initiative (1894 – 1900): Edson White responded to Ellen White’s 1891 appeal and went to the South with the Morning

74 These numbers come from Table 2 in Calvin Rock’s dissertation. The figures are based on a compilation of SDA Annual Statistical Reports.
Star steamboat and organized/instituted the Southern Missionary Society in 1895. This work was deemed “independent” because it was not fully funded by the General Conference (The General Conference barely gave aid or assistance).

2. Progressive Maturation (1901 – 1907): the Southern Missionary Society grew in spite of obstacles and problems. The General Conference recognized the Black work as a viable and significant part of the Adventist organization and grafted the Southern Missionary Society into the Southern Union Conference in 1901.


4. Organizational Inclusion (1909 – 1940): the Black work experienced progress, but with the insistent undertone that much more needed to be done. At the beginning of this period, Ellen White still voiced her concern that the church had not done and was not doing what it could for the Black work. This era experienced rapid growth. This growth necessitated that Adventist leaders officially include Black leadership and presence at the highest levels of the church. During this period, two major incidents shook up the church: the defrocking of J.K. Humphrey and the expulsion of the First Harlem SDA congregation; and, death of Lucy Byard. The ending result of these affairs was the formation of Black or regional conferences.

5. Participative Governance (1944 – 1951): the collaborative efforts of regional conferences and Black leadership at the General Conference, division, and union conference levels became the evangelistic norm. As a result, “Black membership increased from 20,000 in the early 1940s to more than 70,000 in the 1950s.”

6. Cultural Activism (1952 – 1969): this was the era of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, and considered the most stormy racial period in the church in the United States. While the country was reordering its laws and attitudes towards Blacks, the

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77 Lucy Byard, a Black Adventist from New York, was refused admittance to the Washington Sanitarium, an Adventist hospital in Maryland, due to her race. She was transferred to the Freedman’s Hospital at Howard University and died of pneumonia shortly after her arrival. This incident was the catalyst that forced the General Conference to agree to the organization of Black or regional conferences.
78 Baker, 1/13.
Adventist church was also reassessing their own practices and attitudes toward the Black contingency of the church.

7. Affirmative Resolution (1970 – 1977): during this time the Adventist church was “struggling with its practical relationship to issues of discrimination, equal opportunity, and affirmative action.” There was still segregation in some Adventist churches and institutions. The Black contingency, in an attempt to get the church to address these issues, demonstrated and even boycotted.

8. Spiritual Empowerment (1978 – present): the Caucus of Black SDA Administrators was formed to “provide Black leadership a unique opportunity to fulfill the objectives of the Black work through evangelizing, ministering, nurturing, facilitating, and promulgating.” While the main objective of the Caucus is ministry, they still deal with the “residual prejudice that too often subtly and imperceptibly appears in the church.”

These stages that Baker describes corresponds to what other Blacks were experiencing in the United States. In the midst of these changes, the Black contingency in the Adventist is still growing. As of 2010, Black membership is at 279,022 in the United States.

79 Baker, 1/13.
80 Ibid.
81 This figure of Black Membership, contained in the 148th Annual Statistical Report – 2010, was found on the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists website, http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/ASR/ASR2010.pdf#view=fit. This total is based on the total membership in regional conferences: Allegheny East – 37,548; Allegheny West – 13,691; Central States – 13,098; Lake Region – 29,454; Northeastern – 49,172; South Atlantic – 42,139; South Central – 28,548; Southeastern - 41,463; and Southwest Region – 23,909. Accessed 4 October 2012.
CHAPTER 3
MUSIC IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Music in the Early Adventist Movement

The earliest records of the use of music in the Seventh-day Adventist church were documented by Charles Pierce in his 1976 dissertation entitled, “A History of Music and of Music Education of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” Pierce was able to conclude (based on the limited existing records of the beginnings of the church) that since there was no formal organization, church congregations in the 1830s consisted of small groups of believers in various areas. “These groups were held together in loose fashion by itinerant ‘deacons’ who visited them from time to time and brought them not only preaching but some form of worship in music as well.” Pierce notes:

One “itinerant deacon” who was a musical leader in his own family and in various church gatherings was John White, father-in-law of Ellen G. White. He and his family sang, as Pierce notes:

The John White family was very important in the early church organization, and the children became involved at an early age by using their talent for music. They all sang and were given some type of music instruction so that they would be able to help their father. The father, who was a singer, took his children with him as he went from place to place to conduct his meetings and their singing added much to the attraction of these gatherings.

The hymns that were used were “Advent” hymns mainly because these groups were looking forward to the imminent return of Jesus Christ, and these particular hymns kept them focused on that event. Advent hymns were “sung on every occasion, and to

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83 Pierce, 1.
the significance of their use not only in worship but wherever the early Adventists

happened to be."^{84}

The hymns were sung a cappella and incorporated a method called “lining out”

the hymn:

The manner of singing these hymns in meeting was that of “lining out”

the hymn, which was a custom followed by many churches and

congregations until printed hymnbooks were in general use. The only

mention made of this is from the record of the 1843 Maine Eastern

Christian Conference at which John White requested, “. . . if you will

read an Advent hymn, Samuel. So Samuel announced and read the

hymn, which they sang.” The origin of this manner of singing is

described by the ordinances of the Westminster Assembly of 1644: “. . .

for the present, where many of the congregation cannot read, it is

convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him

and the other officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing

thereof.” No mention is made in any source of the use of instruments to

accompany the singing until many years later and it is assumed that

eyearly Adventist singing was completely a cappella.^{85}

Since the majority of the early Adventists were country people, “farmers and laborers

with little culture and education,” the hymns had undemanding melodies to facilitate

congregational singing:

The hymns of the early Advent Church were simple and direct in style…

the type of music which they understood and were able to sing was the

music of the church. They were also musically uneducated and the

simple songs were necessary if they were to be sung congregationally.

It is not known whether effort was made to sing the hymns in harmony

or if they were unison songs. The style in which the tune was sung was

of little importance because the words were of much more consequence;

through them the congregation shared in their religious experience and

had a part in the service.^{86}

Music was not only used in regular religious services and social gatherings, but was also

used for evangelistic purposes. Although Pierce suggests in the passage above that the

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^{84} Ibid. 1.
^{85} Pierce, 3.
^{86} Ibid. 6.
text was more important than the music, or the “style in which the tune was sung,” in church services, he notes that music progressively became a powerful evangelistic force:

The importance of music as a means of attracting the public to evangelic meetings and as a method of presenting the Advent message became increasingly apparent to the denomination’s ministers. Since most of them had no musical training it became an accepted practice for people who could sing or play an instrument to be called upon to help with the music of these meetings. This was indicated in a report in which “… mention is made of a tent meeting at East Unity, New Hampshire, in which brethren were asked to come from Washington and Lempster to help with the singing.”87

Hymns as the Main Musical Source

As stated earlier, the predominant musical genre used in the church was the hymn. Most of the hymns were Advent in nature, and reflected what Merle Judson Whitney called “a sense of alienation” due to the other-worldly characteristic of the text88:

In letters, articles and records of “testimony” meetings there are frequent references to hymns that voice the feelings of alienation and the struggles of pilgrimage, but those hymns go on to extol the “blessed hope” of Christ’s soon coming and the glories of heaven. Hymns about the Sabbath were also great favorites.89

The following are examples of hymn texts that express the above sentiment of alienation and the blessings of the seventh-day Sabbath:

I Saw One Weary90
(Text by Annie R. Smith Music by George Coles)

I saw one weary, sad, and torn,
With eager steps press on the way,
Who long the hallowed cross had borne,

87 Ibid., 10.
88 The hymn texts reflected the imminent coming of Jesus Christ and a longing to leave the corrupt world and live with Jesus Christ for eternity.
90 This and the following hymn texts in this chapter were transcribed from the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal.
Still looking for the promised day;
While many a line of grief and care
Upon his brow was furrowed there;
I asked what buoyed his spirits up,
“O this!” said he – “the blessed hope.”

And one I saw, with sword and shield,
Who boldly braved the world’s cold frown,
And fought, unyielding, on the field,
To win the everlasting crown.
Though worn with toil, oppressed by foes,
No murmur from his heart arose;
I asked what buoyed his spirits up,
“O this!” said he – “the blessed hope.”

And there was one who left behind
The cherished friends of early years,
And honor, pleasure, wealth resigned,
To tread the path bedewed with tears.
Through trials deep and conflicts sore
Yet still a smile of joy he wore;
I asked what buoyed his spirits up,
“O this!” said he – “the blessed hope.”

While pilgrims here we journey on
In this dark vale of sin and gloom,
Through tribulation, hate, and scorn,
Or through the portals of the tomb,
Till our returning King shall come
To take His exile captives home,
O! what can buoy the spirits up,
Tis this alone – “the blessed hope.”

Safely Through Another Week⁹¹
(Text by John Newton  Music by Lowell Mason)

Safely through another week
God has brought us on our way;
Let us now a blessing seek,
Waiting in His courts today;

⁹¹ This hymn text was written in 1774 and was originally entitled “Saturday Evening.” The poem emphasized Newton’s belief of the Sabbath falling on Sunday.
Day of all the week the best,  
Emblem of eternal rest;  
Day of all the week the best,  
Emblem of all the week the rest.

While we seek supplies of grace  
Through the dear Redeemer’s name,  
Show Thy reconciling face,  
Take away our sin and shame;  
From our worldly cares set free  
May we rest this day in Thee.  
From our worldly cares set free  
May we rest this day in Thee.

When the morn shall bid us rise,  
May we feel Thy presence near,  
May Thy glory meet our eyes  
When we in Thy house appear,  
Here afford us, Lord, a taste  
Of our everlasting feast.  
Here afford us, Lord, a taste  
Of our everlasting feast.

May the gospel’s joyful sound  
Conquer sinners, comfort saints;  
Make the fruits of grace abound,  
Bring relief to all complaints  
Thus may all our Sabbaths be  
Till we rise to reign with Thee.  
Thus may all our Sabbaths be  
Till we rise to reign with Thee.

The hymns reflected the common spiritual and doctrinal bonds of the early Advent church. “The first hymnbooks of the Sabbath-keeping Adventists stressed the Second Advent and the Sabbath.”\footnote{Whitney, 9.} The text of the hymn “Watch, Ye Saints” is a good example of a hymn that describes the imminent return of Christ that was heralded during the Second Awakening:
Watch, Ye Saints
(Text by Phoebe Palmer   Music by William J. Kirkpatrick);

Watch, ye saints, with eyelids waking;
Lo! The powers of heaven are shaking
Keep your lamps all trimmed and burning,
Ready for your Lord’s returning.

Refrain:
Lo! He comes, Lo! Jesus comes;
Lo! He comes, He comes all glorious!
Jesus come, to reign victorious,
Lo! He comes, yes, Jesus comes!

Lo! the promise of your Savior,
Pardoned sin and purchased favor,
Blood-washed robes and crowns of glory;
Haste to tell redemption’s story.

Kingdoms at their base are crumbling,
Hark! His chariot wheels are rumbling;
Tell, O tell of grace abounding,
While the seventh trump is sounding.

Nations wane, tho’ proud and stately;
Christ His kingdom hasteth greatly;
Earth her latest pangs in summing;
Shout, ye saints, your Lord is coming.

Sinners, come, while Christ is pleading;
Now for you he’s interceding;
Haste, e’er grace and time diminished
Shall proclaim the mystery finished.

Another member of the White family important to the founding of the Seventh-day Adventist church was James White, the husband of Ellen G. White, who was instrumental in the compilation of the early hymnals of the denomination:

James White was not formally trained as a musician, but came from a musically talented family. He was known as a good singer. His hymnals evidence the fact that he must have kept up with the trends in church music at large in his day.\(^93\)

\(^93\) Whitney, 10.
Early hymnals published for the church were:

- *Hymns for God’s Peculiar People* (1849)
- *Hymns for the Second Advent Believers Who Observe the Sabbath of the Lord* (1852)
- *Hymns for Those Who Keep the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus* (1855)
- *Hymns and Tunes for Those Who Keep the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus* (1869, 1876).

### Hymnals in the Twentieth Century

As previously stated, the primary musical sources of the SDA church were hymns, anthems, and some jubilee or gospel songs in the early years of the denomination. The principal hymnals used during the beginning of the twentieth century were *Hymns and Tunes* (1886) and *Christ in Song* (1908). Published in 1886, *Hymns and Tunes*, as described by Pierce, was the official hymnal of the church until a new church hymnal was published in 1941. It contained 1,413 hymns. The first 1190 hymns were classified based on subject matter. Hymns 1191 to 1413 were listed based on special department of Bible songs and came to be the most popular part of the hymnal. This section contained many of the new hymns composed by F. E. Belden and Edwin Barnes.

*Christ in Song* was compiled and edited by Frank E. Belden (nephew of Mrs. Ellen G. White), and published in 1900 by the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Washington, D. C. It contained 950 hymns and 43 responsive readings from the Bible. Although it was not a denominational hymnal, it was extremely popular within the SDA churches. Pierce states that:

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[Christ in Song] was sold, however, by the Review and Herald and in a few years had taken the place of the church hymnal, Hymns and Tunes. Since it was a private enterprise by Frank Belden it was not discussed in the pages of the Review and Herald. Shortly after the book was published Mr. Belden left the church; this was another reason that it was not advertised by the Church’s publication. Despite this it became immensely popular and remained so until the publication of a new church hymnal in 1941.96

The 1941 Church Hymnal was used for forty years [in all SDA churches?]. In 1980, many church leaders were questioning whether it was time for a new hymnal. Ministry, a journal for Adventist ministers, published an article entitled, “Is it Time for a New Hymnal?” in 1981.97 The article, co-authored by Wayne Hooper and Bernard E Seton, expressed in the affirmative a need for a new hymnal. Each author had his own rationale for a new hymnal. Hooper, a respected musician within the denomination, stated several reasons why the hymnal was needed. First, Hooper felt that the hymns in the 1941 hymnal were not easy to sing due to nature of the melody, text setting, and key. He states that, “Many of the hymns are pitched too high. No. 566, “There Is a Stranger at the Door,” is an example of this problem. When most of us attempt to screech out the three high Fs in this hymn, I’m sure the “Stranger” would be frightened away!”98 Hooper also discussed the fact that the 1941 hymnal was behind the times and did not reflect the current musical culture and that it lacked music of African Americans, particularly spirituals:

A new awareness of the contributions of the black heritage deserves recognition. There is not a single Negro spiritual in our hymnal; yet, since the Civil War and the world tours of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, these unique and powerful songs have won a place in the programs of all the

96 Pierce, 33.
98 Hooper and Seton, 10.
great singers and choirs – and in our hearts. When a congregation sings such spirituals as “Trampin’ ” and “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian,” it can be a moving experience.\textsuperscript{99}

Hooper also believed that there was a need for more hymns that related to Adventist beliefs. He states that, “The Sabbath, Second Coming, judgment, sanctuary, and the priesthood of Christ are some of the subjects we need to sing more about.”\textsuperscript{100}

While Hooper focused on the musical aspects of the 1941 hymnal, Bernard Seton focused on its philosophical and visual aspects. Seton believed that the hymnal needed to be changed because it outlived its usefulness:

The useful lifetime of even the best of hymnbooks is more limited than most of us realize. Some authorities declare that the effective life is twenty years. Mixing that idealism with a pinch or two of realism, we may expect to need a new hymnal every thirty years. The years that follow this point of time are increasingly barren so far as the hymnbook is concerned. Our present Church Hymnal, published in 1941, is now forty years old, and is overdue for replacement.\textsuperscript{101}

Seton also outlines some major labeling and categorical mistakes in the 1941 hymnal, stating that “the present book reveals little evidence of its compilers’ acquaintance with the wealth of standard hymnals used by other communions during the past century,” and that lack of knowledge [of repertoire possibilities] has “impoverished itself and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”\textsuperscript{102}

By 1981, the General Conference appointed nineteen members to serve on the Church Hymnal Committee. The committee met two to three times a year from 1982 to 1985, surveying hymns and songs from various sources, including but not limited to old

\textsuperscript{99} Hooper and Seton, 11.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Hooper and Seton, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{102} Hooper and Seton, 11.
Adventist hymns, hymnals from various denominations and nationalities, folk songs, and Negro spirituals. The new hymnal, the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, was first distributed at the 1985 General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Ottilie Stafford, member of the SDA Church Hymnal Committee, describes the process and materials used in the 1985 hymnal:

About four hundred hymns were eventually added to the three hundred retained from the present hymnal. The choices were then sent to a panel of consultants whose responses were seriously considered and often affirmed. When some of the panel pointed out, for instance, the amount of sexist language in a hymn, the committee made an effort to make changes without doing violence to history or traditional rendition. Where appropriate changes could not be made, the hymn was eliminated rather than exclude a major portion of the church from its message…. 

Additions have been included from almost every period and style of hymnody: plainsong, German chorale, eighteenth-century English hymnody; German, Scandinavian, and Appalachian folksongs; twentieth-century hymns; old and new Adventist hymns; carols, gospel songs, rounds, and children’s hymns, as well as hymns about the modern city and the natural world…. 

Since 1950 there has been a tremendous resurgence of hymn writing in England by a group of hymn writers so productive that one must go back to Watts and Wesley to find an analogous period. The new Seventh-day Adventist Church Hymnal will contain a large number of hymns by such men as Fred Pratt Green, Fred Kaan, Brian Wren, and Timothy Dudley Smith [more] than any other present-day hymnal. It also brings back hymns from the old Hymns and Tunes of 1886.103 

The 1985 hymnal contains 695 hymns. In response to the increasing desire to represent African American musical expression, as voiced by Seton, 11 Negro spiritual and hymn arrangements by African Americans were included in the hymnal.

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Emergence of African American Musical Styles

One cannot exactly pinpoint when African-American musical influences entered the SDA denomination, but many authors and individuals interviewed for this study suggest that the influences became more evident in the 1960s. During this decade, significant socio-political developments in the United States – most importantly, the Civil Rights Movement – brought about new interest in African-American culture and identity. However, earlier developments contributed to the heightening of African-American awareness in the American society at large, and within institutions such as the SDA Church. In the 1920s several factors contributed to Blacks, especially Black Adventist, demanding autonomy in the management of their resources and institutions. In the book *Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement*, author Samuel G. London, Jr. highlights eight factors that contributed to this development:

1. African American Adventists contributed financially to the construction and upkeep of white Adventist institutions, yet the denomination denied them access to these facilities.

2. Many African Americans believed they had the right to control their own destiny; they embraced the ideals that President Woodrow Wilson voiced, more specifically, his argument supporting the self-determination of subject people.

3. African Americans who served in World War I wanted to receive the same freedoms at home that they fought for and enjoyed abroad. This attitude influenced the entire Black community and reenergized efforts aimed at social reform.

4. In Harlem, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, headed by Marcus Garvey, encouraged Blacks around the world to achieve economic and political independence.

5. The art and literature of the Harlem Renaissance promoted Black assertiveness and pride, while rejecting, or at least challenging, white cultural influences.
6. African Americans were beginning to secure better working conditions and higher wages through collective bargaining.

7. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in its 1929 spring meeting, failed to institute the recommendations of African American Church leaders to establish Black conferences with administrative authority. If adopted, these semi-independent Black conferences were to exist within the denomination’s organizational framework at the same level as the white local conferences.

8. The Great Depression exacerbated the inequalities of American society and contributed to Black disillusionment and desire for autonomy. This crisis brought about socioeconomic readjustment, meaning that whites desperate for work took low-wage, service-sector jobs traditionally reserved for Blacks. This trend forced many African Americans out of work, leaving them to struggle for their own survival. Realizing they could no longer depend on the caste system, African Americans demanded the creation of more black-controlled institutions designed to provide their community with long-lasting economic security and employment.104

Building on the advancements of the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement of the 1970s brought African Americans to an even greater awareness of self-appreciation and self-love. Cornel West, philosopher and activist, states that the Black Power Movement “does not teach hatred; it teaches love. But it teaches us that love, like charity, must begin at home; that it must begin with ourselves, our beautiful black selves.”105 This new appreciation of Black identity – this “love for ourselves” – was reflected in diverse cultural expressions, including clothing and hair styles, language, and music, both secular and sacred.

The late Dr. Alma Blackmon, former professor of Music and English at Oakwood University, spoke of the new attention drawn to African history and African-American culture within schools and churches. However, she suggests that the spiritual had long been a part of the music of the SDA church, but does not give evidence for her statement or specify the churches that introduced it. She states:

During the civil rights struggle, when Black Americans rediscovered an interest in reaching back to Africa, the history and grandeur of that land, once obscured from us, became apparent to us. The establishment of Black studies in the curricula of schools, colleges, and universities across the country inspired many to embrace almost everything that was Black.

In Seventh-day Adventist churches the Negro spiritual has always had a place, but when Black Adventists began to look for something new that reflected Black heritage, many looked to the rhythmic gospel music that disc jockeys were beginning to play on the radio. This in many churches was viewed as performing the music of the Pentecostal Church, but Black Adventists were determined to reflect in their music the culture of their people.106

In response to such cultural changes, a greater emphasis on African-American expression became evident not only in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but also in most mainline Black denominations between the 1970s and 1990s. In *Let Mount Zion Rejoice! Music in the African American Church*, author James Abbington assesses the changes that took place within the music programs of mainline denominations during these decades, linking them to significant social-political developments within the United States:

Changes in the national culture have had a prodigious influence on the music and worship in the African American church.... The 1960s saw the civil rights movement, black nationalism, Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam’s nationalist critique of Christianity as the white man’s religion, the black power movement, James H. Cone’s articulation of

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black theology, and the commercialization and industrialization of gospel music with the recording of Hawkins’s “Oh Happy Day.” In the 1970s Molefi Asante developed the theme of Afrocentricity. Through the 1980s were felt the rushing mighty winds of neo-Pentecostalism, and free-spirit, charismatic, and evangelical independent churches attracted many mainline church members.…

As black people embraced their African identities, they began to incorporate African religious practices into their liturgies…. Consequently, the energy of revival-style, folk religion began to emerge in black churches with conventional liturgical practices.

As this style emerged many churches abandoned Euro-American anthems, hymns, pipe organs, traditional choir robes, and familiar liturgies, replacing them with gospel music, Hammond organs, drums, tambourines, electric guitars, hand clapping, rocking and swaying--forms that had once been associated with the sanctified holiness church, or the holy rollers.107

As a result, some of these influences have not been readily accepted and have caused confusion and conflict in the church. In regards to this confusion, Blackmon believed that

Black Seventh-day Adventists are fragmented in their perceptions of music that is appropriate for the worship of God. Cultural differences within families, dissimilar opportunities for musical training and exposure, varying musical traditions within local churches, and wide diversity in the degree to which our clergy, musicians, and members have dedicated themselves to the study of church music all contribute to the fragmentation that we are now experiencing.108

Black Adventists, while identifying with their ethnic heritage, in a sense, have been forced to suppress at least some of their ethnic identity in favor of a denominational identity. On one hand, there are Black Adventists from the “old regime,” such as Blackmon, who feel that Black identity is secondary to Christian identity of congregants, while, on the other hand, the sentiment is reversed among the younger. Dr. Dedrick Blue,…

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108 Blackmon, 183.
Senior Pastor of the Ephesus Church, notices this generational divide throughout the denomination:

…there is a group of, for example more mature individuals, who grew up in a denomination that basically set cultural norms. And so the Adventist Church in many ways was moving on a different sort of cultural and musical and identity track than others. But what has happened in Adventism was not atypical of what happened in other denominations that were predominantly White that had significant Black memberships as well.

So it’s a phenomenon that one sees repeated over and over again in Black churches in predominantly White organizations, whereby there is asserted [a] certain setting aside of one’s cultural identity for what is considered to be a larger spiritual identity. So in Adventism, especially amongst older members who have somebody say, “it doesn’t matter if it’s Black or White, what really matters is a Christian,” or saying that “my identity is not rooted in my race; it’s rooted in my relationship with Jesus Christ.” Those are the kinds of things that you’ll find frequently amongst the older. Amongst the younger people, they will say, “my relationship is rooted in Jesus Christ, and I’m Black. I’m a Black Seventh-day Adventist; I am not an Adventist first.” They would usually describe themselves as being a Black Seventh-day Adventist. So there has been a cultural shift amongst those who were younger versus those who were older.109

Blackmon believes that Black Adventists should embrace their ethnicity, but should also realize that “we are also Seventh-day Adventist Christians, and it is incumbent upon us to select those parts of our heritage that we can safely incorporate into our faith and lifestyle.”110

Music has amplified the divergent views about African American identity that have emerged within the SDA church. Dr. Wayne Bucknor, current chairman of the Music Department at Oakwood University, discusses the dilemma of music in Black churches in the denomination. In his dissertation entitled, “The Changing Face of Music

110 Blackmon, 185.
in the Liturgy of the African-American Seventh-day Adventist Church: Guideline for Improving its Qualitative Use,”¹¹¹ Bucknor argues for a balance of musical styles within Adventist worship services and offers guidelines for implementing African American musical influences within the worship service. These guidelines are divided into three categories: 1) “Criteria for Selection of Worship Leader, Musician, and Instrumentation,” 2) “Biblical Standards for Liturgical Guidelines,” and 3) “Guidelines for Balance in the Music Liturgy.” Noteworthy in the third category is Bucknor’s statement that highlights the need for honoring African American heritage: he suggests that it is “the responsibility of the African American music minister to be educated in the history of African American Music.” Also in this same category, Bucknor outlines other practical strategies to help create a balance between traditional, denominationally approved repertoire and style and newer uses of Afro-centric music, always in relation to the church’s liturgy and individual service:

- Realize that worship must include all members, allowing all to participate. This can be achieved by
  - singing hymns in four-part harmony;¹¹²
  - performing at least one spiritual or spirit-filled song that possesses and emotional nature and close affinity to the Black culture;
  - performing songs whose lyrics are directly related to a scriptural verse;
  - including song selections that promote the two facets of the denomination’s name, namely the Second Coming of Christ and the belief in the seventh-day Sabbath; and
  - presenting a balance of genres.

¹¹² Bucknor listed “Eradicate the practice of excluding the Bass voice range in the liturgy” as the first strategy in creating a balance of musical styles in the church. In most Black churches, the bass line is eliminated from most music that is performed by the choir.
• Plan music to be used in liturgy in accordance with the subject of the sermon, whenever possible.
• Use resources offered by the denomination as a partial guide and as an educational tool.\textsuperscript{113}

It is not known if all Black Adventist churches have incorporated some or all of these initiatives, which is definitely a topic worthy of further study; however, some of the musical developments in Ephesus Church that I discuss in Chapter 5 correspond to Bucknor’s ideals about musical balance.

As the influence of African American practices began to compete with or replace Euro-American music and musical style, there was also a loss of qualified musicians in the church to continue in the Euro-American traditions. According to Abbington, those who remained were not nurturing the next generation of young people in church music, nor “were they willing to accept, teach, and adapt to the rise of gospel music.”\textsuperscript{114} Abbington also feels that Black churches have lost musicians due to them retiring, relocating to other cities, making career changes in order to have a regular consistent salary, or dying. In many cases older musicians have not been replaced with younger and “equally competent musicians.” Many churches have panicked and have taken “whomever they could get, and as a result, the level of the congregation’s music has been suddenly redefined by the limitations and ability of the musician.”\textsuperscript{115}

Abbington finds a correlation between the lack of trained musicians in the African American church and the reduction or elimination of music programs in public schools during these same decades. The cutting back of these programs has had a detrimental

\textsuperscript{113} Bucknor, 75-78.
\textsuperscript{114} Abbington, 2.
\textsuperscript{115} Abbington, 4.
effect, in that many students have begun to come out of school without any sort of music education. If these students are fortunate to have had music in their educational plan, the quality has often proven to be inadequate. On the high school level, present-day students are singing in choruses and playing in bands that learn music mainly by rote instead of learning the rudiments of music, sight singing and ear training. Students who would like to take music lessons privately find it difficult due to the expense of lessons, or they cannot find teachers who can adapt to their learning style.\(^\text{116}\)

Abbington’s observations are not reserved for Black mainline denominations alone, but can be applied to the state of music and worship in Protestant and Catholic churches in the United States today.

Black Seventh-day Adventists assimilated to the musical culture of the denomination without questions as a means of being accepted into a dominant culture. However, as a result of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, Black SDAs began to accept this musical aspect of their culture. While Ephesus Church adapted to its ethnical culture socially, adapting to the new musical culture proved to be a challenge.

\(^{116}\) Abbington, 3, 4.
CHAPTER 4
HISTORY OF EPHESUS SDA CHURCH

Ephesus SDA Church has been in existence for 87 years.\textsuperscript{117} The church is one of the first churches established in New York City.

\textit{Early Beginnings of Ephesus SDA Church}

The Adventist Movement was not new to the state of New York. Most of the activity of the Movement took place in upstate New York in the mid-nineteenth century. By 1905, there were six Adventist churches in Manhattan, and one in the Bronx.\textsuperscript{118} While there were SDA churches in the New York City area, most of the members were Caucasian. For example, one Adventist church, the City Temple, which was located on 120\textsuperscript{th} Street and Lenox Avenue in Harlem, had a congregation that was mainly White, reflecting the demographic make-up of Harlem before 1920.\textsuperscript{119} While the denomination’s evangelistic efforts had focused on Blacks in the South in the 1890’s, concentrated proselytizing of Blacks in the New York City area did not take place until the 1900s. In 1901, Stephen Haskell (1833 - 1922), a prominent pioneer in the SDA Church administration, organized the first African-American congregation in the New

\textsuperscript{117} Ephesus Church celebrated its 87\textsuperscript{th} anniversary in 2010.
\textsuperscript{118} There is a plaque in the Heritage Lobby at the Ephesus SDA Church that has a listing of all of the Seventh-day Adventist Churches in the area between 1905 and 1906. The list was compiled from the \textit{New York City Directory 1905 – 1906: Record of Public Institutions – “Seventh-day Adventists.”}
York City area, and by the time he left in 1902, eleven members had been organized.\(^{120}\) When Haskell departed, the congregation was left under the leadership of lay member, J.H. Carroll (n.d.). Under Carroll’s leadership, the congregation grew by 300 percent.\(^{121}\) Among Carroll’s first converts was James K. Humphrey (1877 - 1952). Humphrey, a Jamaican immigrant and ordained Baptist minister, was on his way to Africa to become a missionary when he was exposed to the Seventh-day Adventist message. Upon converting to Adventism, Humphrey soon began working for the church in New York City, and, according to Dudley, became an effective leader: “Under his direction, the work spread rapidly. Humphrey worked in both Manhattan and Brooklyn and founded the First Harlem SDA Church. By 1920 its membership was about 600, and he had also started three other congregations.”\(^{122}\) Ephesus (formerly known as the Second Harlem SDA Church) was one of the congregations organized under J. K. Humphrey’s leadership. R. Clifford Jones, in his book entitled, *James K. Humphrey and the Sabbath-day Adventists*, discusses the circumstances that brought about the establishment of Second Harlem SDA Church:

First Harlem continued growing so well that no building in Harlem was large enough to accommodate the burgeoning congregation. Consequently, in consultation with Atlantic Union and General Conference officials, the group’s leaders made a decision to start a new congregation in Harlem. On January 1, 1924, Harlem Number Two was launched with 108 members, and Matthew C. Strachan was called up from Florida to lead the new congregation… By the time Harlem Number Two was voted a part of the Greater New York Conference at


the Conference’s Eighteenth Session held on March 12-14 that year, the membership of the church had grown to 125.\textsuperscript{123}

In 1929, a series of events took place that eventually led to the dismissal of J. K. Humphrey and the First Harlem SDA Church from the denomination. In \textit{Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream}, the authors Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart emphasize Humphrey’s expansion of his work into community-based projects beyond the church, which would put him at odds with the SDA General Conference:

Everywhere [Humphrey] looked, he saw discrimination: in the church’s schools, hospitals, sanitariums, and conferences. But finding there was as yet no General Conference support for the idea of separate black conferences, he started work on a secret communitarian project called Utopia Park. It would be situated just outside New York and would consist of an orphanage, an old people’s home, a training school, an industrial area, and health care facilities. Humphrey emphasized that the park would not be just for Adventists but would be open to all Blacks in the United States. When word of the plans leaked out, the denomination expelled Humphrey, and when his congregation stood by him, disfellowshipped the church as well.\textsuperscript{124}

After J. K. Humphrey and the First Harlem SDA Church were dropped from the denomination, he and First Harlem members formed their own denomination called the United Sabbath-day Adventist Church. Matthew C. Strachan was moved from the Second Harlem Church because conference officials felt that Strachan, an executive member of the NAACP, would follow Humphrey’s example and perpetuate the conflicts between Black leaders and SDA congregants in Harlem and the denominational leaders of the General Conference:

\textsuperscript{123} Jones, Kindle edition.

Strachan’s views on the Utopia Park project, as well as the summary dismissal of his friend and colleague along with the First Harlem Church, are not known. However, after the showdown between the denomination’s leaders and Harlem’s Adventist community, the General Conference removed Strachan as pastor of the Second Harlem Church and reassigned him, in 1930, as the representative of the Negro Department to the Southern Union Conference.125

George E. Peters (1883 - 1965), first Black Secretary of the Negro Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, was sent to Harlem to help stabilize the congregation. Under his guidance, the Second Harlem Church was renamed the Ephesus SDA Church in 1930, and grew rapidly.126

By 1930, Ephesus and the United Church, two SDA churches with similar missions, were proselytizing and conducting services in the same area. Humphrey still had a name in the Harlem community and as far as his congregants were concerned, was still affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Meanwhile, Peters and the Ephesus Church were trying to separate their identity from J. K. Humphrey. In order to grow the church, Peters held a series of evangelistic meetings at the church’s 141st Street location. The place could not accommodate the influx of people that were coming to the meetings. The church sought help from the Greater New York Conference. In a letter dated April 30, 1930, Louis K. Dickson (1890 – 1963), President of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, petitioned the Atlantic Union Conference for financial assistance so that Peters and the Ephesus Church could rent a church building on West 123rd Street and Lenox Avenue, a facility that offered sufficient space

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125 London, 100.
to hold evangelistic meetings, to expand membership, and to compete with Humphrey’s church for SDA dominance:

Because of the present situation obtaining Harlem as a result of the actions of J. K. Humphrey and his congregation, the brethren of our committee have been carefully studying what would be the wisest course to pursue for the best interests of the work for the future.

Elder G.E. Peters is well started in his leadership in this perplexing situation, and under God is successfully grappling with the problems as they appear…

At the present time the facilities of the Second Harlem church building are too small to house the audiences which turn out to hear Elder Peters. He has been forced to turn away some because after filling all the seats and aisles as well as the platform there was no more room.

Let me say also that Humphrey is now using every means at his command to belittle the work of Elder Peters and the Second Harlem church in the minds of his people…. Now our committee, in counsel with Elder Peters, in the light of all these facts…has felt that this is the moment when we should lay definite plans to put on the strongest kind of campaign for souls in a public way that we have ever held in Harlem. In order to offset the conviction that we often find in the minds of the public; namely, that J. K. Humphrey and his followers are the Seventh-day Adventists of Harlem, this seems to be the most effective way to go about or work at the present time.

This brings us again into perplexity, as there is only one available and adequate place to hold an evangelistic meeting. This is a large church on the corner of 123rd Street and Lenox Avenue, and can only be rented for a large sum of money. This church is the one which Humphrey formerly tried to buy… This we wish to thwart, if possible… Some action, we feel, must be taken at once to secure this place as it is impossible for us to get the use of the old Temple property.

It will be necessary for us to have at or command for such a summer campaign as the situation demands not less than $5000. In considering our evangelistic budget for this year, we find it entirely inadequate to meet this emergency…

The Greater New York Conference has greatly appreciated, and wishes to express this thankfulness… We believe you realize that should we lose this upper hand now in this situation it would have a direful effect
on the colored congregations throughout North America, and intensify some problems in certain foreign lands.  

With the help of the local conference, the Atlantic Union and the General Conference, Ephesus moved into its future home in 1930. Elder Peters stayed at Ephesus until he was re-assigned to the North American Negro Department of the General Conference in 1935. Frank L. Peterson (1893 – 1969) served as the interim pastor at Ephesus until 1939.

In January 1939, Thomas Milton Rowe (n.d.) became the fourth pastor of the Ephesus Church. Under Pastor Rowe’s leadership, the congregation purchased the building that they rented for eight years. Excitement about the purchase of the building was expressed in the church’s Annual Report of 1939:

Perhaps the biggest item on our year’s program was the purchasing of a church home. For several months we were engaging in raising a partial down payment on a church building. So deep was the interest of the local and general conferences that it was decided that a general conference meeting comprised of all the local and union conferences be held in this church on July 5. As a result of this meeting it was voted that the general conference appropriate $34,000, the Union $25,000, and the Local conference $25,000 toward the purchasing of the building. Not many days hence the deal was completed and Br. Gilmore with ladder in hand walked to the front of the church, stationed the ladder, climbed to the top of it and took off the weather beaten ‘For Sale’ sign from its resting place for many years. We sang Alleluia, praise the Lord.

By November 1944 the church was dedicated and declared free of debt by J. L. McElhany (1880 – 1959), president of the General Conference. At the end of Rowe’s tenure in 1945, the church had grown from 525 members to 1,134 members.

127 Letter dated April 30, 1930 from L. K. Dickson to Elder E. K. Slade, President of the Atlantic Union of SDA.
128 “7th Day Adventists to Purchase Church Edifice on Lenox Ave.”, n.d. There is a discrepancy as to the length of time that the church rented the space. An article by Thomas Rowe in The North American Informant, a denomination publication, stated that Ephesus rented the space for nine years.
129 Eva Bradford-Rock, Church Clerk, Annual Report for Year 1939, Oakwood University Archives.
Each pastor who was assigned to the Ephesus Church brought the congregation to a new threshold. Adolphus Webb (1898 – 1969), who served from 1945 to 1950, was not only responsible for the church’s continued growth, but was also instrumental in the purchase of the church’s pipe organ in 1945.

The church membership continued to grow under the leadership of Willie S. Lee, Sr. (1915 – 1998). Ephesus had grown so much that leadership considered holding two services on Sabbaths. Marvin Brown, former member and retired SDA pastor, recalls this situation:

When [W. S. Lee] came after A. E. Webb, he began to preach. Ephesus always had a Sunday night service that was for preaching and promulgating the beliefs … Ephesus Church began to get crowded. People began to come… Before then you could always find a seat anywhere; but the place began to increase… Then [Elder Lee] said, “We’re going to have two services.” The people who came for the early service stayed for the second service, so it was still crowded… it didn’t work at all. People stayed. I stayed. Everybody stayed; nobody went anywhere.132

Lee came up with the idea of establishing a church for the youth. Creating a youth church would serve several purposes: (1) it would help eliminate the overcrowding situation of the church; (2) it would serve as a training forum for youth in regards to service in and out of the church; and (3) it would be a medium for training ministers for service in the denomination. He appointed several people to serve on the committee whose purpose was to design the structure of the Youth Church. The committee – Eula Gunther, Marie Sampson, James Richards, Joseph Merriweather, and Marvin Brown – under the supervision of Samuel A. Hutchins (1925 – 1990), came up with the

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131 Ibid
organization of the Youth Church and in January 1955, the Ephesus Youth Church was born.

R. T. Hudson (1912 – 1969) served as pastor at the church for seven years (1955-1962) before being called to serve as the president of the Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He was well known for his evangelistic and social efforts within the Harlem community, and for bringing international guest speakers to the church:

[Hudson] launched an almost continuous evangelism in Ephesus Church, which resulted in a steady membership addition. These converts in turn made possible the founding of other congregations in the tri-borough area and on Long Island…. From the various diplomats representing their countries at the United Nations he invited speakers who gave short talks about their countries, their aspirations, and their needs. The result of inviting the diplomats was that Hudson had a packed church each Sunday night when other Harlem meeting houses had largely empty pews….

Hudson led a movement in Harlem that resulted in a $21-million addition to Harlem Hospital. Borough authorities had neglected this facility to the point that the roof leaked and the building was infested with rats and roaches. Hudson had his congregation walk to the site one Sabbath after church services, and from the steps he addressed the gross inequities of the situation. The sudden appearance of these two thousand people from the Adventist Church so frightened politicians that they began immediately to make plans for renovations and the new multimillion-dollar wing.133

Hudson died suddenly of a heart attack while preaching a funeral service in Michigan on December 10, 1966.134

Robert H. Carter (1925 – 1999) came to Ephesus in 1962 and served as its minister until 1968. He was noted with having “great administrative ability.”135 During his tenure the church was renovated and decorated; he also encouraged the church to have

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133 Reynolds, 284.
long-range plans and to budget funds to carry them out.\textsuperscript{136} He received a call to another church at the end of 1968.

\textit{Music in the Black SDA Church in Harlem before 1970}

The earliest record of music performed in the Black Adventist churches in Harlem is documented in the \textit{Messenger}, a publication distributed by the United Sabbath-day Adventist Church. As previously stated, this denomination was formed after the ousting of the First Harlem SDA Church and its pastor, J. K. Humphrey from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists because of a disagreement on the formation of conferences and facilities for Blacks, along with the circumventive actions of the pastor to procure real estate without the consent of the General Conference. While the First Harlem Church (later, United), was no longer a part of the denomination in 1930, one can speculate that its musical culture was similar to that at the Second Harlem SDA Church (later, Ephesus), due to the fact that J. K. Humphrey founded both congregations, and that both churches were adhering to the musical practices of the SDA denomination at large.

In the August 1931 edition of the \textit{United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger}, editor P. J. Bailey describes the music that was performed at the First General Conference of the new denomination, which featured choral and solo vocal music of the classical and American sacred traditions, accompanied by organ or orchestra under the direction of F. Vernal Matthews:

\begin{quote}
Among the many phases of the Conference activities that contributed to the remarkable success of the gathering, the music must take a high place. In the capable hands of F. Vernal Matthews, organist and choir leader of the Harlem Church, the work of the musical department was an
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
outstanding success. Both the vocal and instrumental music fitted into the services of which they were a part, and added to the effect of the sermons and addresses delivered…

Those who were present at the Harlem church at 3pm on Sunday, May 10, enjoyed a rare musical treat in which the organ, orchestra and choir of the church took part. Elder Humphrey wielded the baton on this occasion and showed himself a rather lively director. The programme for the afternoon included selections from Gounod, McFarlane, Rogers, Mozart, Dett, Beethoven, Herbert, Bach, Widor and Wagner…

…Sis. C. Cruger, a faithful, hard-working member of the Harlem choir, sang a solo entitled, “I Will Exalt Thee.” She was accompanied at the organ by F. Vernal Matthews…

…Leo C. Evans of the Brooklyn Progressive Forum effectively rendered as appropriate tenor solo, entitled, “O God, Be Merciful.” He was accompanied at the piano by E. Martin.…

That all this music made an impression for good, there is no question.137

In a detailed, personalized account of one performance during the ten-day event, Lillian Gauntlett, a reporter at the Second General Conference for the United Sabbath-day Adventists, suggests that the church choir of United was well regarded in the Harlem community, if not the city, and reports on several solo selections, including an aria from Tosca by a member of the choir:

On Sunday afternoon, May 22nd, at the Harlem U. S. D. A church in New York City, the famous choir of the church presented a very entertaining and enjoyable musical feast. Considering the old adage, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” this program was a very fitting contribution after the duties and business of the ten days spent in conference by the members and delegates from the many U. S. D. A. churches. This particular kind of relaxation is one of the highest forms of entertainment, because good music lifts the soul heavenward.

The words falling intelligibly from the lips of the singers bring a message oft of cheer and hope to the hearts of the hearers. Even when no words are uttered as in the playing of an instrument, music is always a universal language understood by all.

The program began at 4:15 p.m. with our beloved President, Elder J. K. Humphrey acting as chairman. In opening, the choir rendered two beautiful anthems under the direction of Elder Humphrey and Prof. Vernal Matthews, who ably presided at the organ. We then listened with rapture to an organ solo which was rendered by Prof. O. John, one of the leading organists of the race. The sweet voices of the singers of Israel again filled the edifice with the sweet strains of “Hallelujah,” after which Sister Dora Turner, a former member of the choir whose sweet, rich, strong soprano voice is stilled missed by her former associates, entertained us with a very delightful soprano solo. This number was heartily received by the audience.

After the choir’s rendition of Nathaniel Dett’s “Listen to the Lambs,” we listened to two little lambs from the Newark Church, Little Amy Myers and Marjorie Crooks who sang to us a duet…

The choir then sang “Let Mount Zion Rejoice,” at the conclusion of which Sister Clarice Cruger, who is a very faithful member of the choir and possessor of a very sweet and rich soprano voice, sang to us “Visi Darte,” [sic] from Tosca. This was sung in Italian, and although most of those present did not understand the language, yet judging by the very hearty applause, every heart was thrilled at the ability of the artist in the beautiful rendition of this difficult number. One of our very talented young ladies, Sister Margaret Hunter, was a sympathetic accompanist for both soprano soloists.

The choir concluded the program by singing, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat,” a very timely invitation and exceedingly appropriate in closing such a splendid program.138

It is interesting to note that Negro spirituals were not mentioned in the repertoire of the Harlem SDA church in these two accounts of the early 1930s. Most of the music, even the Nathaniel Dett piece mentioned in Gauntlet’s article, were anthems. While the musical culture was thriving at the former First Harlem SDA Church, Ephesus was beginning a legacy of its own, centered in the musical efforts of its music directors and/or organists, choirs, and soloists.

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Musicians at Ephesus: 1920 – 1940:

Jennie Irvis

Important to the musical development of Ephesus in its early decades was Jennie Irvis, the first musician who performed the functions of a musical director at the church. Serving for more than 22 years under the leadership of Elders J. K. Humphrey, M. C. Strachan, G. E. Peters, and T. M. Rowe, she directed the choir and played organ and piano.\textsuperscript{139} The Irvis family was known for its musical ability, as described in an interview with Jake Nixon, Jr., great-grandson of Jennie Irvis:

Jennie Irvis came from a very musical family. Her sons were musical. My grandfather played piano. My mother’s uncle was a trombonist—a noted trombonist in Duke Ellington’s band. He instituted using a hat… on a trombone… he was a musical innovator…. This is the family that Jennie Irvis had.\textsuperscript{140}

The son to whom Nixon refers was Charlie Irvis, jazz trombonist, who with his friend Bubber Miley, is credited with the muting technique that gave Duke Ellington and the Washingtonians their unique “jungle music” sound. While Charlie Irvis ventured into the jazz scene, his mother, a devoted Christian and member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, continued in sacred music, as Jake Nixon noted:

Jennie Irvis was a staunch and upright Seventh-day Adventist. She epitomized what is a church musician…. Her whole musical heritage was directed towards how can the music be a ministry in the service of God. That is what constitutes a church musician.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{139} “They Also Served: Jennie Irvis,” The Ephesian 1, no. 3 (1963), 2.
\textsuperscript{140} Jake Nixon, Jr., interview by author, Bronx, NY, March 1, 2012.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
Sister Irvis, as she was known in the church, was the first music teacher of her granddaughter, Ruth Naomi Irvis Nixon Gardner, who would later take on most of the same musical duties of choir directing, playing organ and piano, as well as teaching:

Jennie Irvis taught my mother how to play. She was my mother’s first music teacher. So Jennie Irvis begat Ruth Irvis Nixon Gardner, and you could see how that musical DNA was passed down to my mother, because my mother was a church musician – playing the organ, playing the piano, playing for all the musical services, directing many different choirs, teaching and mentoring future church musicians, who I’m glad to say Jeryl Cunningham has also now inherited some of that musical DNA dating back… to the very first Ephesus SDA church’s first church musician, Jennie Irvis.

Irvis’s strong musicianship led to the development of the music ministry at Ephesus Church.

Musicians and Choirs at Ephesus: 1940 – 1960

Jesse J. Rowe

Another figure important to the building of a strong musical tradition was Jesse J. Rowe (n.d.), brother of Thomas Milton Rowe (n.d.), fourth pastor of the church. Jesse Rowe served as choir director from 1939 to 1945, when Negro spirituals were introduced at Ephesus Church. Not much is known about Jesse Rowe. According to Everyl Chandler-Gibson, a long-time member of Ephesus Church and church organist for over 50 years, the choir director was working at the church before Elder Rowe came into leadership. What is known about Professor Rowe is that he was a singer, a bass-baritone, who directed and arranged music for the church choir and himself. Jesse Rowe was especially known for his soul-stirring singing:

Do you remember… the duet “Let Me Lean on Thee” sung by Elder and Prof. Rowe on Sunday night April 6…Credit is due Prof. Jesse Rowe for

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organizing the Junior, M. V. choir and the Oriole group. Our appreciation is given to him and the senior choir for the good music furnished and for their faithfulness…\textsuperscript{143}

The congregation bowed its head in prayer and meditation while the choir director, Br. J. J. Rowe sang his own arrangement of The Evening Prayer…\textsuperscript{144}

Jesse Rowe, brother of Pastor Milton Rowe, rendered a solo, and the choir rendered as an offertory hymn “Ho! Ev’ry one that thirsteth, come…”\textsuperscript{145}

Professor Jesse Rowe sang “My Lord’s Going to Move the Clouds Away,” at the request of the pastor…\textsuperscript{146}

Jesse Rowe was featured in a recital sponsored by the Youth People’s Missionary Volunteer Society (Y. P. M. V. Society) of the church.\textsuperscript{147} The program for the recital was divided into four groups – two groups of classical works in three languages, and two groups of spirituals. Rowe started the group of spirituals with his own arrangement of “Were You There?” and featured Negro spirituals arranged by David Gion, Harry T. Burleigh, and Carrie Jacobs Bond.

The length of J. J. Rowe’s tenure at Ephesus Church is not known; however, based on extant accounts, one can say that he left an indelible mark on the musical practices and culture at the church.

\textsuperscript{143} Annual Report for Year 1939, by Eva Bradford-Rock, Church Clerk, Oakwood University Archives.
\textsuperscript{144} Annual Report for Year 1941, by Eva Bradford-Rock, Church Clerk, Oakwood University Archives.
\textsuperscript{145} “Ephesus SDA Church,” \textit{New York Age}, n.d.
\textsuperscript{146} “Ephesus SDA Church,” \textit{New York Age}, Saturday, Dec. 18, 1943.
\textsuperscript{147} The date and location of the recital is not listed on the program. It is assumed that the recital was sponsored by an Adventist church because of the department title (Y. P. M. V. Society), but cannot confirm that the venue was Ephesus. Today the department is known as the Adventist Youth Society.
Rosa Lee Jones and the New Believers Chorus

Ephesus Church between the 1930s and 1940s had mainly one choir to service the musical needs of the church. The Senior Choir served every weekend singing for Saturday morning and Sunday evening services. Although it was documented earlier that Jesse Rowe aided in creating some additional musical groups at Ephesus during the 1940s, there is no record available that states how long these groups lasted or how often they served in regular morning services of the church. The author interviewed several older members of the church who have had similar responses to confirm the fact that Ephesus Church had one main choir that supplied the musical needs of the church, and that choir members had to be baptized members of the church.

On April 5, 1956, Rosa Lee Jones, the Bible Instructor at Ephesus, organized a musical group called the New Believers Chorus (NBC) as a means to incorporate new members into the life of the church. In the April, 1964 edition of Ministry magazine, R. T. Hudson, the pastor of Ephesus at the time, described the mission of the NBC and the effects of the group on the evangelistic efforts of the church:

In New York we have tried to broaden our evangelistic ministry by making every organization of the church a soul-winning agency… As an example of the organizations, I might point to our New Believers Choir. About five years ago Mrs. Rosa L. Jones, our Bible instructor, organized this group in our church with the view toward putting newly baptized members to work. It is the type of organization to which non-Adventists might be properly invited. A Bible study is conducted prior to each rehearsal. I can safely report that I have baptized no less than thirty people during the five years as a direct result of the work of this choir. People simply join the choir, they hear the Bible studies, they sit through to listen to sermons, and they take their stand to be identified with the remnant people. The choir makes a remarkable contribution in holding new believers. It makes them feel that they are a part of the church program and they in turn render very acceptable music. They
sing every fifth Sabbath and at other times throughout the year. There are more than 100 people presently singing in this group.\textsuperscript{148}

Not only has the NBC contributed to Ephesus by adding members, it was also instrumental in presenting many fundraising concerts for various local and regional church projects in the United States and as far a Bermuda.\textsuperscript{149}

\textit{Youth Choir – 1960}

The Youth Choir came into being with the organization of the Youth Church in 1955. It is unclear who first directed the choir; however, in the 1960s, the Youth Choir was under the direction of Sister Marguerite Daly. Sister Daly, affectionately known as “Mama D,” is remembered as a loving but firm director. Laura Chesson, former member of Ephesus, recalls her experience in the Youth Choir and Daly’s insistence on vocalization exercises and inclusion of classical repertoire:

Marguerite Daly… when I got of age, I wanted to join the Youth Choir… I was finally able to travel to Manhattan, all the way to 123\textsuperscript{rd} Street – because I lived on 6\textsuperscript{th} Street. So… my sister and I would get on the train, we travelled way uptown to go to rehearsal. And she had this thing that you had to be a certain age before you could join. But I could understand why…. She gave you music, we practiced… the scale, up and down… about twenty minutes… if you were late, she would take you on the other side to go over your scales…. But we sang these songs that I had never, ever heard of before. It sounded like a Catholic cathedral to me, the type of music we were singing.\textsuperscript{150}

Sister Daley moved to New Jersey in 1972 and continued her music ministry at the Englewood SDA Church.

\textsuperscript{149} As stated on the album jacket of the 1956 recording by the New Believers Chorus, “Worthy is the Lamb.”
\textsuperscript{150} Laura Chesson, interview with author, Lithonia, GA, October 1, 2011.
Ephesus in the 1960s was full of energy and excitement. The music program was thriving. There was an influx of musicians who had relocated to New York City to attend the colleges in the area. One such musician was Walter J. Turnbull. Turnbull, a native of Mississippi, had just graduated from Tougaloo College and was beginning his studies at Manhattan School of Music 1966. Being an Adventist, he came to Ephesus for church services and for a short term served as music coordinator for the Youth Church. He recounts his experience of being drawn to the church and becoming musically involved in his autobiography, *Lift Every Voice: Expecting the Most and Getting the Best from All of God’s Children*:

One day, while walking down the hill on 122nd Street, I noticed a church named Ephesus on 123rd Street and Lenox Avenue, in the center of Harlem. The name was special because it was the name of the church that my family belonged to in Greenville. Ephesus is also a significant name in biblical history. The apostle [John] wrote the epistles to seven churches, one of which was Ephesus. Ephesians, as we were called, were very proud of the significance of that name. The very strong attachment that I had to the church stayed with me through college and now graduate school… The members of Ephesus Church in Harlem were warm and familiar, and for the most part acted like the congregations of every other Black church that I had attended over the years. They were fundamentalists to the bone and, now that I think about it, bourgeois to the bone, too. Shirt and tie were required, and any demonstrative praise was almost frowned upon. It was not unlike other so-called middle-class churches in Harlem where the Black folk thought that it was low-class to praise God in any way that seemed African in spirit. Playing drums, shouting, and the throwing of hands were not encouraged. Dignity was defined by the times, and many back then appeared to want to run away from their Blackness….

…Ephesus became my new church home after I transferred my membership from Greenville. I spent a lot of time with the youth programs and after a while, was asked to become the music coordinator for the Youth Church. I agreed, not really knowing what I was getting into. I was responsible for making sure that there was an organist, a
pianist, and a choir or soloist every Sabbath for service. After a year, I gave it up. It was impossible to spend the necessary time to do a credible job, given my chaotic schedule with performances and graduate school.\footnote{Walter Turnbull, \textit{Lift Every Voice: Expecting the Most and Getting the Best from All God’s Children} (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 91-92.}

The Ephesus Boys Choir was a group started by Robert Bowman, but discontinued shortly after, when Bowman was drafted into the military. The group was not active for two years until Turnbull brought it back to life. In an interview with Marcus Thompson, the Minister of Music for the Youth Church, Turnbull spoke of his interest in boy choirs (most likely of the Anglican and Episcopalian traditions) and his being asked to restart the Ephesus Boys Choir:

My first talks about starting a boys choir at Ephesus Church began over dinner with the Thompsons in [the Bronx]. They were members of the church and had two children, Lonieta and Marcus, both if whom were my age. Marcus had been the music coordinator at one time at the church. He was a first-rate violist and a student at Julliard at the time. Unlike a lot of other musicians at the church, Lonieta was a real pianist and organist. She also studied at [Manhattan School of Music]. We gravitated to each other because of our classical training…One Sabbath, we were discussing the fact that my Sunday church gig was in Southport, Connecticut, and that they had a boys choir. The boys went to school at the Trinity Parish Church, very much in the style of the Western European tradition…the director, Fred Dehaven… answered a lot of my questions. I then began asking Ephesus Church officials about having one there. I was told that there had been one but it was only active for a couple of years. A young man named Bobby Bowman had organized the group, but he was later drafted into the army. His mother, Sister Bowman, had adopted me as a son, and I had talked with her about the choir… Marcus, Lonieta, and I decided that we should resurrect the boys choir and asked permission from Elder Carter, the minister at Ephesus. At the end of one Sabbath service, Marcus and I talked with Elder Carter. He promptly gave us his blessing without much discussion.\footnote{Turnbull, 93-94.}
At the first rehearsal of the revived Ephesus Boys Choir, twenty boys were in attendance, along with the accompanist Ruth Nixon. Dr. Turnbull recalls that “the rehearsal wasn’t memorable musically, but I was satisfied that they could sing, and more important, that they wanted to do something other than hang out on the streets.”

Music selection did not come easy, because Turnbull had no experience working with treble voices. Most of the songs that they sang were hymns. However, after time and much research the repertoire of the choir extended to Bach chorales, Mozart’s Coronation Mass in C, and original pieces composed by Linda Twine, a fellow colleague from Manhattan School of Music.

The Ephesus Boys Choir under Turnbull made its debut on a Father’s Day program at Ephesus in 1967. As the group began to gain popularity at home, word also began spreading around the Harlem community about the choir, which began receiving invitations to perform at other churches. Turnbull described his high performance standards and the difficulty of meeting them:

I demanded excellence in myself, and I wanted the same thing from the boys…It was fun, and the kids had something to look forward to during the week. They were gaining a little fame and the younger kids in the church couldn’t wait until they became of age to sing in the Ephesus Boys Choir. Some of my most memorable times were preparing for performances. Many of the deacons and elders who were fathers could sing bass and tenor and were the backbone of the choir. We performed Christmas concerts with orchestras and presented a whole host of material that at the time, quite frankly, we were not able to perform at the highest level.

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153 Ibid., 94.
154 “We Remember Father,” The Ephesian 1, no.12 (July 1967), 5. The Ephesian is the official newsletter of the Ephesus SDA Church.
155 Turnbull, 96. As a young church member, I also remember wanting to become of age so I could sing with the Ephesus Boys Choir. My childhood friend was a member and I wanted to be one, too. My gender held me back. However, in 1980 the Girls Choir of Harlem began and I made it a priority to become a member of the organization. My father was also one of the deacons who had formed the backbone of the choir, as mentioned by Dr. Turnbull. My father has fond memories of his time performing with the choir at Columbia University in 1975.
One disadvantage of boy choirs is the fact that boys’ voices change when they reach puberty, preventing them from continuing as sopranos in a choir whose vocal tessitura centers on the treble voice. As Turnbull lost singers in the Ephesus Boys Choir to this natural development, he began looking for voices outside of the church:

The pool of singers at Ephesus had become shallower and shallower. Adding new blood to the choir created a problem within the church. Some of the members became agitated at the presence of nonmembers.156

The addition of boys who were not affiliated with the church was just one problem that Dr. Turnbull faced. There were complaints about the choice of repertoire and attire. There were members who felt that the choir should only sing sacred music and not venture into other “worldly” genres. They were also against the choir wearing the traditional boy choir attire (the cassock and surplice) because they felt it was “too Catholic and thought they were the ‘mark of the beast.’”157

According to Walter Turnbull, the greatest problem that he faced was the lack of space. On January 9, 1969, Ephesus Church sustained major fire damage. The only part of the building that was not damaged by fire was the parsonage:

The parsonage, a building next door, was the only place where [Ephesus] could hold any of their activities, and the choir had to compete for time. The space was in great demand, and many of the older members constantly complained about the time given to the choir…Rehearsal time was becoming more and more difficult to schedule, and I needed to find another place.158

Dr. Turnbull’s vision for the choir was so forward moving that the church was not able to facilitate it. Turnbull’s first steps to circumvent the restrictions of the church included

156 Turnbull, 99.
157 Ibid., 99-100.
158 Turnbull, 100.

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the incorporation of the Ephesus Boys Choir in November 1974 and the formation of the first board of directors by February 1975. With the group’s incorporation, Dr. Turnbull was able to raise funds for the operation of the choir and ask for in-kind aid. One of the solicitation flyers describes the musical and social purpose of the Ephesus Boys Choir, beginning with an emphasis on its connection to the European, especially British, tradition of boy choirs that Turnbull had alluded to his interview with Thompson (see pp. 76):

From the earliest times, boy choristers have played an integral part in the performance of sacred music. This tradition has been especially maintained in the countries of Western Europe, and particularly in Great Britain, where every Cathedral and most parish churches have mixed choirs of boys and men. In the case of the Cathedrals, the choristers are usually educated in the choir school attached to the particular Cathedral. There, in addition to the normal school curriculum, they are taught the music required for daily services, thus, at a very early age, they acquire habits of the acceptance of responsibility, attention to detail, personal discipline, and the appreciation of the beautiful – all of which stands them in excellent stead against the time when they become adults.

The same kinds of basic ideals are important to boys in Harlem. The acceptance of responsibility and personal discipline is one of our goals at the Ephesus Boys Choir. As one writer has said, “The needs and tastes of Black people are as varied as their skin tones.” We must attempt to meet some of the needs of the boys in our community. They should not be deprived a fine musical background because of a lack of foresight on our part.

To this end, the perpetual existence of the Ephesus Boys Choir is our goal.159

Further marking the expansion of Turnbull’s goals for the choir were the changing of the group’s name and the severing of formal ties with Ephesus. At the Ephesus Board Meeting held on June 16, 1975, a request was made for the Ephesus Boys Choir “be allowed to change its name to the Boys Choir of Harlem and function as a separate

The request was granted at the meeting; that same year and the Boys Choir of Harlem existed under its new name from 1975 until 2008.

**Philosophy of Music within the SDA Church**

As a denomination, the Seventh-day Adventist Church regards music as “one of God’s great gifts to man” and “one of the most important elements in a spiritual program.” The main guidelines put forward by the SDA General Conference Committee in 1972 state that music should:

1. Bring glory to God and assist the Christian in acceptably worshiping Him.
2. Ennoble, uplift, and purify the Christian’s thoughts.
3. Effectively influence the Christian in the development of Christ’s character in his life and in that of others.
4. Have a text that is in harmony with the scriptural teachings of the Church.
5. Reveal a compatibility between the message conveyed by the words and the music, avoiding a mixture of the sacred and the profane.
6. Shun theatricality and prideful display.
7. Give precedence to the message of the text, which should not be overpowered by accompanying musical elements.
8. Maintain a judicious balance of the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual elements.
9. Never compromise high principles of dignity and excellence in efforts to reach people just where they are.

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160 Ephesus Board Minutes, June 16, 1975.
161 “Guidelines Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music,” statement issued by the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee, October, 1972, M-1.
10. Be appropriate for the occasion, the setting, and the audience for which it is intended.\textsuperscript{162}

Forty years before the General Conference found it necessary to create such guidelines for music in the church, F. Vernal Matthews, the organist and choir director at the Harlem Church (United Sabbath-day Adventist Church) articulated similar ideals in his article on the philosophy and performance of music in the Black Adventist church. He emphasized the liturgical purposes of church music and warned that musical performance should not outweigh or diminish the sermon in the service:

There is a steadily growing tendency in several churches (especially the larger ones) to lengthen the instrumental and choral portion of the service and then shorten the sermon proportionately… That is too extreme however, for after all, the sermon is the kernel of any religious service and should be given the time its importance deserves…

The devotional possibilities of music are best utilized when it is thoroughly understood by everyone that at service time \textit{all} music – whether it be prelude, offertory, anthem, or postlude – is a \textit{part of the service}, and should be listened to reverently and in SILENCE. There is no greater time for meditation and introspection than during the quiet, unobtrusive playing of the voluntary. It soothes the soul and awakens an expectancy which is heightened during the reading of the Scripture lesson, the offering of prayer, and the singing of anthems. When the momentary pause which usually precedes a sermon finally arrives, the soil of our spiritual being should have been so prepared that the seeds of truth, admonition and encouragement coming from the lips of the speaker will find a receptive and fertile resting place…

The church needs showmanship of the \textit{right} kind: outsiders must be first invited, then intelligently entertained and taught, and ultimately won over to the Gospel truth as we believe and practice it. What greater source of entertainment is there than music? What greater exponent of good music than a well-balanced, harmonious (spiritually and musically) choir?\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, M-2.
\textsuperscript{163} F. Vernal Matthews, “Music in the Church,” \textit{The United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger} 2, no. 8 (August 1931), p. 3.
Matthews’s aesthetic and religious standards, as well as those presented in the General Counsel guidelines, were reflected in the central musical practices and worship demeanor at Ephesus Church in its early decades. Most of the musical repertoire used in Ephesus services consisted of hymns and anthems. Elihu McMahon, a member at Ephesus Church for over 65 years, confirms that these formed the core repertoire, as he also recalls the organ, choir, and overall “devotional” tone of the music and worship services of the church c. 1940:

The church was very conservative… the music was always anthems. They didn’t even sing spirituals; spirituals came down the road….The church organ was an incredible instrument. It was designed for the church…so when they played the anthems, it was like heaven. …there was just one choir…I don’t recall them ever singing any gospel kind of number, not in [1939 or 1940]…strictly anthems. We sang hymns, lots of selections from the Christ in Song…the songs that they sang in those days had no jump to them at all. They were just simple, melodic tunes. They were very spiritual…but there was no rhythm kind of thing to make you tend to want to move; it just didn’t happen….there used to be a sign where the Heritage Lobby is that read, “The Lord is in His Holy Temple. Let All the Earth Keep Silence Before Him.” That’s the way the church was…I used to go to a Catholic church with my wife before she became an Adventist. And I enjoyed the silence and the quietness of the Catholic Church. That’s how Ephesus used to be.164

McMahon underscores the absence of spirituals or gospel, or the rhythms of gospel or other Afrocentric style, in his early years at Ephesus. When asked about the introduction of spirituals into the Ephesus Church services, McMahon credits this inclusion to Sister Elizabeth Sattersfield:

The first person I remember singing spirituals was Sister Sattersfield. She would do her holy dance in the church… but she was probably the first Mahalia Jackson-type kind of person that I can remember.165

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165 Elihu McMahon, interview by author, New York, NY, October 11, 2011
Based on other recollections, gospel music was introduced by a number of people. Dr. Lonieta Thompson-Cornwall, former member and musician at Ephesus, recalls that Sister Marguerite Daly and the Senior Choir used to sing songs like “It’s a Highway to Heaven” and other songs that are categorized today as traditional gospel music during the 1950s. However, Brother Eugene Washington is credited with introducing the “gospel style” of playing keyboard instruments (and performing in gospel’s rhythmically driven manner that emphasizes off-beats) into Ephesus Church in the late 1960s. Washington, who came to the church in 1967, speaks of his first encounter with the New Believers Choir of Ephesus and his experiences that led him to join and be baptized in the church:

I was a Methodist all my life… when I came back out of the Service, I met this woman sister Laurie who was a member of the church. She took me like a brother. She was a member of the New Believers Choir; she began to tell me about the church. When they had their first concert at Hunter College, I went to hear them. I was so impressed with them that I started going to Ephesus on Saturday to hear the NBC choir and the Collegiate Choir…I was so impressed I kept going every Sabbath, not thinking I was going to join these crazy people. That’s what I thought [because] they were worshiping on a Saturday; but then it became so interesting. Sister Jones saw me and invited me to her bible study… I still didn’t join the church. I went from the Methodist church to the Pentecostal church because they were leading a little better than the Methodist… the night that I was supposed to be baptized [into the Pentecostal church], this lady called me. She said, “Brother Washington don’t get baptized; the Spirit is talking to me.” I returned to church the next Sabbath… as the pastor finished preaching I was going to join…I was trying to get out the seat, the Devil was wearing me down. So the next Sabbath I made up my mind before the offertory I was going to join the church and that’s what I did. And I been very happy since…

Sometime after he joined, he was asked to play the organ for a church service, and his new style of playing initially created controversy, as he recalls:

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166 Lonieta Thompson-Cornwall, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 2, 2012
When I first came to the church, some of the sisters told me, “We don’t have that kind of music in this church.” I sort of brought the Gospel to the church, coming from a first day church; I came from a shouting church. So what I would do, when we would sing our hymns I would throw a little Gospel into it. Several people came to me after and said, “we don’t play that kind of music here.” And I said, “Look, I do it like the Hallelujah people.” It’s been accepted into the church; and now if you don’t put any gravy [on] it now, you’re just not playing. So it’s more accepted now.168

By the end of the 1960s, Ephesus was beginning to embrace new performance practices within the music used for church services. While anthems and hymns remained a constant, the introduction of the spiritual and gospel began to add another dimension: the expression of African-American identity.

168 Ibid.
CHAPTER 5
MUSICAL PRACTICES AND DEVELOPMENTS AT EPHESUS SDA CHURCH,
1970-2010

Continuity and Change in Musical Culture at Ephesus

Stimulated by the powerful transformations in American society and culture brought on by the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement, Ephesus Church continued in its efforts to incorporate African-American expression into the music at Ephesus Church in the 1970s and subsequent decades. The trend toward the use of Afro-centric repertoire, genres, performance styles, and instrumentation was also found in other Seventh-day Adventist churches, as well as in most mainline Black denominations between 1970 and 1990, as described by James Abbington and discussed in Chapter Three. Reinforcing ideas woven through the recollections of other SDA church members, Dr. Dedrick Blue, the present senior pastor of Ephesus Church, implies that African-American genres and styles were increasingly used in the Adventist church in Boston that he attended in the 1960s and 1970s, largely due to the impetus of the youth of the church; he also notes that the reactions of some members against African-American or popular music styles persisted into the 1980s, although they diminished over time:

When I first started into the Ministry, most of the Adventist churches that I attended, seemed to be very, very theologically conservative, culturally, socially conservative, and musically conservative. When I say musically conservative, most of those churches primarily sang hymns and anthems. Occasionally you have somebody to come along and sing gospel, and it was often times politely tolerated, especially by the older members of the congregation. And of course the younger members saw it as a welcomed refreshment.

As a matter of fact, the church that I grew up in…it was during those late 60s and early 70s, in our church that actually the young people were pushing for greater musical diversity in different musical offerings. And
there was some resistance to it, as a matter of fact in the church that I was growing up into.

So when I became [a minister] in 1982, I’ve experienced some of that same resistance, though it had softened somewhat, just based upon the fact that 10, 15 years had passed, as the initial wave, but there were a lot of diehards who were still very opposed to different kind of musical genres in the church, almost to the extent -- for example where I remember my aunt speaking in terms of black music in general, calling it “jigaboo music.” And others speaking in reference to jazz is calling it foolishness.¹⁶⁹

Blue’s comments and the harsh reactions of his aunt give insight into the aesthetic and social tensions that have existed in SDA churches, including Ephesus, regarding the repertoire, genres, and styles that are considered appropriate for worship.

From 1970 to 2010 at Ephesus, the new uses of African-American music and musical expression did not replace the Euro-centric repertoire and hymn-based aesthetic of the SDA denomination (as discussed in previous chapters), nor the musical tradition begun by J.K. Humphrey, but they certainly affected the Music Ministry of the church. In this chapter, a variety of developments in the musical practices at Ephesus will be chronicled and described by decade and sanctuary (Senior and Youth).¹⁷⁰ These include changes in musical leadership, musical styles and repertoire, and a brief history of important musicians and ensembles. The discussion will reveal a dual trend: 1) the continuing use of SDA-approved, Euro-centric, and classically influenced music and musical style and 2) the increasing incorporation of Afro-centric repertoire and genres, compositional and performance styles, and instrumentation (including amplified

¹⁶⁹ Dr. Dedrick Blue, interview by author, New York, NY, September 27, 2011.
¹⁷⁰ Most of this information was gathered from the church’s annual nominating committee reports. For some decades, the record of the report was not available. In some cases, especially beginning in 2000, the term for officers was changed from one year to two years.
keyboards, guitars, and drum sets) associated with popular secular music or with traditional African-American music.

In addition to the larger societal developments that deeply influenced the latter trend, a sudden change in the physical space that housed Ephesus Church had a great impact on its musical practices: the burning down of the Church’s sanctuary at Lenox Avenue on the corner of West 123rd Street in 1969 destroyed the organ, pianos, rehearsal and performance spaces, and created a need for special benefit programs, with new repertoire and styles that could attract a wide range of contributors to help towards the building of a new sanctuary. Moreover, the fluctuating presence of trained musicians in the church also altered its music-making in varied ways.

Overview of Music in the 1970s

Between 1968 and 1975, the loss of trained musicians and the burning of the church were the most immediate factors that affected changes in musical practice at Ephesus. Like other churches described by Abbington, Ephesus lost a number of qualified musicians, including music students who served at Ephesus during the time they were attending various colleges in the area, but who left to accept teaching posts outside New York upon completion of their studies. Cited along with their schools, some of the students who performed or directed music at Ephesus were:

- Marcus Thompson – The Juilliard School
- Lonieta Thompson-Cornwall – Manhattan School of Music and The School of Sacred Music at Union Theological Seminary
- Harold L. Anthony, Sr. – Columbia University
- Walter J. Turnbull – Manhattan School of Music
As previously discussed, Walter Turnbull remained in the Harlem community and developed the Ephesus Boys Choir into the Boys Choir of Harlem.)

Perhaps a more important catalyst for changes in the music at Ephesus than the departure of these musicians was the fire of 1969. On January 9, 1969, Ephesus was seriously damaged:

… a fire started in the roof of the Youth Chapel and quickly spread to the church. The entire interior was destroyed, except for three stained glass windows. Witnesses on the scene remarked that the fire department took great care in causing minimal damage to the windows… 171

As a result of the church’s lack of a sanctuary, the church encountered various problems. Not only did the church partially lose its identity in the community because the congregation was without a place to hold their worship services, the membership began to dwindle. Many of the members of the congregation moved their membership to other Adventist churches. This loss of membership affected the church’s finances. Many of the church ministries suffered due to the lack of adequate facilities. 172

The congregation had their first services after the fire at Metropolitan Community Church, which was located on Madison Avenue and West 127th Street. The following week and for the next eight years, the church held its services at St. Andrews Episcopal Church, located at Fifth Avenue and West 128th Street, two blocks away from

171 http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMAAEG_Ephesus_Seventh_day_Adventist_Church (accessed July 17, 2012).

172 This information comes from a report that the Church Board submitted to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists c. 1970.
Metropolitan Community Church. Marvin Brown recalls the reason for changing churches:

When the fire took place, we started worshipping at Metropolitan Community Church. Pastor Hutchins arranged that. But what happened was I spoke to him, “you didn’t make arrangements for us to have Youth Church.” …So the next week, we only spent one week at Metropolitan. That’s when we went to Saint Andrews…because of the basement.  

The basement at St. Andrews was large enough to house the Youth Church. This change in location had a major effect on the music ministry. First of all, there was no place for the choirs to rehearse at St. Andrews. The only part of Ephesus that was not damaged by fire was the parsonage. This area was used as the church office, while St. Andrews was used for the main services of the church: Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting, Sabbath School, Morning Service, and Missionary Volunteer meetings. Other church ministries were relegated to R. T. Hudson Elementary School (Pathfinders) and the parsonage (Music Ministry), and community-based organizations (Ephesus Community Services and Trailblazers). There was one room on the second floor in the parsonage reserved for the Music Ministry, and the schedule was tight! By 1970, there were seven choirs vying for regular use of the room.

Musical Leadership in the 1970s

From 1960 to 1973, the Music Department at Ephesus was under the leadership of Professor Homer Wade. Professor Wade was an educator, teaching in the New York Public School System. It is unknown whether he had a music degree, but because of his pianist and choral skills, he was affectionately known as “Professor.”

For 1974 and 1975, the responsibilities of the Music Department were divided between the Minister of Music and the Music Coordinator. Although the responsibilities for these positions are unknown, what is known is that Everyl Chandler Gibson served as Minister of Music, while Yolanda Clarke served as Music Coordinator. Upon Clarke’s resignation in October 1974, Sylvia Williams was asked to fill the position for the remainder of the year.

During the 1970s, the main goals and responsibilities of the department was not only to schedule and supply music for weekly services, but to also plan fundraising events to aid in the rebuilding of the church sanctuary after the fire of 1969. In addition to individual contributions, many of the musical groups in the church gave concerts and donated the proceeds to the Building Fund. The Larkettes, an all-female choir directed by Sylvia Williams, and the New Believers Chorus made recordings and donated the proceeds to the fund. They built up the church musically and financially.

Musical Repertoire and Styles in the 1970s

By the decade of the 1970s, the music at Ephesus began to change more rapidly than in previous decades. On one hand, the Senior Church was maintaining the musical tradition of anthems, spirituals, and hymns. On the other hand, the Youth Church was beginning to incorporate more contemporary styles of music within its services. Moreover, although gospel music was not totally foreign to the Ephesus Church before the 1970s, as noted in Chapter 4, seemingly it was sung more frequently during this decade. Various choirs, groups, and soloists in the church sang some of the more traditional gospel song forms, as reflected in the substantial amount of music written and
published by African-American composers that was found in the music library of the church. Among the selections were pieces written and arranged by American gospel singers and composers, Roberta Martin (1907 – 1969) and Kenneth Morris (1917 – 1988).\(^{174}\)

The choirs that served in the Senior Church – Senior Choir, Collegiate Choir, and New Believers Chorus – maintained the tradition of singing “war horse” anthems, as well as spirituals, some of which had been introduced by Sister Sattersfield. The New Believers Chorus was perhaps the group that ventured most frequently into the traditional gospel genre and performing style. The main reason for this experimental practice was due to the presence of Eugene Washington (b.1929), the accompanist for the choir. Washington recalls an evening when the New Believers Chorus began to swing some of their selections:

There were times now that Rosa Lee Jones [director of the New Believers Chorus] also kind of take some of the songs and “whiten” it up. One song I remember it was called, “You Been So Good to Me.” The man that was singing it, he couldn’t sing it because he felt he couldn’t sing it in that [whitened] style. So we were singing it one Sabbath morning. I said to him, “Don’t watch her, stay with me and I’ll give you the beat.” And he sang it with the beat that I gave him…she had to fall right back into… When he got through the thing, [the congregation] was saying, “Amen” and what not. I told her, I said, “Sister Jones, you’re a good director and you’re a good musician, but some songs you can’t whiten up; some songs you have to leave it alone.” She finally acknowledged that…\(^{175}\)

\(^{174}\) Roberta Martin and Kenneth Morris were Black composers from Chicago. Roberta Martin was known for her singing group, The Roberta Martin Singers. Kenneth Morris, originally from Jamaica, NY, was a composer and part owner of Martin and Morris Music Company, a Black owned music company. Morris was also for introducing the Hammond organ into the gospel genre.

\(^{175}\) Eugene Washington, interview by author, New York, NY, September 6, 2011.
The New Believers Chorus also sang call and response spirituals during the morning service. One piece in particular that they were known for singing was entitled, “Leaning on the Lord.”

While Eugene Washington was accustomed to playing keyboard instruments incorporating jazz and blues influences, other musicians were not as comfortable playing in the style. This discomfort or lack of skill was due to two possible reasons: 1) unfamiliarity with the style, and 2) the limitations of the transcriptions during that time.

Most musicians in the Adventist church were taught that certain styles of music were not appropriate to play in or out of the church. Everyl Chandler Gibson (dates?) was the organist at Ephesus for over fifty years. She studied organ at the Julliard School with Edward G. Morganson and Lillian Carpenter. Her musical training focused on classical music. When asked about playing in the gospel style, she stated,

I wasn’t allowed to do that in my house…when I was coming up learning hymns and what not….I didn’t get a chance to play those hymns. I loved the beats and everything, but I can’t do it. I was not allowed to do them at Juilliard….It was something and I don’t know- I know I have a talent from God, but I don’t know if I was held back, but I just can’t do it. I hear the pianists now going up and down the piano, and doing all kinds of things. I play a good organ anthem. But to do what I hear today, I sit down and I am mesmerized by what some of the organists can do. And I just can’t do it.

Gospel folios in the 1970s were more like road maps of the piece, allowing for the musician to create an accompaniment based on the ability of the musician. If the musician was not good at “playing by ear” or improvising, the song was not as full

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176 I have fond memories of Brother Bagby, one of the tenors in the choir, standing directly behind the organ in the choir loft leading this song. He would sing the line, “Tell me how did you feel when you…” and the rest of the choir would join him singing “…come out the wilderness… leaning on the Lord.”

177 Everyl Gibson, interview by author, New York, NY, September 4, 2011.
sounding. The difficulty in rendering gospel style well could possibly be one reason why the Ephesus Senior Church continued to maintain a Euro-American musical tradition. However, by the 1990s, with the emergence of computer software like Finale, composers have been able to document all of the inflections that used to be reserved for that special group of musicians who had innate ability or who had become familiar with the style through oral tradition.

Music in the Youth Church – 1970s

The Youth Church, from its inception in 1955, was modeled after the Senior Church. Although the immediate role of the church was to alleviate the overcrowding in the Senior Church, the secondary and more long-term role of the Youth Church was to prepare future leaders for service. To that end, the organizers of the Youth Church patterned the organizational structure after the Senior Church. The Youth Church is also unique in that it has its own pastor, who is assigned from the local SDA conference. So Ephesus not only has been training its youth in church lay ministry, but it has been the training ground for many young ministers coming out of seminary.

Musically, the Youth Church musicians performed the same type of genres as the Senior Church in the 1960s. The performance of Euro-American hymn style, with “classically” oriented accompanimental style, was easy to facilitate not only because it was the culture of the times, but also because some of the youth musicians were students at Juilliard and Manhattan School of Music. However, by the 1970s, the music of the Youth Church began to move in a more Afrocentric direction.
Musicians and Musical Groups – 1970s

Sylvia Williams, the Larkettes, and the Children’s Chorale

One musician who was instrumental in transitioning the Youth Church towards the incorporation of contemporary gospel music was Sylvia Williams. Born in 1939, Williams, affectionately known as “Aunt Sylvia,” was affiliated with Ephesus since childhood. She started taking piano lessons at age seven and from then, she dedicated herself to music ministry until her untimely death in 1999.

In 1963, she formed a women’s choir that she named the Larkettes. The group started out as a special choir for Ladies’ Day and continued on as a regular participant in music ministry at the church for thirty years. The Larkettes was a special group because they sang a large variety of music.\textsuperscript{178} In a time when women’s choirs were not in vogue or common, the Larkettes brought a welcomed change to the church. Since the choral selections for women’s groups were slim, it was not unusual to find Williams adapting traditional choral music to suit the group.

In 1971, the Larkettes produced a recording, simply entitled “The Larkettes,” which consisted of sacred music, from anthems to traditional and contemporary gospel. One track on the album was a rendition of Edwin Hawkins’s “Oh Happy Day.” The song was so popular among church members that it was an important catalyst for the new Afro-centered orientation in the Youth Church.

\textsuperscript{178} Sylvia Williams was a lover of music and exposed the group to many genres, sacred and secular. She was an innovator, always looking for new and interesting repertoire. Many a day, I would find her at Carl Fischer, surveying new music. Carl Fischer was a music store located on Cooper Square in the Greenwich Village area of Manhattan, within walking distance of New York University, where Williams worked. The clerk would set her up at a piano and bring scores upon scores of music for her to examine. Sadly, the store closed 1999.
The Larkettes gave concerts twice a year, winter and spring, to benefit the rebuilding of the church edifice of Ephesus on the corner of Lenox Avenue and West 123rd Street. These concerts featured the group and special guests. From time to time, Aunt Sylvia would have men sing in the group if there were certain pieces that would not work without male voices; the men were called the Larks. One concert of the Larkettes, held in December 1974, featured the last performance of the Ephesus Boys Choir.\footnote{The Boys Choir of Harlem, Inc. Board of Directors was formed in February 1975. Official separation from the Ephesus was complete in March 1975.}

Around 1974, Aunt Sylvia saw there was a need to revive the children’s choir. The Children’s Chorale had as many as 100 children, ranging in age from three to fifteen. Like the Larkettes, Aunt Sylvia presented the Children’s Chorale in annual concerts, sometimes in joint programs with the Larkettes.\footnote{I sang my first solo with the Children’s Chorale in a joint Christmas concert with the Larkettes in 1975. A recording of this concert was found, courtesy of the late Katherine Gooden, my maternal grandfather’s cousin. She had a cassette recorder and enjoyed taping various concerts and services.}

The Larkettes and Children’s Chorale were like family, and in many cases they were family. William and Laura Chesson, Aunt Sylvia’s family members, recall the musical genealogy within both groups:

Because the Larkettes existed a long time, you had parents and then you had those parents’ kids… I remember… whenever they had to go anywhere… at intermission… Sylvia would tell the story of the Larkettes. [She would say, for example], “That’s Janet Jacobs…. She started singing in the Larkettes… and then her daughter, Carlotta, came in…. And Karen Martin and her two daughters….” That’s they way… it worked out.

And when the children’s choir followed, she would [say], “This is the Chesson family. Will all the Chessons stand up?” So then William would stand up in the base [section], I would stand up, then Yvonne, Stacey, and Laurie would stand up…. Every time we had another [child, she would say], “Oh, there’s been an addition to our family.” My son was a baby. She would introduce him; so then we would have to hold
him up from the audience…. But that’s what the choir was made of; and because of that, everybody kept together.\textsuperscript{181}

Although Sylvia Williams did not attend college or a conservatory for music, she encouraged all aspects of the arts, and mentored young people at the Ephesus Church and throughout the community.

\textit{The Ecstatistics}

The all-male group known as the Ecstatistics was created to represent the Ephesus Pathfinder troupe at the 1972 Pathfinder Camporee held in Trinidad and Tobago. After the Camporee, the group continued to perform together. Under the guidance of James Beaman, the Pathfinder director and group manager, the Ecstatistics performed extensively in the New York tri-state area and along the Eastern Seaboard.

Throughout the 40 years of the group’s existence, its repertoire has centered on traditional gospel music. The instrumentation of the group, which consists of drums, electric guitars, and occasionally a keyboard, has attracted the youth of the church, while repelling some older members at the same time. At times, the volume level on the amplifiers of the electronic instruments has been so high that it rattled the nerves of older members. However, the youth were enthralled with the group’s popular style, as Laura Chesson describes:

\begin{quote}
I think they made a big difference. Everybody was in love with them. We finally had music that [we] could adapt to. My kids just loved them. “Aaah,” the girls in the audience would sigh… [We] wouldn’t go and [listen to]… Little Richard… or …Little Anthony…[because]… we had our own. They were [a group] that [my kids] could listen to because they were Adventists.\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{181} William and Laura Chesson, interview by author, Lithonia, GA, October 1, 2011.

\textsuperscript{182} Laura Chesson, interview by author, Lithonia, GA, October 1, 2011.
Although James Beaman died in 1988, the Ecstatistics remain active in their music ministry.

Music Education

Most of the formal musical education that the youth at Ephesus received was at the R. T. Hudson Elementary School. Those who were fortunate to attend the school were introduced to music by Ruth Irvis Nixon Gardner. However, informal musical education also took place in the worship service, by way of congregational singing, the hearing of musical performances of varying types, but especially through participation in the choirs.

Ruth Irvis Nixon Gardner

Ruth Irvis Nixon Gardner (1935 – 2004) was the granddaughter of Jennie Irvis, the first known musical leader of Ephesus Church. At a young age, Nixon Gardner learned the rudiments of music from her grandmother. She began playing for Sabbath School and the youth services at a young age. Everything she knew about being a church musician she learned from her grandmother. Jake Nixon, one of Ruth’s sons, stresses the importance of her role as musical leader and educational force in the church:

A church musician’s role is more than just playing for a church service or directing a choir. It’s to lead a congregation in their musical worship experience…. It also engenders education. I see how Jennie Irvis took her granddaughter and mentored her in church musicianship.183

When the Youth Church was established in 1955, Mrs. Nixon Gardner directed the Children’s Choir. She was also the first accompanist for the

183 Jake Nixon, interview by author, Bronx, NY, March 1, 2012,
Ephesus Boys Choir. In 1975 she became the director of the Youth Choir and worked with Youth Church until 1991. She left the Youth Church and committed herself to the Senior Church, where she worked with the Senior Choir from 1991 until her illness in 2002.

A gifted singer, Nixon Gardner was the featured soloist in many concerts around the city. She and Walter Turnbull collaborated and performed a benefit recital in 1968 to raise funds to purchase a grand piano for R.T. Hudson Elementary School, the above-mentioned elementary school that was sponsored by Ephesus and two other SDA churches in the area.184

For thirty-seven years, Nixon Gardner taught at R.T. Hudson. She taught music for grades 1 through 8 and developed the school choir into one of the best elementary choruses in the Northeastern Conference. Gardner taught every class an instrument in addition to singing. She would start the classes with the song flute, then move them to the recorder, and at last the melodeon or melodica. As noted in her obituary, “Without the formal education as a teacher, parents and staff were amazed with the musical talent she unearthed in so many students.”185 Although she did not have musical degrees, she had an innate ability to teach music to young and old. In reminiscing about his mother’s musical abilities and influence on people, Jake further emphasizes her teaching of musical literacy, as well as the musical links that she helped to form between R.T. Hudson and Ephesus Church:

… [my] mother was talented enough to teach at any school she could have wanted…. But she chose to teach at little ol’, small R.T. Hudson Elementary School, and… spread her musical ministry to encompass huge numbers of children. She introduced them to basic music theory.

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185 Ruth Irvis Nixon Gardner obituary.
She formed choirs out of these elementary children and taught them the rudiments of vocalization and general musicianship. She taught them how to read and write music. That is the role of a church musician.\footnote{186}

As a church musician, she exposed the youth there to a variety of musical genres. The Youth Choir sang major choral works, such as \textit{The Seven Last Words} (\textit{Les septes paroles du Christ}, 1867) by Théodore Dubois, and excerpts from Georg Friederich Händel’s \textit{Messiah} (1741). While Gardner was not one for contemporary gospel pieces with strong, rhythmic drives, she did, however, enjoy the works of the gospel singer, songwriter, and arranger Andraé Crouch (b. 1942) and the gospel singer and pastor Walter Hawkins (1949-2010), and taught them to the choir. On any given Sabbath, one could hear the Youth Choir singing “Take Me Back,”\footnote{187} “Jesus Christ is the Way,”\footnote{188} or “Changed.”\footnote{189}

\footnote{186} Jake Nixon, interview by author, Bronx, NY, March 1, 2012.\footnote{187} “Take Me Back” was written by Andraé Crouch. It is the title track on the 1975 album by Andraé Crouch and the Disciples.\footnote{188} “Jesus Christ is the Way” was written by Walter Hawkins, and is the title track on the Hawkins Family’s 1977 debut album.\footnote{189} “Changed” was written by Walter Hawkins, and is on \textit{Love Alive 1} (1975) by Walter Hawkins and the Love Fellowship Choir.
### MUSICIANS AND PASTORS FROM 1970 – 1979

**Ephesus Senior Church**

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<tr>
<th>Pastors</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minister of Music</th>
<th>Music Coordinator</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sylvia Williams (1975, 1977, 1979)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Assistant Minister of Music</th>
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<td>Sylvia Williams (1977)</td>
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<th>Choirs/Ensembles</th>
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**Collegiate Choir**

- Alva Ibitoye (1975)

**Sanctuary Choir**\(^{190}\)

- Everyl Gibson (1977)
- Assistant: Mae Brown (1970)
- Sylvia Williams (1977)

**Ephesus Boys Choir**\(^{191}\)


**Ephesianaires**\(^{192}\)

- Sylvia Williams (1974)

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\(^{190}\) The Sanctuary Choir changed their name to the Senior Choir in 1975.

\(^{191}\) The Ephesus Boys Choir served in both Senior and Youth Churches.

\(^{192}\) Based on the 1974 Church Board Minutes, the Ephesianaires was considered an official choir of the church. Tenure of the group is unknown.
**MUSICIANS FROM 1970 – 1979**

**Ephesus Senior Church**

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<tr>
<th>Head Organist</th>
<th>Head Pianist</th>
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<td>Sylvia Williams (1977)</td>
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<td>Homer Wade (1979)</td>
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<th>Assistant Organist</th>
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<td>Homer Wade (1977)</td>
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<td>Henrietta Morgan (1975, 1977)</td>
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<td>Sylvia Williams (1974, 1975)</td>
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<td>Yolanda Clarke (1974)</td>
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MUSICIANS AND PASTORS FROM 1970 – 1979

Ephesus Youth Church

Pastors

Music Coordinator
Edwina Humphrey (1978)   Lenora Cannegieter (1979)

Assistant Music Coordinator
Ruth Nixon (1975)     Cathy Hall (1979)

Choirs/Ensembles

Youth Choir
Harold Anthony (1970)
Ruth Nixon (1975 - 1979)
Assistant: Eugene Washington (1978)

Larkettes
Sylvia Williams (1970 – 1979)
Assistant: Christabel J. Earl (1978)

Ephesus Boys Choir\textsuperscript{193}
Assistant: Ruth Nixon, Pianist (1970)

Alleluia Chorale

The Children’s Chorale
Sylvia Williams (1972 – 1979)

\textsuperscript{193} The Ephesus Boys Choir left the auspices of the church in 1975 and became a community-based group, namely, The Boys Choir of Harlem, Inc.
**MUSICIANS FROM 1970 – 1979**

**Ephesus Youth Church**

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<tr>
<th>Head Organist</th>
<th>Head Pianist</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sylvia Williams (1979)</td>
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<td>Homer Wade (1979)</td>
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<td>Pamela Blair (1978)</td>
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<td>Jeryl Cunningham (1978)</td>
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<td>Alberta McMillan (1979)</td>
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Overview of Music in the 1980s

The 1980s ushered in changes in leadership that affected the church and especially the Music Department. After nine years of serving the Ephesus Church, Pastor Edwin J Humphrey was moved to another congregation. Ephesus received another pastor, Dr. Leon G. Cox, from Chicago, in 1980. Dr. Cox’s wife, Blanche, became the director of the Senior Choir.

During this decade the Ephesus Senior Church had its youngest Minister of Music, Jeryl Cunningham (the author of this study), in 1989 and the Music Department of the Youth Church was layperson-driven for several years, rather than musician-driven.

Musical Leadership in the 1980s

In the early 1980s, an elder of the church headed the Music Department of the Senior Church. Elder Otis Searcy was assigned to oversee the organization of the Music Department and to chair the Music Committee. It is not clear as to why Elder Searcy was given these duties; however, it can be assumed that the nominating committee could not find a musician who was willing to take on these responsibilities. By the mid-1980s, a musician returned to the post for remainder of the decade.

Musical Education

After her arrival around 1980, Blanche Cox, director of the Senior Choir, presented each member of the choir with a handbook that outlined not only the responsibilities of a chorister, but also outlined basic techniques of singing. The handout
entitled, “The Senior Choir of Ephesus SDA Church,” has on its cover page the purpose of the document:

These brief notations are dedicated to the faithful members of the Senior Choir who love the service of the Lord. In this writing there is nothing new but several reminders of music matters too important to forget.

There are some things in choir service that are so basic that too often they go without saying, and so what is written here is a somewhat neglected statement that I pray will be useful and helpful to all.194

The handout’s combination of instruction pertaining to spirituality in worship with musical guidelines is evident from its sections covering “Spiritual Concepts for a Church Choir Member,” “Vocal Helps,” “Breathing Techniques,” “Physical Sensations Involved in Singing,” “Principles of Interpretation,” “Watching the Director,” and “Organizational Reminders.”195

Blanche Cox’s tenure with the Senior Choir ended in 1985, when her husband was transferred to another congregation.196

Music in the Youth Church – 1980s

During the 1980s, the music in the Youth Church experienced its greatest change. The Youth Choir lost members due to the fact that many of the members were attending college outside of the New York City area. There were a large number of young adults beginning to marry and have families. The responsibilities of balancing family life and

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194 “The Senior Choir of Ephesus SDA Church” is a six-page typewritten document that I found while cleaning and organizing the Choir Room. There is no specific date or author given; however, it is assumed that it was written and distributed during Sister Cox’s tenure at the church.

195 See Appendix C, p. ___.

196 The Church nominating reports were incomplete; the next documented director of the Senior Choir was Roland Roberts in 1989.
church were too much for some members, so they chose to take a leave of absence from the choir. In addition, interest in the church choir was waning.

Even though the Youth Church choirs were still serving on a weekly basis, and singing a variety of genres, the tastes of the congregation had changed. They craved a music and worship style that was more inspirational, more energetic. Thus began the quest for contemporary gospel music.197

197 The gospel music that was used in Ephesus during the 1950s and 1960s were pieces that were written by Thomas Dorsey and Roberta Martin, what is now considered traditional gospel music. These pieces were performed with piano and organ. The use of percussive and electronic instruments was not permitted in the church during this time. However, by the 1970s, contemporary gospel music tended to be written in the style of popular secular music and used electronic and percussive instruments.
Figure 5.3: Musicians and Pastors of the Senior Church from 1980 – 1989

MUSICIANS AND PASTORS FROM 1980 – 1989

Ephesus Senior Church

Pastors


Minister of Music/Music Coordinator


Choirs/Ensembles

Collegiate Choir
Homer Wade (1986)
Assistant: Lynda Elliott (1989)
    Ruth Nixon (1987)

Voices of Praise
Assistant: Muriel Hutchins (1986)

Senior Choir
Blanche Cox (1982)
Roland Roberts (1989)
Assistant: Muriel Hutchins (1989)

New Believers’ Chorus
Rosa Lee Jones (1957 – 1990)

Head Organist

Assistant Organist
Sylvia Williams (1987)

Head Pianist
Ruth Nixon (1989)

Assistant Pianist
Lenora Cannegieter (1989)
Jeryl Cunningham (1989)
Ruth Nixon (1987)
Homer Wade (1986)
Figure 5.4: Musicians and Pastors of the Youth Church from 1980 – 1989

**MUSICIANS AND PASTORS FROM 1980 – 1989**

**Ephesus Youth Church**

**Pastors**

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**Minister of Music/Music Coordinator**

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**Assistant Minister of Music/Music Coordinator**

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<tr>
<td>Priscilla Beaman (1980)</td>
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**Choirs/Ensembles**

### Youth Choir

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### Larkettes

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### Children’s Chorale

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### Head Organist

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### Head Pianist

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<td>Lenora Cannegieter (1980, 1986)</td>
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<td>Emily Perry (1988)</td>
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### Assistant Organist

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### Assistant Pianist

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<tr>
<td>Eugene Washington (1980)</td>
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<td>Wilbur Love (1980)</td>
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<td>Richard Felder (1980)</td>
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<td>Vera Spellman (1980, 1986)</td>
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<td>Alan Price (1988)</td>
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<td>Bernard Smalls (1988)</td>
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<td>Sylvia Williams (1986, 1988)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nancy Rutledge (1986)</td>
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Overview of Music in the 1990s

Ephesus received four pastors during the decade of the 1990s. This was also the era of significant changes in the Music Department of the Senior Church. First, a layperson began to lead the department rather than a trained musician, as had occurred in the Youth Church in the early 1980s. Second, there were many disruptions in the choirs. The Collegiate Choir and New Believers Chorus disbanded. In addition to these breakups, the remaining choirs were consolidated into two choirs with different musical themes: The Ephesus Sanctuary Choir became the anthem choir, while the Voices of Praise (new name) became the gospel choir.

Musical Leadership

By the early 1990s, the Music Ministry at the church was waning. The choirs, while they were still serving every week, were not producing their best work. Attendance at weekly rehearsals had dropped, and recruitment of new choir members was down.

In 1994 the Church Board decided to intervene and create a six-member investigative committee to survey current and former choir members as well as musicians to ascertain the reasons as to why the Music Ministry was lacking in support. After gathering “factual information” from the musicians and various choir members, the committee came to the following conclusions:

- Low attendance at choir rehearsals had several rationales: (a) choir members had a problem with the rehearsal schedule. Some members did not want to rehearse on Friday evening or Sabbath after church service; (b) some members felt that since the

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198 The information was gathered by conducting personal interviews with choir members and musicians. The committee kept no record of the questions that were asked, nor made a listing of the individuals who were interviewed. This approach, in the author’s opinion, was not very systematic or open to critical judgment and the results, based on this lack of information, were biased.
choirs continually sang the same songs, there really was no need to attend rehearsals;
(c) although some members liked singing in the choirs, they did not like “being
bothered with attending rehearsals on a regular basis.”199

- Many felt that there was a lack of cooperation among the musicians due to personal
customs with each other, and that the musicians were generally uncooperative with
guest artists.
- Some also felt that the musicians were not supportive of the non-musicians who had
been placed into positions of authority in the Music Department. The committee felt
that

…the overall problem with the music department is not the choirs, but it
is the leadership and it appears that the concern of many of them is more
about how they are treated than what is in the best interest of the church.
History will show that over a very long period of time any new talented
musician that comes along never is able to survive and for one reason or
another the church looses [loses] their services. Thus at the present time
we are faced with a music department whose leadership is aging and
very few people are being utilized or trained to take over thus we are
made to feel that we either accept what is given us or have nothing at
all.200

A special Senior Board Meeting was called on October 23, 1995 to discuss the situation
and hear possible solutions from the musicians and interested parties who were invited to
the meeting.

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199 The report of the Investigative Committee findings on the state of the Music Ministry at
Ephesus SDA Church was presented at the October 2, 1995 Board Meeting.
200 Ibid.
In 1993, Sylvia Williams was the last musician to have the title of Music Coordinator. During this tenure, Williams implemented the first and only music workshop at the church. The workshop featured Elder Shelton Kilby, Adventist composer/arranger and minister, as the facilitator. The workshop was a two-day event. Elder Kilby preached during the morning service, and facilitated two discussion sessions – one on Sabbath afternoon and the other on Sunday morning.

The Youth Church, while it mirrored the music and worship style of the Senior Church in the past, now began to reject that musical culture and sought for styles and repertoire that were more relevant to their ethnic identity and experiences. Ruth Gardner, Sylvia Williams, and Eugene Washington “retired” from the Youth Church and began to serve in the Senior Church. Some of the new musicians that served in the Youth Church during that time were Harrison A. Watkins, III, Edison Liburd, and Timothy Amukele.

Harrison Alexander Watkins, III (1957 – 1995), Birmingham native, was a graduate of Oakwood College. A special education teacher, Watkins relocated to New York City and worked in the New York City Public Education system. He was a

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201 The term “Music Coordinator” was first used in the 1970s. When Homer Wade stepped down as Minister of Music at the end of 1973, Everyl Chandler Gibson replaced him as Minister of Music in 1974. The Church Board, however, decided to install Yolanda Clarke, the director of the Senior Choir, as Music Coordinator in the same year. The differences in the responsibilities between the Minister of Music and Music Coordinator positions are unknown, however, some of the musicians (Eugene Washington and Everyl Chandler Gibson) felt that the Minister of Music position required an advance music degree.
phenomenal pianist and arranger\textsuperscript{202} who enjoyed making music. He replaced Ruth Nixon as the director of the Youth Choir.

Under his leadership, the group sang a variety of sacred pieces, including anthems and spirituals. He was instrumental in introducing new music written by contemporary Black composers from Alabama, such as Anthony Patton and Daniel Cason.\textsuperscript{203} These pieces represented, in my observations as a Minister of Music and choir member at Ephesus, the beginning of exact transcriptions of gospel music. The notation of these pieces more accurately reflected gospel style. The syncopated rhythms were notated so that a person who was an inexperienced in the gospel style could play the piece with all of the characteristic nuances of the style.

Harrison was one of the last musicians at Ephesus to teach music using a combination of sheet music and rote methods.

\textsuperscript{202} Harrison arranged a couple of hymns for me. Unfortunately, none of them are transcribed; however, I have audio recordings of the arrangements that we performed during church services. 
\textsuperscript{203} Before Harrison’s death, he gave me original copies of music that he had in his choral library. The collection that he entrusted to me came from Professionals for Christ Publications (BMI), an organization created by Daniel Cason, in Birmingham, Alabama. This was the first time that I had ever seen exact transcriptions of gospel music.
Figure 5.5: Musicians and Pastors of the Senior Church from 1990 – 1999

MUSICIANS AND PASTORS FROM 1990 – 1999

Ephesus Senior Church

Pastors


Music Coordinator


Choirs/Ensembles

Collegiate Choir
Everyl Gibson (1990)

Senior Choir
Stanley Ware (1990)
Ruth Nixon-Gardner (1993)

Combined Choir
Jeryl Cunningham (1993)

New Believers’ Chorus
Rosa Lee Jones (1957 – 1994)

Ephesus Fellowship Choir

Ephesus Ensemble
Jeryl Cunningham (1999)

Ephesus Sanctuary Choir

Voices of Praise

Head Organist
Ruth Nixon (1990, 1991)

Head Pianist
Marie Sampson-Brown (1993)

Assistant Organist
Everyl Gibson (1990)
Eugene Washington (1993)

Assistant Pianist
Ruth Nixon (1990)
Marie Sampson-Brown (1990, 1993)
Roland Roberts (1990)
Sylvia Williams (1993)
Clara Saunders (1993)
Figure 5.6: Musicians and Pastors of the Youth Church from 1990 – 1999

**MUSICIANS AND PASTORS FROM 1990 – 1999**

**Ephesus Youth Church**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pastors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roger Wade (1998 – 2001)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Coordinator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Aurelian (1991)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harriet Williams (1990)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistant Minister of Music/Music Coordinator</th>
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<tr>
<th>Choirs/Ensembles</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Choir</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth Nixon (1990)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeryl Cunningham (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenora Cannegieter (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fellowship Choir</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeryl Cunningham (1997 - 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unlimited</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June Gardner (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s Chorale</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia Williams (1990 – 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NuVision</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Edison Liburd (1995)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Musicians</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clinton Aurelian (1991)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edison Liburd (1991)</td>
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<td>Lenora Cannegieter (1991)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kerry Smalls (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Perry (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly Smalls (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar Jackson (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy Amukele (1995)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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204 This information is incomplete. Most of it was compiled from nominating committee reports and from the Ephesus Youth Church 40th Anniversary program (1995).

205 The Youth Choir was renamed Nu Vision c. 1995.
Overview of Music from 2000 to 2010

The musical practices during the past decade at Ephesus have combined traditional musical styles with more contemporary styles. Several members have recently suggested that, despite additions of African-American music and style, the music and worship at Ephesus remain strongly entrenched in SDA traditions. One member, Harold Stenbar, implies that Eurocentrism holds on as he describes the worship style:

…[it is] somewhat progressive…it’s more Adventist-centered than African-centered. When I say that, we don’t promote our own, but there’s an absenteeism of the identity of our ethnicity to a large degree…for example, you go through our hymnal, there are not that many African American songs that relate to us as a people and our struggle. They’re modified, watered-down.²⁰⁶

Ron Liburd, current Music Coordinator, feels that the music and worship style at Ephesus is “moderate,” in regards to its use of African-American-inspired elements and its diversity of performance practice. When asked his rationale for this conclusion, he stated that:

…now we have drums, which never actually happened before. But it’s not a consistent usage of drums. And even some of our renderings of choral music are not totally classical. We do have classical as well, but then we always mix it up…. It’s light, inspirational, which never used to happen. Some hand clapping. So I would say moderate.²⁰⁷

In contrast to the desire of some members for a greater representation of African-American music and musical style, there continues to be the view that certain musical genres and performance styles are inappropriate for worship. When asked about the changes in the musical culture at Ephesus, Elihu McMahon, a longtime member, stated that

There’s a monumental change. I think the change has gone from reverence to irreverence, from sacred to theater. A lot of music that’s done nowadays deals with emotion and incorporates more African rhythm and movement and less focus on the sanctity of what the song’s message is…. It has to do with carnal feeling, you know, it’s the same kind of way that if I was down in the Caribbean listening to some reggae, it’s the same kind of movement, except that they are applying it to a religious song in theory.

I think that what you end up getting from that kind of music atmosphere, you get emotion rather than substance, and in fact I was criticizing the praise teams that often only sang this song and I said to the person sitting in front of me, “You know, it’s really inappropriate the way they are trying to present this song.” So the person said to me, “Well, you have to listen to the words.” “Yeah, but it’s pretty difficult to listen to the words when you look at the body movement.” I mean, you get young ladies moving and so the person said, “Oh, you’re always criticizing the music.” Now the next week the person came back to me and said, “You know, I have to somehow agree with you.” She says, “What I was doing, I was looking at their performance rather than listening to the words or being focused on the words.” And I said, “That’s the distraction.” I said, “Because when you cannot see the message in the song what you see in the movement in body, it’s not that it’s bad music, it’s not appropriate for church.” That’s my feeling. And I think a lot of things that are done nowadays is not appropriate. It’s designed to stir the emotion…

McMahon’s disapproval of a more intense emotional style of performance, more overt body movement, and African-derived rhythms in church services suggests that he holds onto the traditional Adventist (i.e., Eurocentric) ideals of worship.

The traditional musical practices have continued at Ephesus, although they have been strongly affected by African-American-inspired practices. When asked about the music and worship styles at the church, Dr. Blue, the present-day Senior Pastor, said that… now Ephesus tends to be more culturally conservative and musically conservative than, I would say, most of the other Adventist churches that I now see. What has happened is, as it has happened in society, the baby boomers have come through as a bubble, and baby boomers as they come through as a bubble, they change everything around them. And so, in the process of changing everything around them, many of the

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churches now are more gospel-oriented, evangelical, song-oriented and there’s not a lot of singing of hymns anymore.

People went to singing worship songs, it is not as much singing of hymns. There are very few choirs these days that have the ability to sing anthems, because people are not trained, nor do they have the patience to be trained. And so coming to Ephesus, when I first walked the door of Ephesus, I was able to appreciate the depth of musicianship that existed here in the church. The ability of this church to both hold on to tradition, while at the same time allowing itself not to be stuck in tradition, to be able to move into various genres but to do it tastefully and discreetly, and I think that’s one of the first things I noticed here about Ephesus, when I came.209

The musicians at Ephesus, while attempting to maintain traditional practices have expanded on the traditional musical forms by presenting annual performances of sacred works by major composers, including a dramatization of The Seven Last Words of Christ by French composer Théodore Dubois, as well as using jazz idioms in the performance of traditional hymnody.

Musical Leadership

For the past decade, the Music Department has been under the leadership of Ron Liburd. Liburd, a non-musician, has had to find singers and instrumentalists from outside of the congregation to serve in various musical capacities because there is a shortage of musicians in the church. There are currently three musicians, Byron Sean (pianist),

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209 Dr. Dedrick Blue, interview by author, New York, NY, September 27, 2011. The “worship songs” that Dr. Blue is referring come from the Contemporary Christian music genre. Most of these songs are classified as “Praise and Worship” songs because they are mostly used for the Praise and Worship time at the beginning of contemporary worship services. The “anthems” that Dr. Blue referred to are the old choral sacred songs, or what some like to call “war horse” anthems. Most of these anthems were extracted from major choral works, such as “I Waited for the Lord” from Mendelssohn’s Hymn of Praise, or “Hallelujah” from Beethoven’s The Mount of Olives.
George Davey (organist), and Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming (choir director) serving in the Music Department that are members of the church.

Liburd strongly believes that the current structure of the Music Department is not effective. Among his suggestions, he calls for the hiring of a Minister of Music and greater respect for and payment of musical contributions:

It’s one that needs to be revamped. They need to hire a Minister of Music… the structure should be set up where you have a minister of music in-house, somebody who is qualified to do that position. And having someone who’s just administratively running it works, but it’s like really having… a patch on a sore that’s going to make the sore reappear. They need to hire a minister of music.

With that being said, there are monies that need to be channeled to make that happen, whether it be from conference level or whatever. One of the problems that I have within our structure, our Seventh-day Adventist structure, is that there’s not enough emphasis being placed on music within the churches. They will hire somebody to be the Religious Liberty Coordinator, or the hire the ministers for all different churches, but they don’t think about that you’re having people going to the universities studying music, but not actually saying, “Okay, we got all these young people who are studying ministry. We’re placing them in different churches and finding jobs for them. But we got all these people studying music, why can’t we place them, too? How are they going to survive?” You got nurses, doctors. The only place that [musician/performer] can actually survive… is in the church, unless you send them out to the world.

That’s the problem. And we have not appreciated musicians within our churches, or put prerequisites, put certain entities in place so that musicians are taken care of once they leave our schools. We give them all the tools they need while they’re in the university. But when they come out, we don’t take care of them. We expect them to just fly on their own. And then we disrespect them by not wanting to pay them when they do sing, play, whatever.

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210 I served as Minister of Music in 1989. I have directed three choirs and served as Music Coordinator in the Youth Church between 1990 and 2010. In 1995, the Church Board decided to change the requirements for leadership of the Music Department. Since that time, the Music Department has been under the coordinated by a non-musician.
But we respect the teachers in our schools. We find jobs for them, gladly in our schools. We don’t give the musicians the same respect that you them find in jobs in our school or in our churches.\textsuperscript{211}

\textit{Musical Education}

During this decade, more musical education took place in the church than in the past. Liburd and his current musical collaborators are of the mindset that in order to be effective in music ministry, each performer must have basic musical training and preparation. The central forums for teaching music continue to be the church choirs, along with the newly founded the Bell Choir.

\textit{Ephesus Bell Choir}

The Ephesus Bell Choir, a new musical group of the church, was established in March 2009. The members range in age from seven to eighty-one. Ephesus is not the only Adventist church to have a bell choir; there is a bell choir at the Oakwood University Church in Huntsville, Alabama. However, the Ephesus Bell Choir is unique due to its wide age range and the type of bells used. When asked about the origin of the group, Cathy Hall-Nixon, 34-year veteran music educator and director of the group, spoke humorously, making note of my insistent appeals to her:

\begin{quote}
[The Bell Choir] got started because this lady in the church [i.e., the present author], that I have known forever, was stalking me; every time I turned around she would be sitting there waiting to say, “When are you going to start the Bell Choir?” She stalked me for a year…. Do you remember when I told you I would pray about it? I didn’t pray about nothing! I thought, “Jeryl must be out of her mind!” But because of your perseverance, I started praying…. See, I like persistence. You were not [going to] let it go; you [believed] I could do this, to bring this together. You kept at it until I started praying. I started praying and kept putting every obstacle to God imaginable…. So finally, between you and God, I
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{211} Ron Liburd, interview by author, Brooklyn, NY, July 25, 2012.
was worn down and I couldn’t take it anymore. It was just easier to start the choir than to listen to you and God take every obstacle away. It was easier to acquiesce!  

Originally, the Bell Choir was created for the Pathfinders to fulfill the requirements for an honor in music. However, when the pastor, Dr. Blue, made an announcement inviting members to join the ensemble from the pulpit the morning of March 9, 2009, he did not indicate an age restriction, but gave an open invitation to the congregation. When Hall-Nixon and I arrived at the Choir Room at 4:00 pm that afternoon, we found a collage of people of various ages. This snafu ended up being the best gimmick for the group. The mixture of generations and gender is very effective. It helps to maintain decorum and behavioral management during rehearsals.

Traditionally, when one sees a bell choir, one sees shiny brass bells laid out on a table that has been covered with a black cloth, individual music stands, and white gloves. The Ephesus Bell Choir, however, does not have brass bells or a table – at least not yet. Because the group was initially planned to comprise children, the bells that were first used were color-coded. Recently, bell plates were added. Members learn music from transcriptions that Hall-Nixon makes of all music selections on chart-sized manuscript paper. The chart is positioned in the front of the room and the entire group reads from that one chart. When the Bell Choir performs for church or an outside event, the charts are affixed to two music stands as. the group stands in height order for visibility.

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212 Cathy Hall-Nixon, interview by author via phone, October 12, 2012.
213 The Pathfinder Club is an organization for youth, ages 10 to 15, sponsored by the Youth Department of the SDA church worldwide. The club, which is ordered after the Boys Scout and Girls Scouts, offers boys and girls and opportunity to learn new skills and acquire patches when the skills tests are completed. Each local church sponsors its own Pathfinder Club.
214 When the Bell Choir was organized, I was serving as the Director of the Chancel Choir and a member of the Music Committee. Ron Liburd asked me to speak with Cathy Hall-Nixon about organizing the Bell Choir.
While Hall-Nixon does not provide handouts or booklets on music theory, she does teach basic musicianship to the mass group, at times with a translator to accommodate Spanish-speaking members:

They’re learning theory. Instead of teaching theory separately, which is very difficult for someone who does not know music, I teach it as it comes, usually through a new piece of music. Every time a new piece of music comes in, I review theory with them… we talk about time signature, key signature, and the value of the notes…

A lady started coming to church with her son…. [She] is from Colombia and doesn’t speak…English, nor her son…. [Tina and Sonja] sit there and translate everything I’m saying about the music in English, and she is playing the bells, and so is her son…. Phenomenal! They performed with us for the first time in Sabbath School on the last Sabbath of September. Talk about the educational piece and how the Lord is blessing! We are now bilingual! It is phenomenal to watch and hear them translate in Spanish what I am saying.\(^{215}\)

Cathy Hall-Nixon’s goals for the Bell Choir within the next five years include acquiring a chromatic set of brass bells, to transition the group from the large chart to individual musical scores, and for members of the group to be able to know and have a love for music that goes beyond the Bell Choir. She emphasizes the close-knit dynamic among group members: “We are a family; we take care of each other and love each other. That’s the only way our music will always sound beautiful.”\(^{216}\)

_Musicians and Ensembles_

_Ephesus Chamber Singers_

George Davey came to Ephesus Church in 2004 as a substitute organist. By 2007, not only was he promoted to the position of Head Organist, he inherited a choral group

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\(^{215}\) Hall-Nixon interview.  
\(^{216}\) Ibid.
called the Ephesus Chamber Singers. When asked about the origins of the group, Davey stated that

The Chamber Singers was originally comprised of professional singers; it’s a smaller version of the Ephesus Ensemble. The purpose of the group, I would say, like any other choir, is to enhance the music of the congregation and provide special selections. Presently, the Chamber Singers have transitioned to 100 percent Ephesian…. All members are Seventh-day Adventists.²¹⁷

The repertoire of the Chamber Singers spans sacred genres, from traditional church music to traditional gospel to contemporary Christian²¹⁸, including songs in Spanish. When asked about group’s repertoire, Davey spoke of its intended diversity and underscored the fact that approximately half of its selections center on African-American music:

Because of the diversity in our congregation and the diversity in musical tastes, we try to cater to each taste…. I make a point to schedule at least fifty percent of our musical presentations, at any given time, to African American music, be it spirituals, gospel, or contemporary. Because the demographics of our church is majority African American – there’s some Caribbean and some African, and some South American, and other African-based nationalities in our congregation – but they seem to all appreciate and are inspired by African American music.

I remember once throwing in a piece, which was in Spanish, and it was … well received, more than I thought it would be, because at the time, I was not aware that there were so many South American members in our church. The reason I do that is because I like our members to have something from their own musical pool.

The Chamber Singers has a support group who are responsible for teaching/education the choristers about the rudiments of music. The Choral Academy, a term coined by Davey, was created to aid in this matter:

²¹⁷ George Davey, interview by author via phone, October 10, 2012.
²¹⁸ Contemporary Christian music is a genre of sacred music that uses popular musical idioms, such as pop and rock music, and has sacred text either derived from the Scriptures or based on the composers Christian experience.
We discovered very quickly that as willing as the choir members are, there were some communication problems – communication between myself and the choristers during rehearsal. And that stemmed from the fact that… they did not understand what a bar is; they did not understand [note values], not saying all, but the majority didn’t. We were not communicating well. So we decided to find a way to get the word out about what these things mean so our rehearsal could be more efficient.

We wanted to have the format of a classroom setting where we have a lecturer and students, and they take notes and get quizzed… but we haven’t gotten to that stage yet. Right now, Sister Cathy [Hall-Nixon] moves around the room, and whenever she senses there is something that is not clear to someone, she’ll quickly put them in the right direction and get them on board with whatever they are having difficulty with.

Since the transition of the Chamber Singers’ membership from professional to lay members, there has been an interest from many church members to join the group, even those without prior musical training.

June April, Jazz Inspirational Artist

People who were brave enough to venture outside of the church’s traditional core introduced most of the changes in musical styles at Ephesus Church. Eugene Washington introduced a gospel style of playing keyboard instruments; Sylvia Williams exploited to use of contemporary gospel music and contemporary Christian music at the church. June April introduced jazz inspirational music to the congregation.

June April has been a member at Ephesus all of her life. She was exposed to music through her participation in the various choirs at the church during her youth. This interest in music led her to attend Music and Art High School in Harlem. While attending Syracuse University, she began to fully cultivate her interest in jazz music. When asked about her career and musical style June April stated
I consider myself a Jazz Inspirational Artist... what I hear is with a jazz kind of ear and... my desire is to live for God. So the combination of the two have created my wheel of jazz... [My music] is kind of an eclectic kind of sound for churches, and in jazz, it introduces people to the Word and the purpose of God.219

During the course of our conversation, I told June about Joyce Bryant, a 1950s jazz singer who returned to her Adventist roots in 1955, and how Bryant had had to lay aside her jazz career for the sake of the gospel. I asked June April about her feelings and position on Miss Bryant’s decision, since she, too, is a jazz singer and an Adventist Christian. She believes that her music dedicated to God and that she wants it to serve as an alternative to secular music not just for the Christian, but for all who listens to her compositions:

What I find – and that’s just me – is that every time I open my mouth, it sounds jazzy. I mean... I try to stop it, but it just keeps coming out. So, I’ll be minding my business and saying, “Stop it! Cut it out!” but it just keeps coming.... I know that jazz music is associated with the brothel, with the prostitute, with the drunk, with drugs, with seedy little bars in a club, those types of sounds have illuminated. So if I came to the church and I was hanging out in these brothels before I joined [the] church, hearing these kinds of sounds is not comfortable for my listening ear because it’s reminding them of where [I] used to be. I understand that, but I don’t know if that’s the music’s fault, or that’s where the music just happened to be placed.

Now, I’m educating people that... I’m singing about the Lord and singing about my testimony, so it’s kind of changing their mind frame into where that kind of sounding music came from. I don’t know, you know they say in Revelation220 [that] we [will] overcome by the Blood of the Lamb, and there’s going to be a new song, and everybody going to sing that new song. I don’t know if that’s going to be Classical Music, I don’t know if that’s going to be, “Never Could Have Made It”... you know what I mean... there were sounds that Ray Charles was making music that they would have considered blasphemous, they have the sound, but now it’s in the Church.... So, in answer to your question, I do what I do; and if I’m asked to come back, I’m asked to come back. If they say, “Don’t let the door hit ya, where the good Lord split ya!”

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219 June April, interview by author via Skype, October 10, 2011.
220 Revelation 12:11; 14:3.
then I move on from that sad situation…. It depends on who you are and what your perspective is about; and it’s not always etched in stone. It’s simply, “June, where is your heart? You know where does your heart lies [lie]? Do you think your Music can be a blessing to help people be saved? Do you think that your Music can be an alternative, a positive lure that can be resounding in your head while you’re going on through the challenges of life? Can your Music be a booster? Instead of listening to, “Do Me Baby,” while you cleaning up the house, can you listen to your music? What is the Purpose of your Music?” If you can [have this mindset], then you can say, “You know what, ok, I’m not doing too bad,” because I really speak from who I am.221

June April has produced two recordings. Jazz Hymns (2004) contains five arrangements of gospel hymns and spirituals. Her most recent project, What Am I? (2007), contains jazz arrangements of hymns and spirituals. In addition, there are three of June April’s original compositions on the CD.

*The Seven Last Words of Christ – A Dramatic Presentation*

Between 1960 and 1990, it was a custom at Ephesus to have a “sermon in song” twice a year. During the Christmas season, the New Believers Chorus would perform excerpts from Händel’s *Messiah*, while the Collegiate Choir would perform Théodore Dubois’s oratorio, *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, during the Lenten/Easter season. These musical presentations concluded when these choirs disbanded in the 1990s.

Around March 2009, Dr. Blue approached me with the idea of putting on a passion play for the Lenten/Easter season, although he was not specific about whether he wanted the presentation to be a spoken drama or a drama with music.222 Significant in my considerations was that the work had to be accessible to amateur actors. After some

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221 June April interview.
222 I was not the Music Coordinator during 2009. Dr. Blue asked me about the passion play because I was the director of the Chancel Choir and my professional experience as a performer.
consideration, I suggested Dubois’s *Seven Last Words*. The work was perfect because 1) the music was familiar to the majority of the choir members, 2) the work could accommodate drama, and 3) the actors would not have to learn lines because the choir or soloists would sing all of the dialogue.

While many choir members have performed the Dubois’s work, this was the first time that a staged presentation of the work had been done at Ephesus. As in productions of opera, the project called for a cooperative of many facets of the church’s ministries. There were people responsible for set design, props, costumes, lighting, special effects, audio and video, and catering.

The production took place on April 3, 2010. Many people were moved because they were able to have a glimpse, in dramatized form, of the sacrifice of Christ for the world. Joseph Merriweather and Elihu McMahon, interviewees for this project, both felt that the production was inappropriate for morning worship service mainly because the dramatic portion, to them, was too reminiscent of the theater. 223 While they felt that this type of dramatic presentation was not appropriate for the church, both gentlemen did say that the service was still spiritually moving.

*Music in the Youth Church – 2000 to 2010*

The music and worship services in the Youth Church are more contemporary than the Senior Church. The term “contemporary worship” describes the informal, more charismatic form of worship that is more music driven than liturgy driven. In the past, the music in the Youth Church mirrored the conservative tradition of the Senior Church.

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223 Based on various conversations with J. Merriweather and E. McMahon about the presentation, they felt that the work should have not been presented during the Divine Worship Hour.
Today, hymns like “Near the Cross,” have been superseded by praise and worship songs like “Lord I Lift Your Name on High.”\textsuperscript{224} The Allen organ has been replaced with a synthesizer and rhythm section made of a drum set, bass and lead guitars, and saxophone. Most of the music for the service is conducted by the Praise Team. Denise Joseph, a member of the Praise Team and Youth Choir, gives a description of the music in the Youth Church:

…we have Christian contemporary music and we also have gospel in the Youth Church. So we’ll have… songs from Chris Tomlin to songs from Fred Hammond. Most people are more worshipful; they stand up, they give praise. I guess, I don’t want to say [they’re] more passionate about the music because I don’t know anybody’s heart, but I just feel like they stand up, they’re clapping, they are praising God while we’re singing. They sing with us.\textsuperscript{225}

Chris Tomlin (b. 1972) and Fred Hammond (b. 1960) are two popular composers and performers of Contemporary Christian Music. The Ephesus Praise Team also performs songs written by Israel Houghton (b. 1971) and New Breed, in addition to Kirk Franklin (b. 1970), and Tye Tribbett (b. 1976). While this new style of worship is reaching the young people in the church, one wonders if the church is encouraging the musical preferences of a generation to keep them in church, while not cultivating an appreciation for the traditional repertoire of the SDA Church. However, Omar Jackson, the present-day Music Director in the Youth Church, feels that a balance of musical knowledge is important:

From a young age, I was exposed to all types of music – gospel, anthems, and spirituals – but since they do a majority of gospel and contemporary music in the Youth Church, I tend to hear that a lot and hone to that. But I have a deep appreciation for different anthems and spirituals as well… because I have a balance of both, I think I have an obligation… an opportunity to encourage or

\textsuperscript{224} “Near the Cross” was written by Fanny J. Crosby (1820 – 1915) and William H. Doane (1832 – 1915). “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High” is a praise and worship song written by Rick Founds in 1989. \textsuperscript{225} Denise Joseph, interview by author, New York, NY, October 17, 2011.
introduce different spirituals and anthems to the Youth Choir and the Praise Team as well… it helps me to approach the best of both worlds.226

Many musical changes have transpired between 1970 and 2010. While Ephesus Senior Church has continued in the traditional path of Eurocentric culture by maintaining a traditional service liturgy and incorporating a homogenous blending of traditional and some contemporary musical genres, Ephesus Youth Church has forged its own path into the contemporary worship scene.

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Figure 5.7: Musicians and Pastors of the Senior Church from 2000 – 2010

MUSICIANS AND PASTORS FROM 2000 – 2010

Ephesus Senior Church

Pastors

Music Coordinator

Choirs/Ensembles

Male Chorus
Peter Carrington (2000 – 2005)

Church Choir\textsuperscript{227}
Michael Drummond (2004, 2005)

Chancel Choir\textsuperscript{228}
Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming (2007 - present)\textsuperscript{229}

Ephesus Ensemble
Jeryl Cunningham (2000 – 2001)
Courtney Carey (2012)

Chamber Singers
George Davey (2003 – present)

Organist
Clinton Aurelian (2004, 2005)

Pianist
Ruth Nixon-Gardner (2004)\textsuperscript{230}
Kerry Smalls (2004, 2005)

\textsuperscript{227} The Senior Choir and the Voices of Praise were combined due to Ruth Gardner’s illness and the lack of members in both choirs.
\textsuperscript{228} The name of the Combined Choirs was changed to the Chancel Choir in 2007.
\textsuperscript{229} I took a leave of absence to complete degree requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Kentucky. Several people have directed the Chancel Choir during my sabbatical, including Byron Sean and George Davey. Courtney Carey, Minister of Music at Bethel AME Church, is currently working with the group.
\textsuperscript{230} Ruth Nixon-Gardner died in 2004.
**Figure 5.8: Musicians and Pastors of the Youth Church from 2000 – 2010**

**MUSICIANS AND PASTORS FROM 2000 – 2010**

**Ephesus Youth Church**

**Pastors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pastors</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roger Wade</td>
<td>1998 – 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip Wesley</td>
<td>2001 – 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime Kowelessar</td>
<td>2007 – 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Music Coordinator**

Omar Jackson (2000 – present)

**Assistant Music Coordinator**

Denise Joseph-Saint-Louis

**Choirs/Ensembles**

**EYC Praise Team**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Ball</td>
<td>2007 – 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasiah Pringle</td>
<td>2009 – present</td>
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</tbody>
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**Ephesus Youth Choir**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Ball</td>
<td>2007 – 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasiah Pringle</td>
<td>2009 – present</td>
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**Children’s Choir**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlene Kowelessar</td>
<td>2008 – 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlotta Hamilton</td>
<td>2010 – present</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

In the midst of transformative developments that affected the socio-political, religious, and racial history of the United States from the mid 19th to the late 20th century, national and local changes took place within the Seventh-day Adventist Church that altered the social and racial make-up of its congregations as well as the nature of its worship services. Based on the research that has been done on the early history of the Church, the embracing of Black members into congregations (in different proportions in various parts of the country) did not noticeably alter the ways in which worship, including music, was conducted in most churches. However, beginning in [the 1950s], in the SDA churches of Harlem, including Ephesus, the use of African-American music gradually began to emerge in worship services. Spirituals and gospel music was introduced to Ephesus when new members, like Eugene Washington, joined the church 1950 and 1960. Various choir directors, namely Marguerite Daly and Rosa Lee Jones, made it a regular practice to introduce these genres into the musical repertoire of the church choirs.

Stimulated in part by the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement, which led to overt recognitions of African-American culture and a growth of African-American self-identity in the 1960s and 1970s, musical leaders and members of Ephesus SDA Church began to promote the use of African-American music and style in services more vigorously. The Senior Church continued using hymns, anthems and spirituals as its musical foundation for service liturgy. Meanwhile, the Youth Church began to move
away from the Euro-American style of worship of the denomination and began to embrace an Afrocentric, contemporary style of worship. Musical groups, like the Larkettes and the Ecstatistics, performed traditional and contemporary gospel music within the church and outside of the church.

Within the present SDA Church, some congregations continue to believe that principles of the past transcend all cultural bounds. In these congregations, the nature of music and worship within the Seventh-day Adventist Church remains based on a Euro-American framework based on various pre-existing Protestant denominations.

Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church, from its inception in 1924, has attempted to maintain a musical culture that encompasses its denominational, as well as its cultural identity. A predominantly Black congregation within the worldwide fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist church, Ephesus has been able to adapt its worship style to one that includes some Afrocentric ideals and culture through the use of music. This ideal is mostly achieved through the two worship services – Senior Church and Youth Church – that take place simultaneously two to three times a month.

The Senior Church offers a more traditional style of worship and incorporates its Afrocentric flavor through the use of Negro spirituals and some contemporary gospel pieces. The Youth Church, which mirrored the conservative style of the Senior Church in its early stages, began to transition to a contemporary style of worship around 1970; this change allows the worshipper to be more expressive and participate in worship in a non-traditional manner.

While the Ephesus Church in Harlem is considered a Black church, there are older members who hold denominational affiliation above ethnic affiliation – hymns, anthems,
and spirituals speak to their religious experience. The younger generation embraces their ethnicity first and then their denominational affiliation – gospel music and praise and worship songs minister to them where they are at present.

Ephesus is a congregation that has weathered numerous changes in culture and structure; however, the unifying force that keeps us grounded is our faith and our pride as an African nation. This church continues to be a conduit for musicians and a beacon in the community for sacred music. Regardless of whether the music has Eurocentric or Afrocentric qualities, we will continue to sing alleluia! Praise the Lord!
APPENDICES
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<td>2234</td>
<td>2448</td>
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<td>2190</td>
<td>2134</td>
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<td>1982</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1017</td>
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<td>1105</td>
<td>1170</td>
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**Note:** Statistical data is not available for time period 1954 – 1962.
APPENDIX B
Interviewer: Today is September 27, and I’m sitting here with Pastor Blue, Senior Pastor of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thank you very much for doing this interview, Pastor Blue.

Pastor Blue: My pleasure.

Interviewer: I’m going to ask you some questions, and you just answer them to the best of your ability. If you feel that there is something that’s too personal, you don’t have to respond, just say I prefer not to respond to that, okay.

Pastor Blue: Yes, ma'am.

Interviewer: What is your age range?

Pastor Blue: 45-54.

Interviewer: Your level of education?

Pastor Blue: Well, I have a terminal degree.

Interviewer: A terminal degree in…

Pastor Blue: A Doctor of Ministry degree.

Interviewer: Where did you go to school?

Pastor Blue: Went to school at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Interviewer: And where did you go for your undergraduate?

Pastor Blue: Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama.

Interviewer: Oh, great school, great school.

Pastor Blue: Great school. Great people graduate from that school.

Interviewer: Yes. Can you tell me what your ethnicity is?

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231 The interviews in this section have been grammatically altered in order to make
Pastor Blue: I’m African-American.

Interviewer: Do you have any other ethnicity mixed with African-American that you’re aware of?

Pastor Blue: Except for what came down from the slave plantation, other than that I’m African-American, yes.

Interviewer: No Hispanic?

Pastor Blue: No. No, ma’am.

Interviewer: Are you originally from New York?

Pastor Blue: No, originally I was born in Boston; Boston, Massachusetts.

Interviewer: Are you a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Pastor Blue: Yes, I am.

Interviewer: How long have you been a member of the denomination at large?

Pastor Blue: I’ve been a baptized member since 1975, I believe.

Interviewer: How long have you been pastoring the Ephesus Church?

Pastor Blue: I’ve been pastoring the church here nearly five years, almost five years.

Interviewer: Were you always a Seventh-day Adventists?

Pastor Blue: I grew up in an Adventist home. My mother was an Adventist, so she brought me to church in my formative years. During my teen years however, I was not an active participating or an attending member. And in between those ensuing years, I was an atheist, an agnostic, a Buddhist and a Baptist.

Interviewer: You were a Buddhist?

Pastor Blue: And a Black Muslim. So, I’ve been exposed to other faith cultures and traditions.

Interviewer: I know that you usually worship in the Senior Sanctuary mainly because of your role here at the church, but have you ever served in a Youth Church, have you ever worshipped in the Youth Church?
**Pastor Blue:** Yes. I have, yes, on occasion. Not frequently, but on occasion I had opportunities to worship there or sometimes because of the way our services sort of sometimes stagger, I’ve had opportunity to sit in sometimes for almost the entire service because they spend lot of time singing at the beginning of their service. So [when] we were getting out [of church] at 1:45 they’re just be getting geared up, and then getting out of 2:30 so…

**Interviewer:** I know that you have pastored a lot of churches. During your time pastoring, have you noticed changes in the worship styles of the various churches that you’ve pastored?

**Pastor Blue:** Most definitely. When I first started in the Ministry, most of the Adventist churches that I attended seemed to be very, very theologically conservative, culturally, socially conservative, and musically conservative. When I say musically conservative, most of those churches primarily sang hymns and anthems. Occasionally you have somebody to come along and sing gospel, and it was often times politely tolerated, especially by the older members of the congregation. And of course the younger members saw it as a welcomed refreshment.

As a matter of fact, the church that I grew up in, I remember when within my age category -- because right now you asked [about age range], I’m between 45-54 -- I’m 54 almost 55. So it was during those late 60s and early 70s, in our church that actually the young people were pushing for greater musical diversity in different musical offerings. And there was some resistance to it, [especially] in the church that I was growing up into.

So when I became the Ministry in 1982, I’ve experienced some of that same resistance, though it had softened somewhat, just based upon the fact that 10 to 15 years had passed, [since] the initial wave, but there were a lot of diehards who were still very opposed to different kind of musical genres in the church…for example…I remember my aunt speaking in terms of black music in general, calling it “jigaboo music.” And others speaking in reference to jazz, calling it foolishness.

So because the denomination tends to be, [and] tended at that time to be primarily an Anglo denomination, its cultural influence sort of filtered all the way down through all the aspects of the church, and was normative for the remainder of the body of believers.

**Interviewer:** When you came here to Ephesus, what did you notice about the worship style and also the musical style of the church?

**Pastor Blue:** Well, I noticed that now Ephesus tends to be more culturally conservative and musically conservative than, I would say, most of the other Adventist churches that I now see. What has happened is, as it has happened in society, the baby boomers have come through as a bubble, and baby boomers as they come through as a bubble, they change everything around them. And so, in the process of changing everything around
them, many of the churches now are more gospel-oriented, evangelical, song oriented and there’s not a lot of singing of hymn anymore.

People [are] singing worship songs, [and not so] much singing hymns. There are very few choirs these days that have the ability to sing anthems, because people are not trained, nor do they have the patience to be trained. And so coming to Ephesus, when I first walked through the doors of Ephesus, I was able to appreciate the depth of musicianship that existed here in the church. The ability of this church to both hold on to tradition, while at the same time allowing itself not to be stuck in tradition, to be able to move into various genres but to do it tastefully and discreetly, I think that’s one of the first things I noticed here about Ephesus when I came.

**Interviewer**: Do you think that there is a strong, Afro or African or Afrocentric identity here at the Ephesus Church?

**Pastor Blue**: No, there isn’t. Well, I mean – let me say this – a strong Afrocentric identity, here at the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church…strong, I would say, no. And I would say no for a number of reasons.

Because I don’t want to just say no blankly without giving some sort of explanation as to what my answer is and why I come to that conclusion. I would say no, because there is a group of, for example, more mature individuals, who grew up in a denomination that basically set cultural norms. And so the Adventist Church in many ways was moving on a different sort of cultural and musical and identity track than others. But what has happened in Adventism was not atypical of what happened in other denominations that were predominantly White that had significant Black memberships as well. So it’s a phenomenon that one sees repeated over and over again in Black churches in predominately White organizations, whereby there is asserted certain setting aside of one’s cultural identity for what is considered to be a larger spiritual identity. So in Adventism, especially amongst older members who have somebody say, “it doesn’t matter if it’s black or white, what really matters is a Christian,” or saying that “my identity is not rooted in my race; it’s rooted in my relationship with Jesus Christ.” Those are the kinds of things that you’ll find frequently amongst the older. Amongst the younger people, they will say, “my relationship is rooted in Jesus Christ, and I’m Black. I’m a Black Seventh-day Adventist; I am not an Adventist first.” They would usually describe themselves as being a Black Seventh-day Adventist. So there has been a cultural shift amongst those who were younger versus those who were older.

Secondly, I would say no, because the Church has changed over the years as well in that, if one were to go back in time to the time when -- I’ll go back to one of the previous pastors, R. T. Hudson. When R. T. Hudson was the pastor at Ephesus, as far as I can tell in terms of things that I’ve read and has studied about him, he tended to be Pan-African. I say he tended to be Pan-African because he brought Kenyatta here, [and he brought] Julius Nyerere here. I mean, he brought African world leaders from the UN [United Nations] to Ephesus Church to speak to his congregation. And at the time that he did this, just think about it, at the time that he did this in the 1960s, these leaders, although
they were liberation leaders in Africa and considered to be heroes in Africa, amongst many Europeans they were considered to be revolutionaries. And although they were people who have led their country, many people looked at them as though they were terrorists for having brought about the liberation of their countries in Africa to break the yoke of the colonialist. But R.T. Hudson brought them to Ephesus. That said to me, that he had a mindset that was going far beyond, perhaps even where his congregation was.

The second thing is that if you go backwards in time just a little bit, R. T. Hudson also led a march from our church down to Harlem Hospital. The condition of the Harlem Hospital was so bad that there were rats and roaches literally running in the wards. And despite the protests of many of the African-Americans, the city was unresponsive to the needs of this community and was not prepared to put anything inside Harlem Hospital. One Sabbath morning, R. T. Hudson, after preaching, led the church on a march down Lenox Avenue, in front of Harlem Hospital, and did a protest. That protest caught the eye of the news media and as a result there was a $12 million renovation to Harlem Hospital as result of that. So he was very, very Black conscious, very conscious about his place in history, and his place in terms of what he needed to do for his people.

Go back a little bit further, you had J.K. Humphrey. J.K. Humphrey and his influence in terms of pushing a Black social agenda for African-Americans, Black Adventists African-Americans was stellar. But over time, the next generation comes in just after them, and they were slightly different. That was the generation who now were somewhat the beneficiaries of the doors opening for African-Americans, and now rather than being the ones who protested against, they were now the ones who took advantage of and saw themselves as bridge builders between the African-American community and the large White community. So things shifted a little bit.

**Interviewer:** So, it sounds like Ephesus did have a social agenda. Do you thing that we still have a social agenda now?

**Pastors Blue:** Yeah, yeah, we did have social agenda, and I think for a while we sort of lost it, which goes back to the original question about the black identity. And here is why I went back to history to sort of bring – to bring us through history to answer the question, because I don’t think it’s an easy answer.

I think that if we take a look at the 1970s and 80s, there was a massive wave of immigration and a massive wave of immigration into New York City, particularly with individuals coming from the Caribbean, also influenced the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church. Many people who came from other places perhaps did not view Black identity in the same way as those people who had either lived in Harlem for a long time, or those who had grown up in and around this area. Ephesus has always had a significant West Indian population, it’s always [had it]; you can go back a ways…it has always been there.
Interviewer: But it’s not documented. I call the General Conference… and I did speak to someone at Northeastern Conference, and as far as the numbers of exactly who was of what ethnicity is not available.

Pastors Blue: No it’s not available, because nobody kept records like that. I remember talking to the old timers, and there were people who said, “I remember when I came here from so and so place, I came to Ephesus.” People find some people who had been here from 1940s, 1950s…

The difference was however, and the same thing you see with immigration today. If you went back 30 years ago, 40 years ago when people came to America from someplace else, there was an attempt to integrate into America. So in many ways, you never let go where you came from, but you also understood there was a larger culture that you needed to understand and integrate into. However, during the 70s and 80s, when there was a large wave of immigration that came in, rather than various entities trying to necessarily integrate fully into the African-American experience or into the Harlem experience, they formed smaller communities of self-support.

So, for example, now you had Jamaicans who could to support Jamaicans, or Costa Ricans who could support Costa Ricans, or Antiguans who could support Antiguans. And so, as a result people began to celebrate the uniqueness of their own culture and not really try to fully understand the African-American experience.

And so in that way, African-American identity became less prominent than perhaps what it had been previously. But I think now as we’re beginning to move into this new decade, the second decade of this new century, I think that there is a greater understanding amongst people that we sink or swim together, and that ultimately there is a commonality of heritage that predates how we came to America. And if we can connect on those levels, and understand that there is both a social awareness as well as a political consciousness that will steer us forward towards future, then that’s where a new sense of Black identity is being formed at Ephesus.

Interviewer: Do you think that what you just described had an influence in the music of the church?

Pastors Blue: Ye[s], I do. I think it has. I think you’ve been here long enough to remember, for example, that there were at least a couple of choirs and groups that sang gospel music…

Interviewer: The Estatistics…

Pastors Blue: Right.

Interviewer: …came out of this church
Pastors Blue: Right, yeah they came out of this church. So you can remember a time when Sylvia Williams was here and others. I remember those times. Even though I wasn’t here as pastor, I know that stuff. And then, all of a sudden, it [Euro-American sacred music culture] sort of comes to a halt. And it not only comes to a halt, but it comes to a halt in such a way that now some people would actually frown upon it. So that which at one time was integral to Ephesus and integral to the service, and at least appreciated for its diversity, even if it wasn’t considered to be Ephesus’ highest form – because Ephesus in its highest form has always held to the hymns and the anthems, to the classical, it has always held that as its highest ideal – there never was a time that has never been at Ephesus. But it has made a room for, allowed for, or at times even tolerated things that it did not consider to be as high as ideal; but then you came to a point where that stuff wouldn’t even tolerate, you know…

Interviewer: Right.

Pastor Blue: It [Black/gospel music] was frowned upon and followed as being so low class that it was not worthy to be considered as legitimate worship. That’s one man’s perspective.

Interviewer: Sometimes I, as a Black Adventist or a Black Christian, don’t know how to respond to music that moves me. I want to shout, I want to stand up, I want to – I’m in agreement with what the preacher is saying, I want to stand, I want to lift my hand – but something within me just says, “that’s not the right behavior for church…”

Pastor Blue: Well, first of all, I think some people make the mistake - and I know that Pastor Kowlessar can address this one - I think some people make mistake, however, of thinking that black culture is monolithic. So there’s only one legitimate response, and if you don’t respond that way, then you are not authentically Black. It’s kind of saying that there is only one authentic [style of] Black music and it’s Rap. And if you don’t buy into what the current artists are saying, then you’re not authentically Black. And so I think that there are many ways to be authentically Black without necessarily sharing the same worship idiom. Because to me, what makes a person authentically Black in their identity is not necessarily how they worship or whether or not they have a perspective, a theological perspective that drives the way that they live their lives towards serving God and the empowerment of their people and moving God’s agenda forward within their context.

Now some people may shout, some people may just sit there and not say a blessed word, but they could still be worshipping. Some folk will get up and shout, and then go walk right out the door and do everything that they can do that helps nobody’s agenda, not even their own, whereas somebody else would sit there and be just quiet and never say a blessed word, [but they] go out there and fight for the rights of the oppressed and the poor, and make significant impact. So stand – whether a person stands up and sit down [is not important]. My wife is raised Baptist. I remember the first time I went to her Church in the deep South, I mean deep, deep South.
Interviewer: How far in the South…

Pastor Blue: All-bin-ny.

Interviewer: Okay, Albany.

Pastor Blue: No, no, you said “Albany.” It’s not Albany, it’s “All-bin-ny,” Georgia… [overlapping conversation] … and she went to a church where they still sing long meter. I remember her grandmother got happy one day, all I saw was a fist coming at my face. Because she got happy, her hands were flying…and she was sitting in front of me. All I saw was a fist coming at my face. I said, “Oh Lord, these people done lost their minds up in here.” But if my wife goes to a Pentecostal church, she thinks those people are wild and out of control.

Now an Adventist would look at her Baptist tradition and say, “I don’t understand why those people are jumping and rolling all over this room.” But if you take my wife to a Pentecostal church, she can’t understand them. So there is a spectrum, a broad spectrum of worship style. The question is what you do. C.D. Brooks232 always said, “It ain’t how high you jump and how straight you walk when you come back down.”

Interviewer: We have Pastor Jaime Kowlessar joining us. He is the former Associate Minister here at the Ephesus Church. I’ve asked him to come because of his tenure at Ephesus. How long were you here Pastor Kowlessar?

Pastor Kowlessar: Four and one half years.

Interviewer: He was here for four and half years during the time of my study here. As far as the Youth Church is concerned, Pastor Kowlessar, when you came to the Youth Church, what was your first impression of the overall worship style and the music?

Pastor Kowlessar: My first impression was, to be honest, [was that] there really wasn’t a style or something that was setup. That was something that I discovered when I came in that I needed to setup. I know one thing that attract the younger crowd, or even a more contemporary crowd, is music. And so, being in the Youth Church, for the first maybe six months [or] seven months, was all about recruiting some of the best people that can do praise and worship, work with Omar233 as far as the music, and the instruments, and things of that nature.

So, I think that maybe I helped pull it out; it was there, but I helped pull it out because from what I understand, it was dismantled. And so, looking at the experience in the Youth Church – just being able to connect with people not simply on a musical level, but through preaching as well – I felt that if I was going to give 100% with my sermons every week, the music had to be coupled with that as well. I believe the two go hand-in-hand --

232 Charles D. Brooks was the first evangelist for the Breath of Life, an independent SDA ministry geared towards reaching African Americans and other minorities.

233 Omar Jackson is the Music Director in the Youth Church.
music and preaching. Those are the two ways that [connect with people]… some people may not feel the sermon, but they may have an emotional experience of drawing near to God through the music that’s being presented on that particular Sabbath and vice versa. So basically pretty much when I first got here, that was the – that was one the issues that I was grappling with.

**Interviewer:** So, when you first came, did you notice whether the service [in the Youth Church] was conservative, more along the traditional, or was it more contemporary, or were they kind of like grappling somewhere in the middle trying to figure out which way they were going to go?

**Pastor Kowlessar:** They were more contemporary. They were not conservative. I could tell that they were looking for that contemporary [flavor]. One thing that I noticed in the Youth Church was that they wanted to have their own identity, their own musical identity apart from the Senior Church. It was like an alternative. So if we didn’t have drums in the Senior Church, people would come to Youth Church and they can have their drums, they can have their praise and worship songs. And at the same time, I was trying to also bring in some of the elements from the Senior Church – some of the classical songs, and some of the anthems and things of that nature – just to broaden the perspective and the spectrum of the minds that were worshiping in the Youth Church. Sometimes as young people we tend to get boxed in with only one style of music and we tend to not realize that there is so many different genres that we can appreciate as well. But I would say they are much more of a contemporary style.

**Interviewer:** It’s interesting that you characterize the Youth Church worship style as contemporary. When I was in the Youth Church from the 70s to the 90s, the church basically mirrored the Senior Church. I would say [that] in the 70s, around the late 70s, early 80s was when we [the Youth Church] really started getting into this more – trying to introduce Gospel. A lot of that had to do with the fact that we had [contemporary gospel artists] – there was Richard Smallwood in the 80s, then we had Andrae Crouch in the 70s along with Edwin and Walter Hawkins. We tried to introduce some of those pieces. I think some pieces worked and others did not. I also believe that a lot of it had to do with the leadership at that time. Sister Gardner just could not play in the gospel improvisational style. She just didn’t have that flow. She could fake it, but it’s just wasn’t the same. Sylvia, I think Sylvia Williams and Brother Washington had more of that feel [for the style] because the Larkettes definitely sang a larger variety of music…

**Pastor Kowlessar:** … so when I came that connection was broken, because I didn’t have that. I don’t know if Omar was classically trained; I don’t know if he is or isn’t, but that just wasn’t something that was on the table at that time. So that whole transition just somehow got broken, I don’t know when and where, but it just…

**Interviewer:** I think I figured out what happen. While I was in the Youth Church we had a couple of pianists. Harrison Watkins worked in the Youth Church and he had a choir there. It’s funny, though, because it seemed as if certain members of the Youth Church were saying, “We are tired of hearing these anthems,” while the Youth Choir was
saying, “We’re tired of singing [anthems], and we want to sing more of this, we want to
sing more of that.” More actually meant, “No, we are going to sing just this…”

...instead of just saying, “Okay, if we sing one classic [anthem], can we sing one
Gospel?” It wasn’t necessarily like that. Then after a period of time, there was no one
around. People just transitioned out, but no one transitioned in. We didn’t have anyone
else coming in the Youth Church until Edison Liburd came. I think during that time,
Omar was playing for the Sabbath School downstairs and Edison played for the service.
By that time, Brother Washington had already left the Youth Church. He used to be the
main organist for the Youth Church. So by the time he transitioned to the Senior Church,
but we had not groomed anybody. And I just remember that there was a whole, like
almost two generations of children who had not had the opportunity of singing in the
Children’s Choir – they didn’t sing in any choir because we didn’t have one. It had
gotten that bad.

And the other thing also, was that when Pastor Neil Reid was here, he changed the
structure of the Youth Church as far as the ministry. He felt that we should have our
ministry in the Youth Church geared towards youth. So that’s why when you look at the
Board [Youth Church Board] setup, we have the Children’s Ministry, and then we have
the Teen’s Ministry, and that whole kind of it. What happened was that the Children’s
Choir was removed from auspices of the Music Department and placed under Children’s
Ministry. So the director of the Children’s Choir was not accountable to the Music
Department. The same thing happened with the Youth Choir. Then we started a praise
team and tried to implement a different, more contemporary style of worship within the
service. So now we have all these different things coming through [the Youth Church]
and then people like me said, “I’m out,” mainly because my role started changing and I
found myself more in the Senior Church. That’s basically what happened in the Youth
Church – you served to a certain time and then you transitioned into the Senior Church.

**Pastor Blue**: I have a question for you. During that time of transition, how did the
Senior Church respond to the Youth Church when they saw the musical change?

**Interviewer**: Well, I think the Senior Church was very silent. Some people liked it, and
other people did not; but a lot of people were very silent, pretty much like it as now.
They don’t really give an outward response. There were a lot of mixed feelings, a lot of
mixed feelings. Some people liked what was happening, but then there was – I think the
overall concern was what’s happening with the children, what’s happening with the
music ministries for the kids? What’s happening back there? No one knew anything.
Along with that, the Board decided to change the structure of the Music Department.
We’ve always had Music Coordinators, but the [Church Board] changed the criteria.

So now you don’t have a musician in charge. Based on the report from the small
committee to the Board, a lot of people were not satisfied with the choir and the quality
of the music. They felt that they [people/choir members] wouldn’t come to rehearsal
because the choirs were singing the same songs, the same kinds of songs. But instead of
putting a musician or a qualified person in place, [the Church Board] just decided that
[the church] just need someone to coordinate. And according to the guidelines of the
Church Manual, [the church] just needed somebody to [coordinate], instead of looking at
[the position] from a broader perspective, like “No, this church is a flagship church and
we really need to set precedence and put something in place.”

I remember the Board held a special meeting for the musicians and anyone that was
involved in music. If you wanted to talk, they said they would only talk about the
particular issues for an hour and then they had another hour just for open discussions.
Anyway, I went to the meeting. I suggested to them in 1995 that the Board needed to
breakdown the Music Department, totally destroy the structure – I mean break it down
and rebuild it. And in their rebuilding, they should hire a Minister of Music. Do a
nationwide search, hire someone to oversee this, because what’s happening is, we’re not
educating people anymore. We’re constantly in crisis mode. I told them that in 1995.

So let’s do that in order to what we can get somebody here in place. Shelton Kilby was
working at the Girls Choir of Harlem during that time. We could have easily had Shelton
Kilby here on a part-time, but because of the mentality of the musicians [they were
against paying some musicians and not all], we didn’t. Today we’re paying even more
[than $25,000 a year for musicians]. Had we just invested in him for a year or two years,
he would have put a program in place, and we could have been home free, but that didn’t
happen.

So now, we have all of this befuddlement and people are not sure of anything. We have a
Youth Church that wants to have a more contemporary service, and at the same time, we
have a senior church that is growing older and there isn’t enough youth transitioning into
the Senior Church. The church at a loss.

So, all the tasks and responsibilities that would have fallen under Music Department were
transferred to the Management Department. All the instrumental maintenance and stuff
was still, when Brother Merriweather was in place, it was still under the auspices of the
Music Department. And while he was in office, he mainly made sure that there was a
schedule, and he did kind of facilitate the organization of a male choir, and also facilitate
the organization of the youth choir. And at that time, the Youth Choir I think was called
the Fellowship Choir because I directing them at that time.

But there was nothing systematic to the point where we could train people. I’d never
really saw where we tried to implement some kind of African identity, so I thought that
maybe the best way that we could do something like that is through the music, but for the
most part, the music pretty much is still along the Eurocentric bent. Go on.

Pastor Kowlessar: What you said explains a whole lot of things. One thing that I
always question was why did the Youth Church music came out of the Youth Church
budget [instead of the] music budget. There was a cry, when I was in the Youth Church,
for quality music; and so some people in the Youth Church would ask the question, “why
can’t we have ringers in our choir and have some of those things that the Senior Church
has?’ There are those that enjoy both worlds [musical styles] but they want it inside of the Youth Church as well.

So now that explains the breaking-up – so then you have Youth Church basically controlling and they’re trying to do whatever they can do music wise, when they don’t have the proper training or proper budget, or the tools to be able to reach out to certain individuals – so it seems like that’s where the separation begins. [And it also explains why] some guys [questioned], “Why can’t we have that? Why can’t we have this for now?” It explains a lot.

**Interviewer:** I think the Youth Church would have still had the same quality, had the people who were servicing the Youth Church at times been more appreciated. The other thing too, is that what I didn’t realize was that in the 60s or before the 60s, they were paying the musicians. The musicians were compensated. It wasn’t a whole lot, I mean it wasn’t – it wasn’t the amount that we’re paying today, but when you think about the amount of – when you think about inflation and times changing and stuff, it was comparable of what’s happening today…

The quality of music started to decline because the Board changed the requirement for the office. I have told the board back when they had a session in the ‘90s that they should have a skilled, qualified musician. And they have to hire somebody who has that. It has to be a degree position; the church should not nominate a layperson to be music coordinator. It makes no sense for a church of this size. The *Church Manual* is there as a guideline; it doesn’t mean that we have to do everything by that book because it does not suit the needs of this church.

So that’s really the beauty of the whole structure of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. When you look at the *Church Manual*, it gives you general guidelines as to how to set your structure for each local church. And then it’s up to the local church to be able to set up a procedure that they can handle, that will make them most effective in the community.

People keep asking why we didn’t train any musicians. There were people who were trained, but you can’t make people participate…. So what do you do?

**Pastor Blue:** How do we address it, how we correct this? Let me ask you this – If a person has an advanced degree of music, what are the other characteristics and qualifications that would be necessary in order to make an effective minister of music at Ephesus?

**Interviewer:** To have an effective minister of music at Ephesus, besides the person having a degree, they have to be a part of the ministerial staff. How can we plan music for services we don’t know what you’re planning [or] what you’re doing. There is no way, no way. So that means, whenever there is a pastoral staff meeting, you have to have your musician right there, and you have to – I mean, you need to communicate with them as often as you meet. I mean even weekly, so that those things work together.
**Pastor Blue:** Right. Let me ask you a question, because this is a follow-up question. Let’s say you have a minister of music, who is degreed, who is willing to work with the pastors on a regular basis. We know because of how the Adventist Church is setup and structured that pastors actually come and go. It’s not like in the Baptist Church where your pastor may be there ‘til he dies or becomes incapacitated, or the board of trustees just get sick of him because he’s stolen too much money, or had too many women, basically. In an Adventist Church, the pastor is going to move, five years, six years, seven years, eight years they got to move. Who then sets the musical directions for the church?

**Interviewer:** The Minister of Music.

**Pastor Blue:** Now, you know, I asked that question, what is the minister of music and the pastor are at odds over the direction in terms of worship? How does that give resolved? Because I could particularly…

**Interviewer:** There’s a situation like this going on in a church right now…

**Pastor Blue:** I’m sure, I’m sort of familiar.

**Interviewer:** They are making it work. But if the minister of music is at hired position, then that means, if the person wants to leave they can leave. The church will have to hire another person. But once you’ve set a salary… and then so you really need to decide if the requirements are going to be for part time or for full time.

**Pastor Blue:** May I ask a question about genre? What genre or genres of music, given the fact that Ephesus has a Youth Church, a Senior Church, folks who very old, very young, folks in the middle, maybe there used to be a time that you would have a musical genre in the part of the idiom that would last for a good 10 years, 15 years, before you could see significant change in that idiom, now it happens every two years, something that’s totally flipped over. So musical is constantly in flux, continually changing. So what, in your estimation, should be the musical idiom, musical genre of the church? Should Ephesus have a signature musical genre, and if it would have one of branding, a branding concept, what would that branding be?

**Interviewer:** I think Ephesus really should stay as a traditional church.

**Pastor Blue:** Traditional church meaning…

**Interviewer:** Meaning focusing on anthem, spirituals and gospels, but heavily on anthems and spirituals, hymn singing that kind of thing, because that’s basically what our church is. People are looking at us because we are the last of Mohegan that is known for that kind of music. I heard that’s from someone who is not Adventist. He was saying [that] we are the last ones. Well, matter of fact I’ve been noticing over at Abyssinian, at one point for communion they used to have solo. They are not doing that anymore. They
are doing congregation singing. Where did they get that from? From right here, from Ephesus. Why? Because during communion, our congregation is singing. So, of course the hymns are chosen ahead of time and they are put in the program. I think we could do that, but I think we might lose that tradition of calling out hymns. For some reason, people just like to say, “Oh, we are going to sing this hymn...”

Pastor Blue: Just the spontaneity.

Interviewer: The spontaneity of it all. I still think that we are a traditional church and with that tradition we can still maintain our African identity through the spiritual and through the gospel music. But it just has to be tastefully done, or in the words of Brother Merriweather – presentation. That’s what I think. I think we are a traditional church and we should pretty much stay there musically; and I think that’s what the congregation in some respect, the older members feel. And then even some people around my age feel that way too.

Pastor Blue: How do you feel, Pastor Kowlessar, that the young people would respond to Ephesus and that musical genre in that order? When I say [genres, I mean] anthem, anthems hymns, spirituals, I think gospel in that kind of hierarchal order with the more traditional service of hymns and anthems and that kind of thing?

Pastor Kowlessar: I think for the Youth Church, for the youth, the order will probably have to be flipped for today’s mind. I think they will respond to gospel, spiritual, and anthems. I think once it’s done tastefully, [if] you have a quality presentation, they can get into the anthems, and they can get into the spiritual. I represent that class of most of youth today. I didn’t get introduced to anthems and spirituals not until probably I got to college and not even at AUC [Atlantic Union College], I just had classical, it wasn’t like spiritual. Coming to Ephesus puts me in that mindset. If you take my experience and you couple that with a hundred other young people, they’ve never been really introduced to that genre of music, but they get the gospel constantly because it’s on their CD music. It’s on the TV; it’s everywhere. But I don’t think that they are opposed to being introduced to it if it’s done well, but I think if you ask any other young person I think they would put the gospel first, then anthems – spirituals and anthems possibly together, but if we can mix all that of it, if they could see people of their own age, that will also do something for them as well. But I know one thing with the new church, and as Dr. Blue was stating, is that the music, like even I’m having a difficult time catching up, but the good gospel music has drastically changed. Kirk Franklin seems conservative now.

Interviewer: Oh really.

Pastor Blue: Very conservative, he’s conservative.

Pastor Kowlessar: He’s conservative.

Pastor Blue: I mean, that’s Pastor Kowlessar’s generation and people who know him don’t listen to Kirk Franklin that much anymore. He’s just...
Pastor Kowlessar: Yes, he’s conservative. You have guys like Tye Tribbett and guys like this new guy Mali Music. I believe that this is rolling out of the world and I believe that gospel rap is coming in the church soon.

Interviewer: Oh, it’s already out there.

Pastor Kowlessar: I mean, you’re going to see it coming in.

Interviewer: In the Ephesus Church.

Pastor Kowlessar: It’s going to come inside because it’s growing in leaps and bounds. Now they have a section on the Stellar awards. They are performing everywhere; it’s reaching a whole new class of people and it’s reaching the youth because young people’s minds today can’t hear Kirk Franklin, they can’t hear Tye Tribbett; they can only hear rap, melodic, rhythmic, beat and tone rhyming stories, because that’s just what they grew up in.

Pastor Blue: I think if you listen to Pastor Kowlessar’s style, his style is reminiscent of the fact of the era in which he grew up in, so that he could hear that the beats and the rhythms of hip-hop music that allow him to be able to string words along together in a rhythmic way; and that’s why the young people respond so favorably to him, because it’s in their idiom. So then the larger musical issue is this: music at every era always spoke to whatever generation that it was addressed to at that time. So the question is this: where does freshness and newness come when there is also tradition and culture that precedes it? And how does, for example, a minister of music come to make those kinds of decisions? How does a minister of music come to do that?

Interviewer: You know, I think what ends up happening is that the Minister of Music basically falls along whatever the guidelines the church or the denomination has set. That basically has happened in most denominations. I think you just have to introduce it, like for example, introducing new hymns. I also believe that it’s up to the pastoral staff and the musical staff to decide where to introduce it. Do we introduce it during our morning service or is it something that we could introduce in the afternoon, like during the AYS hour, or is this something that we would accept in the Youth Church for morning service, or is it something we’re just not going to do? Now what I’ve noticed – and it’s always been like this – if you introduce more youth-based music or stuff like that at AY [Adventist Youth Society] most of the people at AYS are not youth; they are older people and the music may not be accepted. For example, JuneApril did a concert here at the church and it was jazz, gospel jazz – it was like her own genre. If you listen to her album, it is very conservative. She has some very nice tracks, and the songs that she has written were birthed from her experience. But because the forum was jazz, it created extreme controversial [at the church].

Pastor Kowlessar: Yeah, I remember.
Interviewer: Extremely controversial, because there’s still a large majority of folks who feel that jazz does not belong in the church. They are looking at the genre, so much so that they are not looking at the lyrical content. I think that’s what happens with rap. People look at the genre so much that they’re not paying attention to lyrical content. That’s the main thing that Take 6 talks about. They said it’s all about lyrical content. You can use the different genres to promote something; but music is music until you classify it.

Pastor Blue: It wasn’t until probably about three, four years ago that after Take 6 had been all around the world, won six Grammys [from the time] they started [at] Oakwood College, that for the first time, only about three or four years ago, they were allowed to sing in the [college] church.

Pastor Kowlessar: Wow.

Interviewer: No, they weren’t allowed. I remember…

Pastor Blue: They could only sing in the gym or in Moran Hall or someplace else, but they were not allowed to sing in church. Now keep in mind – six Grammys.

Interviewer: I remember that…

Pastor Blue: You understand...

Interviewer: Mervyn had written a soundtrack for, “Seek ye first the kingdom of the Lord.” It was for the group, A Special Blend. They played it for one of the church services and after that we didn’t hear soundtracks anymore. This was before the Grammys.

Pastor Kowlessar: That’s amazing what you said.

Interviewer: They just did a concert recently...

Pastor Blue: Yeah, I remember them [Take Six] making the remark, “Man, this is great, all these years man …

Pastor Kowlessar: I’m sure if you walked around campus and you talked to the freshman about Take 6, they’ll probably say, “Who’s that?”

Pastor Blue: That’s right.

Pastor Kowlessar: The only reason they probably know about them is because [students] heard they [Take Six] were Adventists…. If you mention the group Take 6, you’re going to appeal to my age and above. but as for youth under that age range, they would ask, “who’s that?” When Take 6 was popular, the church didn’t want to accept them. So now we’re playing “catch up.” Do we wait until we are ready to accept them?
Because when we are ready to accept certain genres or certain styles, they practically, I wouldn’t say die, but the mind has changed and the mind is somewhere else and looking for whatever is out there right now. So I don’t ever want to see the church get to a place where it’s playing catch up; neither do I want to see the church lose its identity as well. I think that classical anthem and the spirituals definitely have its mark, and I think that there should be an even keel, a balance, and like you said, when we introduce these things and how we introduce these things. Just understand that when it comes to reaching different people and different audiences you have to reach them where they are. I think that’s always the challenge with music, because you have one class that says, “No, you have to play it this way,” and you have another class that’s looking for something innovative, something creative, or something new; and so we wrestle with them. Do we stick with a class that’s wants it one way or do we look for the innovative?

Pastor Blue: There’s something that Jeryl said earlier. She talked about maintaining quality. Now, there was in Pathfinders a merit called Media Critic. And I’ll never forget this because my kids were small, 7 and 8 years old, and they had to go for the Media Critic badge. Now the Media Critic badge taught you to evaluate what you were watching or listening to on television, and gave you tools by which you could be the decider and the evaluator over what was appropriate. There were guidelines that were given and the kids would just learn how to do this stuff. So here I am – an older guy – I like watching movies; I like thrillers and suspense movies. My kids would be sitting there saying, “No, no!” with their hands on the remote, “We can’t watch that! That’s not good, Daddy! That’s not good!” But what happened was that they had some criteria by which they could now become their own best media critic. And I think – what you were talking about earlier – they would have lost something in terms of helping kids to understand. One of the reasons we have rebellion in the Adventist Church is because people instead of teaching principles taught rules; and so if it’s not according to my rule, then it’s not right versus, if you teach people principles, then out of the principles people can now make decisions and actually establish rules that can be changed based upon whether or not these rules are still in alignment with the principles.

Interviewer: But the General Conference did put out some guidelines, but when you looked at the guidelines, the first set of guidelines in the ‘70s, first thing on the first guideline, “Oh, you should refrain from listening to music that has a strong rhythmic beat, that has dissonant chord structure”

Pastor Blue: So we are to just eliminated Bach and Mozart then...

Interviewer: No.

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234 Pathfinders is a youth development organization similar to Boys Scouts and Girl Scouts. It’s a camping skill-based organization with merit badges.

235 From “Guidelines Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music,” statement issued by the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee, October, 1972, M-1.
Pastor Blue: No, we did. You know what I’m saying, “rhythmic beat.” Come on man, come on… Bach had a little thing going on there you know, and Mozart got some discordant chords in there, you understand so…

Interviewer: Exactly. But they were saying, “strong dissonances, things that are pertaining to jazz” …

Pastor Blue: Right [overlapping conversation]

Interviewer: …Everything African America, or African based or ethnic based was already frowned upon and it was mainly because the General Conference was looking at the situation from a Eurocentric background.

Pastor Blue: I agree, because you know I…

Interviewer: I know, Pastor Blue, you’ve got to go.

Interviewer: Thanks Pastor Blue. Pastor Kowlessar, I’m just going to kind of backtrack just a little. What is your age range? Are you between 22-34, 35-44…?

Pastor Kowlessar: Yeah, it’s the first one. I’m 32.

Interviewer: What is your level of education?

Pastor Kowlessar: Masters of Divinity.

Interviewer: What is your ethnicity? Are you African American, are you Caribbean American or …

Pastor Kowlessar: I am, birth wise, African American. I consider myself more African American. I do have a Caribbean heritage. My parents are from Guyana, South America, but all I know is America. I’ve never been there, probably maybe my first birthday when I was 1-1/2 years. I haven’t been back there. I have always been a New Yorker. I would say I’m more African American than I am to the Caribbean American.

Interviewer: What types of music do you listen to when you’re at home?

Pastor Kowlessar: Growing up, in my parents’ house, they had Caribbean music. Before they became Adventists, we listened to Marvin Gaye, Teddy Pendergrass, ‘70s R&B, Al Green. Then it transitioned to Al Green singing gospel, to even some Elvis gospel. We then listened to country gospel, Jim Reeves. Not so much of the Black American gospel, but more of the country Caucasian American gospel songs.

Interviewer: When you were growing up, were there any Black gospel radio stations?
Pastor Kowlessar: Oh, no. I think only recently we got one, 1190 AM.236

Interviewer: I remember we use to have WWRL that was 1600 AM237 and then that stopped.

Pastor Kowlessar: Yeah, I do remember 1600, but vaguely. I think I caught it when my mother would listen to it in the car. So I do remember 1600.

Interviewer: But as far as just gospel, I don’t think we’ve ever had gospel on the FM unless it was on the other stations on Sunday morning.

Pastor Kowlessar: That’s right; 107.5 or KISS FM, I think they would play gospel on Sunday morning.

Interviewer: Okay, in essence, so you said that your parents weren’t always Adventists.

Pastor Kowlessar: No. Well, my mom grew up Adventist, but when she came to America, she did drifted away, but she would always send my sisters and me to church. She would work on Saturdays, but she would always make sure that we went to church. One day she told me she had a dream and the Lord told her, “Why are you sending your children to church? You need to go with them.” And from that day it’s been my mom, my two sisters and myself in church. My dad got baptized into the Adventist Church as well. My parents divorced and now I don’t even know what church my father goes to, but he will come if I invite him. I’ve stayed in the church. My sisters left the church and now they’ve come back. I pretty much had an Adventist upbringing since about the age of 7 or 6; that’s the earliest I can remember.

Interviewer: You had mentioned earlier that you had gone to AUC. What was the music and the worship service like at AUC? AUC stands for Atlantic Union College. Where is it located?

Pastor Kowlessar: South Lancaster, Massachusetts. It’s about an hour and a half from Boston, a small quaint town, probably two street like, one street like to the next street like, very small. The style of music at the Atlantic Union College Church was contemporary, but more white contemporary. More solo singing; I can’t remember seeing a choir. If there was a choir, it was the Pro Arts Choir, the school choir, but the majority of the time they were touring, so they hardly sang in the college church. I know the musician was classically trained; however, a lot of the students, I could say even for myself, didn’t go to the College Church. We found other churches, more traditionally Black churches in the area to attend.

Interviewer: So why did you all find other churches? Did you feel that the service wasn’t meeting your needs?

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236 1190 AM is a Christian radio station in the New York tri-state area.
237 WWRL-1600AM used to be a Christian radio station that featured Black gospel music.
**Pastor Kowlessar**: Basically the service wasn’t meeting our needs musically and just generally. We just felt that it was called the College Church, but it didn’t represent the college students. It represented the community because after all the community was the one, the tithe payers and things like that. It just happened to be across the street from the school, so they just deemed it as, “Hey, this is where you students can come and worship.” But rarely I would ever see theology majors on the platform, theology majors preaching, some of the students singing, if the students were singing, it had to fit into what they wanted it to be. The music was Contemporary Christians, Amy Grant, that whole class, Michael W. Smith, things of that nature.

**Interviewer**: I find it interesting that AUC adapted their music and worship style to meet the needs of their population. Amy Grant’s music has crossover appeal. Michael W. Smith’s music has a kind of rock or soft rock flow. However, when one looks at the guidelines for music within the denomination, something that’s Afrocentric is considered worldly.

**Pastor Kowlessar**: Exactly. Then we’ll ignore that side of Amy Grant. They would probably cater more to “El Shaddai” and those type of songs, the more slow, ballad like tunes.

**Interviewer**: I heard that Atlantic Union College closed.

**Pastor Kowlessar**: Yeah, the school is not in effect.

**Interviewer**: When was the last semester at AUC?

**Pastor Kowlessar**: I think the spring was the last semester and that’s a whole story in itself. I don’t know if you know the history of the changing of the demographics.

**Interviewer**: I’d like to hear that because I think it’s very important.

**Pastor Kowlessar**: Oh, well, from what I understand, AUC used to be a predominantly Caucasian, White school. Because of the influx of Caribbean, Caribbean American children, and being it so close to New York City and Boston, a lot more Hispanic and African American students started going there. So the talk is that White alumni began to pull their financial support from the school and so it was left only to the tuition to try to carry the school. The school didn’t get extra endowments that it needed. So because of that whole changing of the guard, changing of scene, the story is that AUC lost a lot of money and they just couldn’t survive anymore.

Then you had students who couldn’t meet the deadline to pay their tuition. So if you don’t have money coming in from alumni and you don’t have students meeting their financial obligations, you’re bound to fail. The school had a decline in attendance; less students were going there. White students were going to Southwestern and Southern, 238

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238 Southwestern Adventist University is located in Keene, Texas. Southern Adventist University is located in Collegedale, Tennessee.
and other Adventist colleges. So you just have African American and Hispanic students faced with high tuition and their parents trying to get their kids through school; and it was bound to fail.

**Interviewer:** This is so sad. Oakwood has gone through some trying times, disappointments and the like. But they persevered and now the school now has university status.

**Pastor Kowlessar:** That’s right.

**Interviewer:** When I was a student at Oakwood, we did have people from different ethnicities; they came from all over the world. We even had like some Caucasians that were in attendance there. We are not going to discriminate against you because you’re White. If you want to go here, if there’s a program here that you can, that’s going to meet your needs, come on. But it’s a little sad for AUC because it seems like it’s just perpetuating that whole segregation or that racial issue within the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

**Pastor Kowlessar:** Yes, and it’s quite sad because AUC is historically Adventist. I mean, just a lot of things that occurred just in that area, South Lancaster. For example, in Founders’ Hall, there is Ellen White pulpit. There are artifacts of Adventism at AUC. The thing about Oakwood is that it’s historically black, it’s historically Adventist, and the alumni are proud of their school and they give back to the school. They attend the alumni weekend. They attend the different programs. At AUC, it felt like it was always like a ghost town. It’s sad that the support wasn’t there to help carry it and to see it flourish. It’s a beautiful campus, a beautiful school.

**Interviewer:** I remember AUC for music. They used to have music seminars at the AUC.

**Pastor Kowlessar:** That’s right.

**Interviewer:** When you were here as the pastor of the Youth Church, did you try to intentionally make the service relevant to people? How did you introduce our ethnic identity?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, try to at least have some kind of African influences or African….

**Pastor Kowlessar:** Yeah, to connect with the audience.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Pastor Kowlessar:** I tried. I’ve tried a few times. I’ve constantly had conversations with Omar about let’s mix up the music, let’s not always – we don’t always have to do Gospel, let’s do some hymns sometimes, let’s dig into the archives, let’s do some
anthems and things of that nature. I think what – why we didn’t really get into those
genres of music is because they didn’t have anyone to teach them and I know that’s what
– I don’t if Omar was classically trained, like he could bring that out of those, because the
voices in Youth Church were just people just liked to sing. They haven’t done singing
lessons, they haven’t gone to school for it, maybe one or two have and those were just –
they just liked to sing, so they sang songs that they – that are easy to sing. They never
touched like Richard Smallwood songs, because you know, Richard Smallwood songs,
those required skill, they never dealt into those and that really wanted to have that, just
that broad spectrum, but only I tried to push them further, but I realized that I couldn’t
push them as far as they can go. And so the music that you saw in Youth Church was –
that’s where they could go. Even though I thought they could have done a little bit better
if they had somebody who actually can bring out their voice, because they had good
voices that can be used and just in the presentation as well sometimes. There’s a way you
have to present yourself when you sing. You can’t sing “la” [without enthusiasm], you
want to feel like you’re into it to get people into it. So, I tried. I think we succeeded on
sometimes and sometimes were failures, but it comes with life and things like that. So I
did try to bring that whole broad scale of something. Even Omar introduced me to some
music, to songs that I have never heard before and I strongly believe that if it was done
well, that it would be greatly appreciated inside of the church.

Interviewer: It’s funny. I sang at a funeral a couple of – earlier this month. A friend of
mine – a musician friend of mine died, and at the funeral, all – and he was still Minister
of Music at the church, so the choir sang and then all these musicians from all over the
city and everywhere, came together to help form this mass choir. We sang a spiritual, we
sang a couple of anthems and whatever the hymns were. It is interesting that the pastor
talked about how even within the culture, even though this – we were singing everything,
we were singing this classical music, we could sing classical, we could sing anthems, we
could sing gospel, we could sing everything, and it was all a part of our cultures, all a part
of our heritage. Do you think that in some part or in some respect that the music here at
the Ephesus Church really encapsulates our total heritage?

Pastor Kowlessar: Absolutely, yeah. I think just from my perspective. I can only speak
from 2007 to…

Interviewer: …that’s part of my study. I’m going to 2010 [overlapping
conversation]…

Pastor Kowlessar: That’s easy. And being like I said that this is my – this church
introduced me to so many styles of music that I believe and I shared with my wife that I
would not get anywhere at least in the Greater New York area Adventist-wise. I can’t
think of another church I can go to and I can hear all these genres of music and I think
with the addition of the Praise Team and the addition of the Youth Choir, it brings – now
we have all those elements inside of all of the choirs that we have. So I believe that
Ephesus is doing a great job in comparison to the…

Interviewer: To some of these other churches.
Pastor Kowlessar: To some of these other churches because I’ve visited and even my Praise Team who I believe can be much more better, because I could see their potential and I will listen to some other praise teams and I’m like, “No, I need to come back to Ephesus.” I can’t wait... I will go out to hear different choirs and I hear them trying to do some of the songs that Chancel Choir has done, and Chamber singers have done and Ensemble has done and I’d say, “Man, there’s no church like Ephesus.” I think Ephesus is doing a great job. Can we do more, yes. We can always do more. Can we do better; I believe there’s always room for improvement. Ephesus does a great job in comparison. I don’t know about the other Baptist churches. I don’t know about Convent and Abyssinian because I’ve never been able to go to these; I can’t compare to them. But in comparison to what I’ve come from to where I’m now, this is like top grade.

Interviewer: Wow!

Pastor Kowlessar: And if you go visit just in Brooklyn, you will not see one.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Pastor Kowlessar: You should probably as a part of your dissertation – you should probably take a month and just bounce from church to church and you will not witness what you witness here at Ephesus.

Interviewer: That’s funny. I used to hear about Hanson Place. I heard Hanson Place Church was pretty good…

Pastor Kowlessar: … had. At least I don’t [overlapping conversation].

Interviewer: …really…

Interviewer: I know at one point City Tab had a music program. They had a choir. And I think the last time I was at City Tab was maybe two years ago. It was about two years ago and I think that when I was there I sang nearly twice in the month, because I filled in for somebody and then the pastor asked me about bringing the Chancel Choir. So we came and sang for service. They hadn’t had a choir and I just thought that was very strange that they just didn’t have a choir.

Pastor Kowlessar: Yeah, and that’s why I believe the Ephesus needs to keep it up, because these other churches who don’t have it and people are looking for it. I believe that people are – people want that – people want variety. When you go to a buffet, you just don’t want one thing…

Interviewer: Yeah, it’s like, “Okay, here’s some chicken like, here’s a chicken wing.”

Pastor Kowlessar: That’s right…
Interviewer: “Well, fried chicken wing, baked chicken wings, barbecue chicken wings, chicken fricassee… chicken, chicken, chicken…”

Pastor Kowlessar: That’s right, chicken, you want some ribs…[overlapping conversation] That’s right, so Ephesus brings that variety. And what we have now in all our churches, we have churches with great gospel choirs but they can’t touch the anthems, they can’t touch some of the spirituals, they could do the gospel and I don’t see anything wrong with that, but Ephesus has all the departments that can touch on each of them. My desire is for the Youth Choir is for them to have more than one director, a director who is musically and classically trained that can do those sort of songs with the Youth Choir. I think Jesiah’s a great addition to Ephesus, I like his commitment, his drive, but he’s not classically trained. He can teach the gospel, but he can’t – I don’t think he can teach the anthems unless he is taught how to do that with some of the intricate details that go into it. I would love to see the Youth Choir become something like that and just see a mass choir so that when the Youth Choir needs to join with the Chamber Singers or that they – you don’t have to teach them how, they can just fit in and we could just have one big mass choir.

Interviewer: Yeah. I think that’s kind of what I was trying to do in December around Christmas when we had the youth choir to have all the musical entities of the church serving together. You know, that was part of the goal, but I don’t know. Well, I don’t know if it’s going to happen this year.

Pastor Kowlessar: I pray so, because you have a good core of young people that are dedicated.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, I think that’s something that’s very important. I noticed the commitment level of the youth today is not like when I was – when I just was here [when I was] in my 20s. So the commitment level has changed since. Even now, when you look at the structure of the choirs now, it’s different; it’s not the same. So, I think a lot of it has to do with people who are not living in the area and all that. That’s [indiscernible].

Pastor Kowlessar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Thanks a lot Pastor Kowlessar, I really appreciate you coming up and doing this.

Pastor Kowlessar: No problem. You know, my last – well not the last, well one of the things I could do for mighty Ephesus that helps me so much. So just make sure you let me know when you get that Ph.D. If I’m not in graduation, I know I’ll be here whoop, whoop, whoopin’ for you, shouting you out on Facebook…

Interviewer: …Thank you. Shout me out on Facebook.

Pastor Kowlessar: Dr. Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming, that’s all right…
Interview with
Denise Joseph
October 17, 2011

Interviewer: Okay. I’m sitting here with Denise Joseph. Denise Joseph is a very lovely young lady who is a member of the Church here. Denise, how long you have been a member here at the Ephesus Church?


Interviewer: Okay. So have you always been an Adventist?

Denise Joseph: No. I became Adventist at 15.

Interviewer: Okay. You can…

Denise Joseph: Well at age 12, my sister’s ex-husband introduced me to Adventism and I attended 11th Street Church for three years. And then I came here and I was very excited about Ephesus when I got here and that’s where I became baptized at 15.

Interviewer: Okay. So were you a part of any other denominations before Adventism?

Denise Joseph: Catholic.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: But I never attended Church.

Interviewer: And so you were baptized but not confirmed or anything like that. Okay interesting. Can you tell me what’s your age range – are you 21 and under, 22 to 34, 35 to 44?

Denise Joseph: 22 to 34.

Interviewer: Okay. So you’re in that age range. So what’s your highest level of education that you’ve achieved so far?

Denise Joseph: My bachelor’s degree in communication.

Interviewer: Okay. Communication…so that’s general communications or…?

Denise Joseph: Mine is in PR, Public Relations.

Interviewer: Okay, so good, okay. So what school did you attend?
Denise Joseph: I attended Hunter College in 2005 to 2008 and then I attended Andrews University from 2008 to 2010.

Interviewer: Okay. So you were transfer student.

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: Okay. So have you always lived here in New York?

Denise Joseph: Correct.

Interviewer: So you are a native New Yorker.

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so what’s your ethnicity?

Denise Joseph: I’m Haitian.

Interviewer: See there is another one. Okay so, but you were born here but your family is Haitian.

Denise Joseph: Right, yeah, so I’m Haitian-American.

Interviewer: Haitian-American. Okay. So how long has your family been or has your parents been here in the States?

Denise Joseph: 30 years.

Interviewer: 30 years okay. All right. And so they’ve always been Catholic.

Denise Joseph: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. That is interesting.

Denise Joseph: Well, now my father is a Jehovah’s Witness. He hasn’t been baptized yet but he is in the process.

Interviewer: So he is a practicing Jehovah’s Witness.

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: I know that you’re relatively new here; you said you started coming to Ephesus in 2000 you said.

Denise Joseph: 2001…
Interviewer: ...2000, 2001. So when you came here, what drew you to this Church, to this particular Church, the Ephesus Church?

Denise Joseph: Well one, my family was attending this Church, my sisters and her sons, my nephews, they were attending...

Yeah, so we – yeah I used to attend because of them and I...I was just going for fun. And then, I don’t know, just hearing the sermons and just being here every week I started, it was planting – they were planting seed basically. I just started being more interested in God and who He was; and I started to [keep] Sabbath myself. Well not myself, my sister and I – Madeline, my twin-sister – decided to [keep] Sabbath in our house while everyone just doing whatever they wanted to do. Then I just got baptized when Pastor Graham did a revival; it was in 2001, he did a revival...

Interviewer: Okay. He did a revival... oh he did it here at Ephesus...

Denise Joseph: Yeah. And then we got baptized, all seven of us. All seven of us, my sister, her kids, me, Madeline, and my cousin; she just came that day and got baptized.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. All right. So since you’ve been coming here, where have you been doing most of your worship services? Have you been in the Senior Church, do you spend most of your time...?

Denise Joseph: In the Senior Church and the Youth Church.

Interviewer: But on an average because I’m...

Denise Joseph: Oh yeah, like twice a month we usually sing in the Senior Church, well mostly we’re youth. We’re youth, so we are in the Youth Church most of the time.

Interviewer: Okay. What is the music like in the Youth Church? Or I should say, can you describe to me what the worship service is like there?

Denise Joseph: Okay. Well, as far as the music, we have Christian Contemporary Music and we also have gospel in the Youth Church. So we’ll have Chris Tomlin²³⁹... songs from Chris Tomlin to songs from Fred Hammond²⁴⁰. Most people are more worshipful; they stand up, they give praise. I guess, I don’t want to say [they’re] more

²³⁹ Chris Tomlin (b. 1972) is a Contemporary Christian artist and worship leader. He wrote the song, “How Great is Our God.”
²⁴⁰ Fred Hammond (b. 1970) is a Gospel Music artist. He is a prolific composer of scripture songs. He was a member of the all-male gospel performing group, Commissioned.
passionate about the music because I don’t know anybody’s heart, but I just feel like they stand up, they’re clapping, they are praising God while we’re singing. They sing with us. And if you want to compare us to the Senior Church, it’s more like a performance where we – they’re watching us and they’re like nodding their heads.

**Interviewer:** Well do you know – do you have any idea as to why, when do you sing the Senior Church, the people are more, I would say, they’re not participatory but they’re more reserved or they kind of watch, they’re not as, they don’t participate as much?

**Denise Joseph:** Because they’re older one. They’re older one, and two, because the Senior Church is more traditional; it’s like, kind of like the code of conduct, that’s what it seems like…

**Interviewer:** That’s what it seems like?

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah, it seems like that’s just the way they praise.

**Interviewer:** Well, okay. Have you all tried to do anything to kind of encourage more participation from, I mean, when you come into the Senior Church and you do praise and worship, what are some of the participatory things that you have done?

**Denise Joseph:** I don’t know. Jesiah[^241], he tells them to stand up and…

**Interviewer:** Okay but…

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah, that’s all we do. There is nothing that we could do more.

**Interviewer:** What could you do?

**Denise Joseph:** Well as far as me, I pretty much raise my hand so that they can raise their hands. I kind of try to show them look you can participate. But I can’t speak for the rest of my praise team members, maybe they don’t. And maybe that’s why they are more reserved. I wish we can just…

**Interviewer:** Well, I know, like when you get in the Senior Church…’cause even when I was a youth that’s how it felt, (mocking) “we’re in the great Senior Church and now we have to… ah the great Senior Church! There is a certain decorum.” But I think in a lot of cases some of the songs -- what happens if you go somewhere and you don’t know the songs? What do you – I mean, do you feel that you can participate?

**Denise Joseph:** Well as a singer I can…

**Interviewer:** …even if you don’t know the song…

[^241]: Jesiah Pringle was the director of the Praise Team and the Ephesus Youth Choir from 2009 to present.
Denise Joseph: …even if I don’t know it. I’ve done it. I’ve done it… no, no, no. I listen to the chorus and then I kind of get where the song is going. So I mean, I’m not going to raise my hands, of course, if I don’t know the song. But I’ll sing along, I’ll sing along with them.

Interviewer: That’s if you, if you kind of get the…

Denise Joseph: Right, you get the gist of the…

Interviewer: …the song, of what’s going on…

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: Okay. So, but what in the event, it was just something that was totally different and had a lot of words what, I mean…

Denise Joseph: Oh then yes, definitely. You’re on your own then. Well most of the time, they are pretty easy to learn. Like, there are a lot of songs that we sing that they [Senior Church members] know. I know they know it.

Interviewer: How do you know they know it?

Denise Joseph: Because it’s old. It is an old song that has been there since 2000.

Interviewer: But for them, 2000, that’s still relatively new. The hymns have been in existence for like 300 or more years. (laughing) So… suggestion… perhaps, once we get like a screen or something going, then may be you can put the words up so people can – that’s why we print the words or print the hymns in a bulletin because we want people to participate. But if they don’t have the words in front of them they can’t participate.

I know I’ve been in some churches where I’m a singer and I can read the music. But if you don’t give me any music and you put just words, for me, I get a little lost because – especially if it’s something I don’t know. I can’t sing because I can’t read the notes. If I have the notes in front of me, I can sing along and participate. So I think that could be one way that we can kind of bridge the gap between the ages, because I think that’s what happens in prayer meetings a lot of times, too.

We sing -- even though 2000 is not a long [time] -- yeah, 2000 is kind of old for me, too. [Overlapping conversation] [But we are dealing with people who say], “oh no that’s song has been out since the 70’s.” So, for them, like “Soon and Very Soon” has been out since the ‘70s, so they know that because it’s got about a good 40 years [longevity]. So for a piece that’s -- unless it’s something that if they listen to [on] Christian radio -- and
then think of the demographics; mostly people don’t listen to 1190. They don’t listen to that. I listen to 1190, because I don’t want to listen to Family Radio.

Denise Joseph: Right, yeah.

Interviewer: But I like a lot of talk radio, like the Christian talk radio. I used to listen to that a lot, too. But they don’t have that kind of access. Some of them do, some of them don’t.

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: So I think and then two…

Denise Joseph: But then dancing, they always say we can’t move as much. [indiscernible]

Interviewer: Oh really.

Denise Joseph: Yeah. Like Jesiah will say, “okay, we’re going to sing in Senior Church. No moving. We don’t need all of that. Just sing.”

Interviewer: Yeah, I wonder why – did you all ever asked why?

Denise Joseph: No. They won’t – well I assume it’s just too much… too much swaying will distract them from song I guess.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, why do you all move? I’m just asking because – don’t mind me I’m thinking, I’m not looking past you, I’m thinking, figuring out what I’m saying -- I’m noticing in the Youth Church that there is a difference, a marked difference, in the worship styles and the music that’s selected and all. But I’m also trying to figure out why is it that – why there’s so much more activity. Why you think?

Denise Joseph: Well it’s just the whole – like for me, it’s what moves me. Like if this song is an upbeat song, I’m going to move to it. I’m going to dance to it, just like anybody would dance in a concert to worldly songs. I just feel like why not dance to Gospel and be into it. As far as the Senior Church, it’s just etiquette; it’s just, this is not the way, this is not the way you’re supposed to act, and it’s okay for me because I can still move in different ways, like raising my hands, closing my eyes, feeling the song. So even if we’re talking about being lost – like there is a song we sang two weeks ago, “Rescue me Lord. I’m Lost,” and I was just trying to evoke that emotion I’m lost while I was singing. So I didn’t have to move, of course, ’cause it was a folk song. Some – most of the songs we sing in the Senior Church are slow because I guess the upbeat

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242 WLIB 1190AM is the Christian affiliate station of WBLS in the New York City area. The station plays mainly Contemporary Gospel (Black) music.

243 Family Radio (Family Stations Inc.) is a Christian radio network based in Oakland, California. The tri-state affiliate for Family Radio is WFME 94.7 in Newark, NJ.
maybe Jesiah might feel is inappropriate or maybe in the Senior Church we’re just trying to show the dynamics of our – the way we sing. It’s just the dynamics rather, than this is just one song that we’re trying to sing to. Because I don’t know why, maybe this is what Jesiah wants or maybe this is what the church wants, I’m not sure.

Interviewer: So but do you feel that any of this like the movement – in some cultures like what I’ve been studying – I’m only African-American. And I’ve never been to Africa. I’ve only like read about certain cultures and you know watch movies and videos and things. But I noticed and from what I’ve been reading and studying – music is a part, especially in the African culture or people of African descent, music is used for everything.

I mean, you look at slavery, even while the slaves were in the fields, they were singing. There was some kind of music. Music was related to an action or something of that effect. I’m wondering if, do you think that it’s possible that while you, as a member of the praise team, are singing, that you are somehow relating to some kind of African cultural response to music?

Denise Joseph: Maybe because we have drums in the Youth Church and like you were talking about some African descent, when you listen to drums, you just move to the rhythm of the drums. As far as the Senior Church goes there are – well, we can play drums, it’s barely; we barely had drums in the Senior Church, so I guess that’s another reason why we don’t move as much in the Senior Church.

Interviewer: So is there any other time that you are not using drums or anything like that for you? If you were to be somewhere and you didn’t have the drums, and you just had a keyboard or piano and just the thing as, would you still feel that same movement for that emotion?

Denise Joseph: Sometimes it’s based on the audience too, the crowd. If they are trying to look at – there are some – okay we sing in plenty of churches. In some churches, they just look at you; they watch you and they are looking at you like, like say a performance rather than worship; and there are some people where they stand and they go “Hallelujah, amen,” and then you just feel the need to move to show them, “Look, we feel it too. We passionate it about it, too.”

Interviewer: So it sounds like you’re saying, based on what you’re seeing or what you’ve experienced, that when you sing and you don’t get any kind of emotional feel from the congregation, that they’re not worshipping…

Denise Joseph: Well it looks like, that’s what it looks like. I don’t know if they’re worshipping. That’s the thing. But it does look like, to me it does look like maybe you’re not worshipping, maybe you’re not feeling the song, maybe you’re not interested. And they could be, but the fact that they’re just looking and staring and not really – even I wouldn’t mind if they closed their eyes. Yeah and just listen to the song, and rather than look at us.
Interviewer: Okay. I felt like that a lot, too, because sometimes when I sing in the church, when I sing here, it was very quiet and they just look at you. But afterwards, people come to me and they’re like, “I was so moved by the song; it just ministered to my soul.”

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: But you didn’t see it; no, I didn’t see anybody raising their hand. And it’s funny though, because there are some people who are little more emotional singers. I’m really not an emotional singer. I don’t raise my hand. I don’t do too much of that stuff. I think that a lot of it has to do with my upbringing here, because if I go to other churches, I don’t feel that inhibited. Especially when I go to other black churches, I don’t feel that inhibited. I feel like culturally it’s just, if I want to raise a hand I can raise it.

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: I don’t feel like, “oh gosh, I’m raising my hand. What am I going to do? [frenzied] Oh Lord, I’m raising my hand! Oh!”

Denise Joseph: Yeah, sometimes I feel like that. Even when I’m sitting down in the Senior Church and I’m listening to the choir, like the Chancel Choir and I stand up, I don’t like people looking at me standing up.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I always wondered about that. Sometimes I wondered if people know where certain cultural things come from, like standing up when the Preacher speak and when someone is singing. I noticed that a lot in black churches. And I was wondering because somebody stands up here they like, “Why are you standing up? I can’t see.” And they say, “You’re in the light; I can’t see. I’m already trying to look behind a big hat and now you standing your whole body up. I can’t see!” I asked somebody about that. I asked a friend of mine, “What’s this whole thing about people standing up when they hear a song or if the Preacher is preaching?” He said, “Oh, they are standing in affirmation; they’re saying ‘I hear you. I agree with what you’re saying.’” I said, “Oh, that’s it.” I didn’t know.

So that’s why I wonder if today’s youth is looking at certain behavior in different denominations, in different cultural environments, and if they know why – especially the youth here – I’m like, “Do you know why you’re standing? Are you just standing just to be standing? Why?” I always wondered. But a lot of it is also drawn from emotion. I think when we look at the older folks – I’m wondering now that I’m closer to the older generation; I’m kind of in the gap in between the two – but I think that a lot of us have been taught that we should not trust our emotions. I remember attending R.T. Hudson and being taught in the bible classes that you cannot trust your emotions folks. Emotions

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244 R.T. Hudson is the church school sponsored by three SDA churches in the Bronx and Manhattan – Ephesus SDA Church, City Tabernacle SDA Church, and the Bronx SDA Church.
are deceptive, so you have to go with what you know. It has to be logical; and if goes according to what thus sayeth the Lord, then yes. But of course, emotions are fickle. So this is different generation. They’re not talking about, they’re not taking about all those emotions are fickle. They’re talking about …

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah, we hear some of it in sermons like as far as desires.

**Interviewer:** Yeah as far as desires, but no one has really talked about all emotional responses to anything. But as an artist, I have to rely somewhat on emotion because how am I going to minister this song, if I don’t, if – I mean I can have a logical understanding of what is being said – but if I’m just singing notes, I can sing notes and sound good. But it makes more of an impact if one knows what one is singing about and has some kind of connection. So do you all, when you sing, really try to have a connection to…

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah, most of the time. Jesiah always says something.

**Interviewer:** Now what is your connection towards it, is it mainly to the text or is it mainly to the music or…?

**Denise Joseph:** The text, sometimes it’s to the music, sometimes just even if the drums are playing, and you just feel worked up. You just get worked up. It doesn’t even have to be about the text is saying, it’s just wow this is powerful. Can you hear this, can you hear the band? They’re just amazing. You have to feel it something like that. That’s how I am. But mostly it’s the text.

I remember one time I had womanly problems. We all know what womanly problems are. And I had to sing and it was my second day. I was in pain, I had cramps, and we were singing, “I’m trading my sickness. I’m trading my [pain]…” And then once I heard that, I said, “Yeah, I’m trading it to You, God. It has nothing to do with me. Yes I have cramps right now; yeah I’m in pain. But you know what, I’m singing for Your glory and You’re here. You’re in this presence so, why am I even thinking about that? I need to think about how I’m trading and giving it all to You.” And then I sing it and I was just like yeah I’m trading now; I’m giving it all to you and that’s to me that’s emotion.

This is evoking that kind of emotion to the audience so the audience can see “oh she looks like she was in pain this week, too, but look she is trading it, she is trading her sickness. She is trading her pain and I need to do the same thing.” So it’s like ministering, we’re ministering through songs.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So do you hold an office in the church now?

**Denise Joseph:** Yes. I am AY Leader, co-AY Leader…

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245 Lyrics from “Trading My Sorrows” by Darrell Evans
246 AY stands for Adventist Youth.
Interviewer: Co-AY Leader, okay.

Denise Joseph: I am music coordinator assistant.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: So I’m an assistant to Omar.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: I am praise team member.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: I am youth choir member.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: I’m alto section leader of the youth choirs.

Interviewer: Oh boy.

Denise Joseph: I’m co-chaplain of the choir.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: I’m Vice President of Music Administration for the choir and praise team, and yeah, I guess that’s it. I hope that’s it.

Interviewer: Okay, so all right. So since you’ve been here, from 2001 to the present, so I would say maybe last year, have you noticed any changes in the musical style that’s used for worship?

Denise Joseph: Yeah. I have noticed some.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: As far as, from in 2001, we used to sing AY songs a lot; even in divine service we used to sing AY songs.

Interviewer: And what AY songs?

Denise Joseph: “Victory is mine,”247 that’s it pretty much.

Interviewer: Okay, like choruses…

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247 “Victory is Mine” by Dorothy Norwood.
Denise Joseph: Yeah, choruses right.

Interviewer: In worship service….

Denise Joseph: In worship service.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: And as far as now, we’re trying to picking up the latest songs from today’s -- “Mali Music,”248 Israel and New Breed’s new album, you know. Yeah, we’re not really sticking to the old stuff. Like before, we sang Kurt Carr, “We Lift Our Hands in the Sanctuary.”249 And that’s old, that’s really old.

Interviewer: Oh that’s the one. I kind of like him.

Denise Joseph: But it’s old. It’s now we’re trying to keep in touch with the cultural times. So if Israel and New Breed has a new album, we’re going to sing from the album. If Fred Hammond has a new album, we’re going to sing from that album. Like maybe we’ve been singing Tye Tribbett [from his] new album, Takeover Champion.

Interviewer: Okay, I see. I’m probably a couple of years behind with Tye Tribbett250. I think some of what Tye Tribbett does in some of his pieces are so they’re out there.

Denise Joseph: Yes.

Interviewer: And especially I guess nowadays when I watch his videos, or if they happen to be on an award show or something like that, I watch that, and I’m like, “oh my goodness it’s so…”

Denise Joseph: Theatrical.

Interviewer: …theatrical and to me it seems a little confusing. I mean, here it is you’re singing about Jesus, but you’re dropping it. You look confusing. So when it gets an award show and they show Dottie Peoples251, I’m like, “oh I’m so glad to see a choir in background with a robe on and Dottie is standing in the front with her glitter gown on.” [In the past] you never used to see gospel soloists or people be that dressed up… Shirley

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249 Kurt Carr (b. 1964) is Gospel singer/songwriter, and the founder of The Kurt Karr Singers.

250 Tye Tribbett (b. 1976) is singer/songwriter of gospel music. He was the lead singer for Tye Tribbett and G.A. (Greater Anointing)

251 Dottie Peoples (b. 1950) is an American gospel singer. She sings traditional gospel music.
Caesar\textsuperscript{252} for a long time didn’t really dressed up like that. I mean this is a little different now, but he’s [Tye Tribbett] a little…

**Denise Joseph:** It’s true he is out there. I went to a concert. It was crazy.

**Interviewer:** Really.

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah, I went to a concert he was jumping up and down. But it was hype; it was entertaining. I’m not going to say it wasn’t. It was loud. It was entertaining but I mean it’s not something, it’s not my style of music, but everybody is different. And I wouldn’t even agree with his personal life. I don’t agree with like he cheated on his wife.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. And then you have all of these other issues and so do you think that those are some of the other influences that will keep you from either listening to an artist or…

**Denise Joseph:** No. I’m not that type of person. Even a pastor, I can listen to a pastor and then I find out he cheated on his wife or he has done bad things. I just feel like we all make mistakes. We all have problems even and but it’s not even cheating. Let’s not just look at adultery. Let’s look at fornication. Let’s look at going to the club. Let’s look at our issues with jewelry. I just feel like we all have issues and we have no right to judge. And maybe when he did the sermon, he really had good intentions to minister to others and he was even ministering to himself. But yeah, we all have our own issues; even people in the praise team we all have our own problems that we deal with. I might have a problem with shopping, in other words, I’m just saying…

**Interviewer:** I’m not mad at and financial debt is real.

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah and it’s not of God, people would say that’s not of God; that’s a sin. We shouldn’t be in financial debt. You should control your money. You should be simple. You shouldn’t be shopping for a $100 shoe. You know what I mean? So I just feel like we all have our problems. So why should I look at your personal life and say I’m not singing your song? Oh I’m not listening to you just because of your personal life.

But then again, like Tye Tribbett will sing some songs where I’m like, is he doing this for entertainment or is he doing this because he really wants people to be saved. Like you said, some of them are theatrical. Some of them are too dramatic.

**Interviewer:** I’m going to tell you one person that I kind of have a little more respectful is Dietrick Haddon\textsuperscript{253}. Well, maybe because I saw in the movie that was kind of loosely based on his life.

\textsuperscript{252} Shirley Caesar (b. 1938) is a Gospel singer, actress and minister. She was a member of the Caravans and has performed with James Cleveland and Alberta Walker.

\textsuperscript{253} Dietrick Haddon (b. 1973) is a contemporary Gospel artist, composer, and producer. His music is considered progressive because he adapts a variety of genres in his compositions.
Denise Joseph: I didn’t see it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well it came on TV one day and I watched it. And as I looked at it, I said, it’s a struggle. I think a lot of musicians who have – well this new term psalmist, this is the first time I’m really hearing people use this term psalmist – it’s just like you said, they have issues, too. We all have sinned. We all have come short of the glory of God, but when I look at that, I said, “Hmm, he is reaching a demographic that I probably would have written off. I know my husband talks about that a lot because he is very much into this pop culture.

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: He made a valid point that there are some kids who will not come into a church because they have this preconceived notion that they have to be one way. Yes, eventually [we all make adjustments to our lives to fit the criteria of the Christian lifestyle] – yes. There are guidelines. God gave us the guidelines – of course as I’m talking I’m very biased because I am a Christian – that’s the way that I feel.

Let’s create a hypothetical situation. We have a person who has been out [in the world], who has never been to a church except for maybe a wedding, if that, or a funeral. This is a very real incident here in this community.

And they start listening to a lot of the crossover like Kirk Franklin254, Tye Tribbett, J Moss255, Israel and New Breed256 - and they start listening to this music. Well, let’s not even put Israel and New Breed into this because he is more praise and worship…but Kirk Franklin and maybe some of J Moss…because J Moss can be kind of controversial, too.

Denise Joseph: I actually went to his concert. I didn’t like it.

Interviewer: You didn’t like it.

Denise Joseph: Yeah. I mean, he said, “Everyone let’s clap the hands. Everyone let’s give a round of applause for Jesus Christ,” but no one was clapping. [Then] he said, “Let’s give a round of applause for Jesus Christ.” It just seemed like he just wanted applause and he thought, “Oh let me just say Jesus Christ so I can hear everyone applaud me.” That’s what it seemed like. I just said, “I’m turned off.” That’s my problem, too. I’ll look at you – there is one thing; we make mistakes, we sin. But then, if you’re just in that sin and you don’t care, you’re going to keep doing it – that’s my problem. I just feel like he has a pride issue; that’s my problem. Once I heard that, I was like, “I don’t

254 Kirk Franklin (b. 1970) is a Contemporary Gospel artist from Texas. His music crosses between gospel and popular genres.
255 J. Moss (b. 1971) is a Contemporary Gospel artist from Detroit. He is related to Dr. Mattie Moss Clark and the Clark Sisters. He is the composer of “We Must Praise.”
256 Israel Houghton (b. 1971) is a Contemporary Christian artist and worship leader at Lakewood Church (Joel Olsteen) in Houston, Texas.
think… I’m not going to not listening to his songs, but I’m not going to go out of my way to [see what he’s doing or where he’s performing. I’m not going to say], “Let me go to his concerts.” No, I don’t really care.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Skip my hypothetical situation. So it sounds like you are very discriminate as far as whom you listen to and you will go to the concerts. What do you get from going to a live concert?

**Denise Joseph:** Okay. Like Tye Tribbett, I went to his concert; I just wanted to see what he is about. I want to see what that person is about, not the music, not anything else; I want to see what you are about. And when Tye Tribbett came out, he was very theatrical, very dramatic and everything. I thought this is too much; this is entertaining. And then he started preaching. Just came out of nowhere and started preaching about how we need to change our lives, stop pretending, stop being phony and just really change our lives, build up our character, start reading our Bibles. [He said], “I don’t want you come to this concert and just leave and say that was good. I want you to leave and say I need to change my life. I needed to just change this about myself.” His song was, “Son of Man” 257 and “Well Done.” 258 He sang, “Well Done.”

**Interviewer:** I thought that [song] was [from] Deitrick Haddon –

**Denise Joseph:** Which “Well Done?”

**Interviewer:** Oh, there is more than one “Well Done?”

**Denise Joseph:** Maybe Deitrick Haddon had a “Well Done.” 259 Which one are you singing?

**Interviewer:** I don’t know.

**Denise Joseph:** It’s…. I forgot how it goes. Oh enter into my joy. So, “Well Done” is pretty much about you get to heaven and this is what God is going to say; “Enter in my son, my servant. Well done.” He [Tribbett] then started preaching and saying, “you don’t want to go to heaven and then God is not going to say that to you. You want God to say, ‘Well done.’ So you need to change your character.” And I just – that was the first time, first concert I went to where the guys just stopped singing and just started preaching. And I thought that was very… that was very touching. It was very touching. That was before we found out about the whole scandal, but…

**Interviewer:** Were people moved by that?

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257 “Son of Man” is a single on Tye Tribbett’s 2008 recording entitled *Stand Out.*

258 “Well Done” is a single on Tye Tribbett’s 2008 recording entitled *Stand Out.*

259 “Well Done” is written by Deitrick Haddon and is on his 2011 recording entitled *Church on the Moon.*
Denise Joseph: Yeah. I thought – I was moved. I was moved, my sister was moved and I could tell people were like, “Yeah I need to change my life.” I needed to…

Interviewer: But did anybody make a commitment to...

Denise Joseph: I don’t know.

Interviewer: Oh you don’t know about and he didn’t do that.

Denise Joseph: He didn’t do a call.

Interviewer: He didn’t do a call.

Denise Joseph: Yeah, like where people get up and no he didn’t do that. I don’t think he can do that at concert. I don’t know if he can, I’m not sure.

Interviewer: Where was his concert in a hall or...

Denise Joseph: It was in the park, River Park in Brooklyn.

Interviewer: Oh yes that’s cool.

Denise Joseph: Anyway, God gives us spirit of discernment. We know what we shall listen to and what she shouldn’t. There are people… I don’t have to go to the concert. There are people that I just know I’m not going to listen to – like Mary Mary.260 Once they made “God in Me”261 and they started talking about the diamond and jewelry, “she got to write them checks with a whole lot of zeros” – like that’s what you’re praising. That’s not what Christianity is about.

Interviewer: Well, you know, I kind of hear that different; as I was listening to that I think they were saying, “Even though I do all of this stuff it’s not about me…”

Denise Joseph: But then she said, “What they don’t know…”

Interviewer: …that it is about God in me. That’s what…

Denise Joseph: But then she says, “What they don’t know is when I’m behind closed doors praying…” They should know that regardless; wherever you are, not behind closed doors. You should be praying in front of everybody. You should be talking about God in front of everybody. Why don’t they know? I’m just curious.

Interviewer: This is kind of interesting. So you do pay attention to lyrical content.

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260 Mary Mary is a Contemporary Gospel group consisting of two sisters, Erica Atkins-Campbell and Trecina “Tina” Atkins-Campbell. They are known for their 2005 crossover hit, “Yesterday.”
261 “God in Me” is a single on Mary Mary’s 2008 recording entitled, The Sound.
Denise Joseph: Yeah I do. I’m not, “okay that sounds good.” But what are you talking about?

Interviewer: So in the selections that the praise team and the youth choir, whatever you all select to sing for service, are you all very discriminate in the lyrics?

Denise Joseph: I am. There is one song, the “Rescue Me” song that I was talking about; I changed the lyrics. And we sang it in the Senior Church with the lyrics changed.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: I changed the lyrics because they were talking about, referring to Jesus Christ – when the storm was coming and Jesus Christ wasn’t there, they were saying, “Where are you, God? Why are you sleeping?” Right? And I just felt like God is not really, he wasn’t doing – he wasn’t…

Interviewer: And what is storm? You’re talking about the storm in the boat and stuff.

Denise Joseph: Yeah and he was sleeping but he wasn’t sleeping. He was just trying to see… he said, “Oh ye of little faith.” It was a lesson to be taught, and it just seemed like they were saying, “I’m lost, where are you? Where are you Lord?” and “In the times of trouble like, in times of my trouble, where are you Lord and why are you sleeping?” He is not sleeping in the times of our trouble, is he? No, he is never sleeping. He is just not doing anything because he wants us to take it to him. That’s the big thing. So I changed the lyrics, put something else, and they said that’s good. You’re right. You’ve right to change it.

Interviewer: Okay. But that’s you’re following something that has always happened especially within the Adventist Church. If you noticed the hymns that are in the hymnal – that’s another topic that I’m going to talk about – but if you noticed some of the hymns, if you were to compare it to, let’s say the Baptist hymnals, if you look at – or any other denomination it’s the same hymn. Our words are slightly different because people felt that we needed to change it in order to suit our doctrine. But that’s kind of cool… I think sometimes people think that, “Oh the youth are just out there. They’re just singing in all this popular stuff but they’re not really [know]…

Denise Joseph: You don’t know what’s going on. No, we know what’s going on.

Interviewer: Okay. How often are hymns sung in the Youth Church?

Denise Joseph: Every week.

Interviewer: Oh, so you did sing them.

Denise Joseph: Two hymns a week.
Interviewer: Okay. Have you all ever considered like the youth choir doing an arrangement of a hymn?

Denise Joseph: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay. Why is it a hymn now? It’s called “Precious Lord.” Have you heard of it?

Interviewer: It’s considered a gospel hymn, right.

Denise Joseph: Yeah. We’re singing that.

Interviewer: “Precious Lord takes my hand…” That is a gospel hymn. It has become a gospel hymn.

Denise Joseph: Okay. We’re singing that for Senior Church. The next time we sing at Senior Church that’s what we’re singing.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you all sing like spirituals any other music on the black experience?

Denise Joseph: Spirituals like what?

Interviewer: Like Negro Spirituals.

Denise Joseph: Well in the hymns they have Negro Spirituals.

Interviewer: How many hymns, Negro Spiritual, have you noticed in the hymnals? I see you are lost.

Denise Joseph: Very few. But we’ve seen but they have they have some. I don’t know is says Negro Spirituals so that’s, yeah.

Interviewer: So okay so.

Denise Joseph: But in general no.

Interviewer: So you all haven’t learned any of the choral arrangements of the Negro Spiritual.

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262“Precious Lord” is originally written by Thomas Dorsey. The Ephesus Youth Choir sang an arrangement of Dorsey’s song.
Denise Joseph: No. But I think this year our choir is trying to branch out as far as we’re not singing just gospels. We’re going to sing hymns. We’re trying to reach all types of audiences.

Interviewer: So okay. Thank you all. Just tell me that because I’m wondering I don’t think that you all realized that back in the day that’s what how the youth choir was, we sang…

Denise Joseph: All types of it. Yeah.

Interviewer: So we sang anthems, sang spirituals. We didn’t sing as much gospel and I think mainly because the person that was leading us, she wasn’t really – if it wasn’t written down, we didn’t sing it and they were also very, very careful of the lyrics… had to make sure that whatever we’re singing is doctrinally sound. So I think that’s essential thing. So for your personal enjoyment, what do you listen to? Do you listen to just gospel or do you listen to other music?


Interviewer: Christian Rap.

Denise Joseph: Yeah I do.

Interviewer: Who is Lecrae263?

Denise Joseph: Lecrae is an artist.

Interviewer: Oh he is an artist. I’m sure you would listen to Lecrae, Hollis264 would have been like, “oh yeah Lecrae.” What is that? Is that like some kind of…?

Denise Joseph: Yeah. No, he is an artist. I like him. I enjoy him a lot. I’m not really into the Christian rap, but my fiancé is and that’s why I listen to Lecrae everybody else that he listens to. But I really like Lecrae. I think Lecrae is, he could have been R&B rapper but he chose to be Christian. And I just respect that about him because he, not only can he rap, but the lyrics are just like amazing like poetry. So I just feel like, he could have been an R&B artist or a rapper, R&B rapper whatever, but he decided to take his talent and use it for Christ.

Interviewer: So what do you think about Gospel rappers coming here and let’s say for the offertory giving us a rendition for offertory such that…

Denise Joseph: That’s my opinion though. I just don’t feel it’s appropriate for divine service.

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263 Lecrae Moore, a Hip-Hop Christian rapper based in Atlanta, Georgia.
264 Hollis B. Fleming, II, my husband.
Interviewer: Okay. Why do you say that?

Denise Joseph: I don’t know. I think Christian rappers are there to encourage those who are in the world to come in. But now that you’re in, I don’t feel you need to consume yourself in the Christian rap. Like my fiancé, he listens to it but not very [often]. He used to listen to a lot when he was an Adventist and he came into the Church. And then now he is like slowly, not that he is doing it on purpose, it’s just that now that he is a Christian, you can listen to a nicer songs like softer songs, slower songs, like it’s just not saying Christian rap is not nice. I don’t want to say that, yeah scratch that. I didn’t say Christian rap is…

Interviewer: No, no, no that’s fine, that’s fine.

Denise Joseph: Yeah, it’s nice. I like it. It’s just for concert purposes. That’s how I feel. If you want to, it’s a revival type of song. You want to draw the world into the Church. Now that we’re in the Church, there is a different type of music we should have… because for offertory I don’t know.

Interviewer: That’s very interesting. Do you think that Christian rap at any time… let’s say, we want to do something for AY…

Denise Joseph: I think that’s appropriate.

Interviewer: Okay. Why, why do you say that?

Denise Joseph: Because AY is for the youth, and the youth listens to rap whether it’s Christian or not. So you’re reaching the youth, okay we can do that. But for divine service we’re reaching all types of people and I don’t think that the older people would enjoy. They would probably think, “what is going on? This is not a choir.”

Interviewer: They’re already saying that.

Denise Joseph: “This is lost to me. What’s going on?” And you just I feel like the divine service you need to reach all types of audiences, not just the youth. Even though we’re in Youth Church like you’re youth, you’re still youth so if you might not like it then we shouldn’t sing it.

Interviewer: So, you had said something about your fiancé…

Denise Joseph: He just became Adventist. Yes. Two years ago.

Interviewer: Oh good. I’m so clueless. I know nothing. I’m just like here, I see people, say hi but I know nothing. But you were saying that you are noticing that he is listening to softer music.
Denise Joseph: Like songs I would even listen to. He’s listens to things like; I’d have to show you what type of music. It’s just, it’s just different.

Interviewer: No, well is it Christian music?

Denise Joseph: It is, it’s Christian Contemporary.

Interviewer: Oh, he’s listening to like praise and worship.

Denise Joseph: Yeah like, “Abide in me Jesus.”

Interviewer: But that’s one on the radio.

Denise Joseph: Yes. It is.

Interviewer: So do you think that when a, so when a Christian or someone becomes a Christian.

Denise Joseph: I’m not saying they can’t listen to the Christian rap because I listen to Christian rap.

Interviewer: No. I’m just saying do you feel that because what I’m gathering because you’re saying that, oh he is listening to more soothing music, music that’s a little softer. I mean it still has a good message, you still hear instrumentation, but it’s not like abrasive, because sometimes gospel music can be somewhat abrasive.

Denise Joseph: Sure.

Interviewer: Kind of.

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, okay, as – when you became an Adventist, when you came here, what type of music were you listening to? I mean what drew you to the Adventist Church, to Ephesus, as far as the music, what was…

Denise Joseph: Well, we had gospel. It was gospel music that drew me. Well things like Kurt Karr, “We Lift Our Hands in the Sanctuary,”265 you know, stuff like that. But it wasn’t really the music that made me get baptized, I mean...

Interviewer: Of course, we know it’s the Word, but as far as your worship experience…

Denise Joseph: Right it was gospel.

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265 “In the Sanctuary” is written by Kurt Karr and is on his 2001 recording entitled, Awesome Wonder.
Interviewer: It was mainly gospel music.

Denise Joseph: Right. And then I went to Andrews and I saw a different type of music and I liked it. It wasn’t like I didn’t like it, I liked it, I liked the, “I would search for you and I would find,” and they are raising their hands standing up…

Interviewer: So look, people they’re standing up and they’re raising their hands and that’s contemporary.

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: But have you ever read the guidelines for the – the musical guidelines for the Seventh Day Adventist Church? I have to show you one day. The 1973 version said we should refrain from all music that has strong, strong rhythmic background and dissonant chords and such and such and so forth and the other. But now it’s a little they… So it’s not so much that but still we have people who are stuck on the 1973 version that’s pretty much saying, “No we don’t want to listen to this…

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: “…we don’t listen to that; that’s the devil’s music.

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: But you listen to this contemporary Christian stuff and just because it’s softer it doesn’t necessarily mean…

Denise Joseph: Oh yeah, that is better.

Interviewer: That is better.

Denise Joseph: No, no, no I’m not saying that, it’s just that – I feel like when you are a Christian like baptized, you should listen to all types. I don’t feel you should limit yourself to just Christian rap or gospel. You should listen to all types of music and absolutely I just felt like a Christian should be well-rounded and that’s what it is…

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: …and including hymns. You can listen to hymns. I listen to hymns.

Interviewer: Let me tell you. Some of these hymns can send me crying.

Denise Joseph: That is true, that’s true.

Interviewer: Oh, wow! Did you know that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had put out some praise songs?
Denise Joseph:  They put it out?

Interviewer:  Yeah.  They have some praise and worship songs that are written that specifically deal with our doctrine did you know that?

Denise Joseph:  No.

Interviewer:  Cool.  That’s interesting, okay.

Denise Joseph:  Where are they?

Interviewer:  I have them somewhere…

Denise Joseph:  Are they in the hymnal?

Interviewer:  No, they are not because they just put them out of like – how long has Pastor Blue been here…

Denise Joseph:  Since four years.

Interviewer:  Yeah.  So I would say…


Denise Joseph:  I didn’t know that.


Denise Joseph:  What is it a book or booklet or…

Interviewer:  Well here is the thing.  It came on a CD and on – they also have like a DVD that has the music where you can print it, but as I listened to some of it, I’m – I need to get it to you all, because I’m wondering I think if – we don’t know about it.  So you saw how you like, oh really…

Denise Joseph:  Yeah.

Interviewer:  And here you are up there in Andrew around the time they had to put out.

Denise Joseph:  Wow!

Interviewer:  So why don’t you know about it?
Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: And I don’t know if it’s because they’re really trying to perpetuate this Eurocentric stuff. Oh that’s the other thing I’ve been – in my paper I’ve been talking about Eurocentric versus Afrocentric and stuff. So do you feel that this style of worship in the Youth Church is more Afrocentric or Eurocentric?

Denise Joseph: Afrocentric.

Interviewer: And why do you say that?

Denise Joseph: Well, I feel like PMC Andrews University\textsuperscript{266} would be more Eurocentric and I just say its Afrocentric when we have drums, that’s one and we move. We move, we’re not the same; we’re doing other things. We’re singing, we’re feeling, we’re trying to get the audience to participate with us and I don’t feel that’s Eurocentric. I think Eurocentric doesn’t really involve audience participation. It’s more singing and you look, you watch and you enjoy it.

Interviewer: Okay. It’s kind of like the Catholic Church was before Vatican II. Do you know anything about Martin Luther?

Denise Joseph: Oh, the 98 thesis?

Interviewer: …Yeah… and the whole point of the Lutheran chorale? Do you know what a chorale is?

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: It’s a hymn. It’s basically a hymn. And the whole purpose of the chorale was that – Martin Luther felt the same way. People need to participate and worship…

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: So what better way for them to participate and to reinforce their knowledge of the Bible and of God than for them to sing and to participate? In the Catholic Church, the priest and the choir did all the work, all the worship and people just sat back then a couple of “Hail Marys” just went on. But Martin Luther, coming out of that said, “No, these people need to sing.” That’s why Bach, you know, Bach was a Lutheran, and that’s why we have all these chorales and why these hymns are very important, because if people participate and sing the songs of Zion it was reinforcing their faith.

Denise Joseph: So would you say Martin Luther is Afrocentric?

\textsuperscript{266} PMC stands for Pine Memorial Church. It is the university church at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Andrews University is an Adventist institution of higher learning.
Interviewer: I think that he was more – I don’t know if I would say that he was Afrocentric, only because of where he lived and the time and the era that he lived in and the influence that western music had around the world. I mean as far as the whole participation, I think that he was probably trying to go back to Judeo, the original Judeo-Christian version where in the temple, Jewish temple; you have a cantor and people participate.

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: It’s about the participation and worship. So, but when I say Afrocentric, I’m thinking about more of African...

Denise Joseph: Old man rhythm…

Interviewer: Rhythm, where people are not just...

Denise Joseph: Stiff.

Interviewer: Stiff, and their whole idea of worship and what is worship and what is reverence. Do you feel that a person is reverent if they are just sitting still and quiet, do you feel that, that’s reverence?

Denise Joseph: I think you’re reverent even if you stand. It’s based on – I think it gets out of hand when they’re like, (loudly) “Yeah, hallelujah!!” I’ve seen a lot of – that seems like okay, it’s a little out of hand. There is appropriate and inappropriate. And I just feel like you can be reserved standing up and raising your hands and you can be reserved staying down. And I feel like that’s the problem with the way the Senior Church feels. They feel you stand up, you’re not reserved – [Like], “Oh my goodness, what are you doing?” and that’s not the case – that’s not true. You can still be reserved. It can still be appropriate if you just – if it just happens at the right time, at the right moment. Some of them are...

Interviewer: So then how do you define the right...

Denise Joseph: Oh, when I say right time I mean like...

Interviewer: The right time and the right moment.

Denise Joseph: Oakwood.267

Interviewer: Yeah, Oakwood has changed...

Denise Joseph: Oakwood now is totally different.

267 Oakwood University, a historically Black university, is an Adventist institution of higher learning in Huntsville, Alabama.
Interviewer: Oh in their Church services the choirs don’t even sing responses.

Denise Joseph: Oh, they don’t.

Interviewer: No. I was down there a couple of years ago and I was like, “Excuse me, what are the choral responses?” They said, “No, we don’t do that. We have someone, they have a person that’s – they have a chorister and [that person] leads all the hymns.” They have the screen and hymns [and songs] are up on the screen and the chorister for the day is out there waving their hands and singing and stuff, and I’m like…

Denise Joseph: Well, Oakwood, I would even say even in the preaching, some of the things are inappropriate in Oakwood.

Interviewer: Okay, why do you say that?

Denise Joseph: Because every little thing the preachers says, you see someone go, “Amen! Oh yes, yes! You better tell them!” and I’m like, “I’m trying to listen, okay…”

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: I want to – nowadays and I’m still going now, because even Angelo, he is an Oakwoodite and he is, he is even talking about this, like the pastor would say, “Okay, now we will get into the Word.” [And some congregants would shout], “Yeah you get into the Word!” Why are we – that’s inappropriate, so we just say…

Interviewer: Okay. So you say okay, but in some congregation let’s say outside Adventism that that’s what they do. The preachers preach like in a more charismatic movement or I would say even in a Baptist Church, especially in the Baptist Church.

Denise Joseph: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: The pastor would stand up there and he would say something. They talk [overlapping conversation]…

Denise Joseph: Yeah, but sometimes – okay, I’ve been to Baptist Churches, and to me I feel like it’s appropriate, it’s still right timing. Like they’ll go, “Amen, and you know if you’re a sinner you can’t be doing it…”

Interviewer: So you say it’s because they are listening and they respond, so it’s basically what we were talking about with that whole standing…

Denise Joseph: Right.

Interviewer: So they are in agreement.
Denise Joseph: Right, in agreement and something -- like that’s what I’m saying sometimes people are not doing it for agreement; it’s for show. It’s for show; I don’t know what it is. I don’t know. I don’t know why they are doing it. I don’t if it’s to show, “Hey I’m a Christian. I’m feeling this. Everyone look at me” or is it to show – I don’t know. I just – I don’t want to judge or assume, but I just feel like sometimes it’s just inappropriate and like that’s the difference between reserved and the straight out. What’s going on…

Interviewer: Yeah. And I was going to say [indiscernible]…

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, all right. So before you became an Adventist, I was going to say what style of music did you listen to in your childhood? It’s not that far from it…

Denise Joseph: Before I became an Adventist, I didn’t listen to a lot of music.

Interviewer: Really!

Denise Joseph: I listen to the R&B; that was what I was into, because I was a singer for the longest. So I listen to R&B, rap, I would listen to all these popular songs like… Mary Mary came out with “Shackles Off My Feet,”268 I would listen to that, Kirk Franklin came out with something [indiscernible]…

Interviewer: Oh yes, I got that out. I still have that.

Denise Joseph: Stuff like that, it has to be popular. It has to be what everybody knew, not just the Christians, but what everybody knew.

Interviewer: So even now do you still listen to R&B and/or you listen to…

Denise Joseph: No.

Interviewer: You do pretty much…

Denise Joseph: No, I just stopped everything.

Interviewer: Okay.

Denise Joseph: I listened to Nicki Minaj269, Beyoncé270, Christian and then I just…

Interviewer: So why is that?

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268 “Shackles” is a single on Mary Mary’s 2000 recording entitled, Thankful.
269 Nicki Minaj (b. 1982) is Hip hop and R&B artist.
270 Beyoncé Knowles (b. 1981) is a R&B and pop artist. She was a member of Destiny’s Child before launching her solo career.
Denise Joseph: I just want to keep my mind focused on godly things and I just feel like it’s not what – listening to those things would just put things in your head that you don’t need like love songs, talking about sex. I mean, I am a virgin.

Interviewer: Why do [overlapping conversation]

Denise Joseph: Exactly, I don’t need that. I’m getting married next year. I don’t need – I’m already tempted, do you understand?

Interviewer: Right.

Denise Joseph: I already have my own temptations, why do I need to add some more temptations in my mind and there are certain – actually certain things I shouldn’t watch on television either, but in fact I’ll do, but I think it’s a step, getting rid of the gospel music. I haven’t – I mean not gospel, R&B music. I didn’t listen to R&B music since 2008.

Interviewer: That’s a long time.

Denise Joseph: Three years. I mean I will hear every now and then. I will hear what everybody else is listening, but I’m not…

Interviewer: But that’s a really – to listen to know exactly what it is.

Denise Joseph: Yeah. I don’t know what it’s saying; I don’t know what it’s about…

Interviewer: Okay, I ain’t mad at you… Stay out of temptation please…

Denise Joseph: That’s true.

Interviewer: …you’ll be stuck out there and you’ll be like going what the [indiscernible].

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you know what nationalities are represented here at the Church or have you ever? Okay, so when you first came here, you probably said that this was the majority at Caribbean Church?

Denise Joseph: Actually, I felt majority black…

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Denise Joseph: But then…
Interviewer: Black, but not to really say…

Denise Joseph: Yeah. I don’t want to say it now, I can say it Caribbean.

Interviewer: Well, you know, strangely enough at the inception of this Church, and they were telling me that it was maybe about 60% African-American…

Denise Joseph: Oh, really! Wow!

Interviewer: From American black to 40%…

Denise Joseph: Caribbean.

Interviewer: Caribbean, but, you know, but then too remember immigration policies were different and then there was a period of time where it was just – where there was and even greater percentage of American Blacks here, but now…

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yes, I would say, I would agree with you on that. So do you think that – okay, do you think that some of the music that is – that we use for service should reflect more of the Caribbean cultures since most of the people here are from the Caribbean?

Denise Joseph: I never thought about that. No really, I never really took time to say if it’s the Caribbean Church why don’t we, you know, have like Caribbean songs. I never felt about that that would actually be nice.

Interviewer: Oh, really!

Denise Joseph: I would like that.

Interviewer: Okay, I’m…

Denise Joseph: Now, I don’t know if we should, I don’t know.

Interviewer: I’m going to tell you – were you here for the health fair?

Denise Joseph: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Well the music that they are playing and I just noticed it. It was all – it was like Caribbean hymn, like the songs that it was all Caribbean like Church music, but it was all kind of like Caribbean country folk songs from the – I said to myself, “Can you please play some gospel?” I’ve said that, because I got tired of hearing some song about “going way back home when the Jesus come,” I mean with all of that instrumentation and thing and I said, “oh man”… with the bad grammar and the – I
thought about that’s it, oh okay... I said, “Who is the DJ? Can you please play some gospel?” I found myself saying that...

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** But then when I look outside, the majority of the people...

**Denise Joseph:** Were Caribbean.

**Interviewer:** Were from the island. And I had to really think about that.

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And I’m thinking about also well maybe I think the Chancel Choir sings this song, “Psalm 150.” It has kind of like a calypso flair; that’s the only time I allowed them to really kind of think nationally. But I’m wondering maybe that’s something that...

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah maybe our Youth Choir or the Praise Team can sing something like that. I didn’t think about that ... I’m Haitian American, I think about Haitian, I would have thought about it, but because I’m westernized, I’m really westernized, I’m not thinking about why don’t we try out some Caribbean music.

**Interviewer:** I mean because I mean that Haitian music would fall into that category, too.

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah, exactly.

**Interviewer:** So I mean even – I was just wondering if that’s something that we should consider because...

**Denise Joseph:** Even if it’s just one song, you know.

**Interviewer:** Because...

**Denise Joseph:** That sounds good.

**Interviewer:** I know what. But since we have more people that are not purely American, we’ll need to – I’m wondering if we need to consider that the Church now is the – I don’t know the breakdown of nationalities here at the Church, because first of all the Adventist Church hasn’t for years really looked at people’s ethnic identity.

**Denise Joseph:** Right.

**Interviewer:** They will look at – well I would say they will look at it in respect, so okay this is a black Church, this is another – they – now if you go, look at Greater New York
in the white conference – I hate to keep pointing to black versus the white – that’s the reality.

**Denise Joseph:** Right.

**Interviewer:** If you go to their churches, their churches are more mixed, now it’s somewhat mixed, now to the point where they’re becoming more black than…

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah, are you talking about Greater?

**Interviewer:** Greater New York Conference…

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** You have a lot of Spanish, you have a lot of people from the Caribbean and the white demographic is next to gone now. You don’t see a lot of Caucasian in the Adventist Church in this area. Or period. So I’m wondering we got a – I’m wondering about what should we do about that.

**Denise Joseph:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Well Girl, I’ll be talking to you all day. I mean we got covered so much, we covered basically everything…

**Denise Joseph:** Really!

**Interviewer:** Yeah…

**Denise Joseph:** Just from stories?

**Interviewer:** It’s about an hour and a half. Sounds good, thank you very much Denise.

**Denise Joseph:** No problem.

**Interviewer:** All right. Wish you well…
Excerpts of Interview with
Eugene Washington
September 6, 2011

**Interviewer:** I’m sitting here with Brother Eugene Washington, member of the Ephesus SDA Church, former musician. I still think he’s a present musician, because he’s always ready, willing and able. I thank you for doing this for me. This will help me finish my project, also to give some insight into the musical culture of our church. Can you tell me what your age range is? If you don’t’ want to answer, you don’t have to answer: 45-54, 55-64, 65+…

**Eugene Washington:** I am 65+

**Interviewer:** Amen. What is your level of education? How far did you (go)?

**Eugene Washington:** After 4 years of college, I graduated and worked in the Accounting field for quite a bit, and I have a Bachelor in Business.

**Interviewer:** Did you take any music lessons or do you have a degree in music?

**Eugene Washington:** I didn’t get any degree in music, but what I did [was study] piano with a brother from the church name is Andrew ______. After coming out of the Service, I studied with Professor Dodson at Abyssinian. But then I stopped after I got married and I just sort of stopped playing regularly. So most of my musical training might have come as a result of me practicing on my own. So far as my musical career as choir director, I’ve had quite a bit of information from him [Dodson], what you should do with a choir, et cetera, and what not.

**Interviewer:** And you said his name was….

**Eugene Washington:** Professor Dodson. He was the Head of Music at Abyssinian at the time.

**Interviewer:** You said you also took music lessons from someone at the church…

**Eugene Washington:** A woman… she was a Methodist….at the Methodist church. Her name was Angelique Clemmons. In fact, she just died in ‘92.

**Interviewer:** Were you always a Seventh-day Adventist?

**Eugene Washington:** No, I came into the Adventist church at about 1967.

**Interviewer:** Oh, so you came in right [at the beginning range of] my study…
**Eugene Washington:** My reason for coming in there was that... I was a Methodist all my life, but when I came back out of the Service, I met this woman, Sister Lorie, who was a member of the church [*indiscernible*]. She took me like a brother. She was a member of the New Believers Choir. She began to tell me about the church [and] when they had their first concert at Hunter College I went to hear them. I was so impressed with them that I started going to Ephesus on Saturday to hear the NBC choir, the Collegiate Choir and they were run by Professor....

**Interviewer:** Wade. Professor Wade.

**Eugene Washington:** …Wade. I was so impressed I kept going every Sabbath, not thinking I was going to join these crazy people. That’s what I thought they were worshipping on a Saturday. But then it became so interesting. Sister Jones saw me and she invited me to her bible study; and the more I studied – I still didn’t join the church. I went from the Methodist church to the Pentecostal church ‘cause they were living a little better than the Methodists were doing. But after being there [at the Pentecostal church], the night that I was supposed to be baptized, this lady called me. She said, “Brother Washington, don’t get baptized. The Spirit is talking to me.” So I went to church the next Sabbath. I had determined that when the pastor finished preaching I was gonna join. Seems like as I was trying to get out the seat, the devil was holding me down. So the next Sabbath I made up my mind before he [the pastor] comes out on the pulpit, I was going to join the church; and that’s what I did. And I’ve been very happy since, you know? I think this is the way that the Lord had wanted me to go. It was His way. Actually today [*indiscernible*] and the one thing that I found... I knew all about Jesus Christ and his suffering; but I really didn’t understand the magnitude of that suffering until I joined our church. It made a difference with my life. I’m thankful I gave up the drinking and smoking and all – that was part of my life. But I don’t even miss it now, you know? I’m glad He brought me to this stage of my life. And I don’t mind telling you I am 82 years old.

**Interviewer:** You’re what? I really need my camera because this is important. That’s wonderful! And I think Everyl said she is going to be 84 or 85 this month. Can you tell me what is your Ethnicity is, are you African American do you have any Caribbean in your blood?

**Eugene Washington:** No, no. My parents are from Charleston, South Carolina. I was born and reared in New York City. I was born in the oldest part of Harlem Hospital...

**Interviewer:** So you’re a Harlemite...

**Eugene Washington:** …yeah I’m a Harlemite. But the nice thing I know about that – see going back to the roots, I say the Lord kept me here for a reason because the night that I was born, I understand that I was not supposed to live through the night. Now my mother was not an educated woman, but she was a God fearing woman. And I understand she prayed all night. They were surprised that I was living the next morning. I just felt that the Lord has had His hand on everything all through my life.
Interviewer: I’m finding this interesting that here it is you have southern roots; even though you’re from Harlem, your family is from the South. I’ve been noticing that when you look at the make up of the Ephesus Church, there’s so many [people from the] Caribbean now. And back in the beginning stages of the Ephesus Church, there was a good mixture. I need to find out what the make up was. I need to see if I can find out what the make up was: how many Americans…

Eugene Washington: You might say it was 55/35: Americans - 55, West Indians - 35. Then as time went on, the barrier began to shift. I think now I would say it’s at least 85 [%] West Indian, and 15% American. And then what makes it so interesting, you’re getting other people and other races now; and you’re also getting a lot of Caucasians.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Eugene Washington: Well, I think there’s one that’s ushering and [one who] also plays the piano sometimes… and it think there’s a few others. But there are also people from China, and we have quite a few Puerto Ricans and what not. So the church is getting kind of a mixture.

Interviewer: Changes. I’m gonna follow up on that. It’s funny I tried to ask about the ethnic break down of our congregation, actually within the Conference, and they don’t keep those kinds of records, from what I was told. They just started at least adding ethnicity as an optional category in the forms that the clerks have to fill out…

Eugene Washington: I think what might have also happened, those of us that were born here in the North and those that came from South to the North, I think our way of living is much different from theirs, you know? They came, sometimes, from the islands where they may not have had much, so they appreciate the blessings of God. I think people up here in the North, things weren’t that bad for them, and so we didn’t appreciate what God had to offer as much as the West Indians did. I think that’s why they come here they’ve become sort of adapted to [indiscernible] because they know that God has brought to them.

Interviewer: That’s interesting. I didn’t realize that. If you joined in 1967, you’ve probably been at Ephesus 50+ years.

Eugene Washington: About 55…

Interviewer: When you first came to Ephesus who was the musicians around the time besides Homer Wade?

Eugene Washington: It was Homer Wade, Everyl Gibson; I think Ruth Nixon was in the Youth Church at the time. There was a lady by the name of Sister Clarke…

Interviewer: Yolanda Clarke…
Eugene Washington: ...and also a lady by the name of... I forgot. She had the Senior Choir at the time, but she moved to New Jersey.271

Interviewer: So how many choirs were at the church in 1960?

Eugene Washington: I think they only had two choirs until Sister Jones organized her choir. They had Brother Wade’s choir, and also the Senior Choir. Now when Sister Jones organized her choir, her choir was supposed to sing every fifth Sabbath. That took care of that break in between until they became an official choir of the church. Once they became an official choir of the church, Brother Wade’s choir and the Senior Choir would sing twice a month. But every month [that had an] extra Sabbath on the calendar, Sister Jones would only fill one month. [Otherwise, she would sing on the] third Sabbath [one month and the fourth Sabbath on the next]...and it rotated like that. Also another person I forgot to mention was a young lady named Loñieta Thompson. At one time, she was the Youth Church organist. Loñieta was that good; and they brought her into the Main Church. And of course, the only reason it didn’t work there, I think, [was that] a lot of people thought she was too young to handle that, so she went back to Youth Church. But she was very good.

Interviewer: That’s very interesting because in speaking with Everyl that same concern came up in when she started playing for the church. She told me she started playing for services at age 16.

Eugene Washington: They told me she was very young when she started playing.

Interviewer: I think it’s very interesting that that same mentality was still going around.

Eugene Washington: I was amazed when I first heard Everyl, because see I wasn’t as good as she was. I used to just sit there sometimes and watch, especially like when we would do things from *The Messiah*. Everyl did not have a book. Everyl had it all up here (points to his forehead). When she played those things, even when I became was a better organist. She was very helpful. When I played *indiscernible*, she said, “Don’t do it like that; play this. Do this do that-this and that.” She was quite a help to me. One more person was Ruth Nixon, not so much in the Main Church, but I don’t know if you remember the Youth Choir?

Interviewer: I used to sing in the Youth Choir the late 70’s and 80’s.

Eugene Washington: Ok, So then you remember the type of music that they did. It was good quality music and then she had a version of the music----she would take anthems, she would sing Spirituals, light Gospel, but it was all done in good taste. I do give her credit for that. Too beautiful to see; could sing and play.

271 Marguerite Daly was the director of the Senior Choir between 1960 and 1970. She moved to New Jersey in 1972.
Interviewer: Now that we are talking about style of music, what do you consider the style of worship that we have at the church today? Do you think that we are still relatively conservative or how do you…

Eugene Washington: I think what’s happening now I think we’ve gone too far over to one side. The reason I say that, when I came to the church – I am not saying singers should not be paid, that’s not my point – but even if they’re paid, I would like to know that they are concerned about their connection with God. Sometimes, I hear that the choir we have now… what is it called…

Interviewer: The Ensemble?

Eugene Washington: Yeah, I think sometimes, they come to church – they are good singers, very professional – but sometimes I don’t feel it’s coming from here [the heart]. And that is the thing that concerns me… [indiscernible]. I believe that if God gives you talent, you should be paid for it; but then at the same time, it has to come from within. And then even with their choir not so much, there’s that Youth Choir that comes in there. I am totally against that music. The reason being, sometimes there’s nothing but emotions. I have nothing against emotional singing, but at the same time, I don’t like no choir to get up and start swinging and all this kind of stuff before they start it up. It just sort of takes away from it. And I feel a certain amount of satanic [aura] in that kind of music; I can’t get into it. [indiscernible] Let somebody get up there and sing a good hymn. A good old-fashioned hymn does wonders for the service, does something for the people, and you as a singer. It does something for as a singer. And so I think the church needs to get back to some of that. I don’t feel like we are worshiping like we used to…we clapped in church sometimes but it wasn’t all this. Years ago we used to say, “Amen! Hallelujah!” It’s almost like I am being entertained, and that should not be. So that’s why I am saying worship and music. I like the old way of worshipping.

Interviewer: Do you feel this new style of worship or should I say the new music – the contemporary gospel, the praise and worship music, and all of those things – do you think it is adding more to who we are as African American, or do you think that it’s taking away – I guess what I am trying to figure out is… it seems as if you’re not against good, quality music…

Eugene Washington: Right…

Interviewer: …but it seems as if certain elements, or I should say, musical characteristics, like certain instrumentation, and the clapping that most people would say are totally characteristics of ethnic music, music from an African point of view…

Eugene Washington: I do feel we need to have some of this music because it is part of our heritage, but the thing about it is that it needs to be done in good taste. Now, you think all this the urban music, and listening to the contemporary… good quality music, and if you felt that you could to sway with it, you could sway with it. But at the same time these folk are coming with a band. My thing now is, sometimes when the Youth
Choir gets up, [saying], “Everybody, praise the Lord!” [and] starts swinging, I can’t take that. I feel this much, if I am sitting there and the Spirit hits me, I’m gonna say, “Hallelujah!” But don’t start off with this sort of thing. It becomes so… I don’t know the word to use… it’s not real.

Interviewer: Contrived? Let me not put words in your mouth….

Eugene Washington: Maybe I’m against so much stuff. We got the drums now; we got the people [indiscernible] and what not. I think sometimes it’s taking away from some of the singing. I think at that age you should enjoy what you are singing about. They’re so busy listening to this band play this stuff, this man play the drums and what not. Some of them jumping up and what not, I am no longer able to feel the power of that song. And I am not against all of it, but God told me everything’s got to be done in good taste.

Interviewer: So in the past when you first came to the Ephesus SDA church, what was the type of music that was used? Was it mainly hymns and …

Eugene Washington: Well, I just want to tell you this much. When I first came to the church, some of those sisters told me, “We don’t have that kind of music in this church.” Because I sort of brought the Gospel to this church. Coming from a first day church, I came from a shouting church. So what I would do, when we would sing our hymns I would throw a little Gospel into it. Several people came to me after and said, “We don’t play that kind of music here.” And I told them, “Look I do it like the Hallelujah [indiscernible].” Now little by little, it’s been accepted into the church. And now if you don’t put any gravy it now, you’re just not playing. So it’s more accepted now.

Interviewer: Oh, so you are one of the entities that….

Eugene Washington: I started it…

Interviewer: I can understand that. So, in the beginning it wasn’t readily accepted. Do you have any ideas as to why it wasn’t so readily accepted?

Eugene Washington: I think that, I didn’t know too much about Adventism before I was in. I think when I came to the church, whenever the choir would walk in it was [indiscernible] … Even when it got into the choir, the minister – even the sermon was so much different – music before the sermon was so much different, and it seemed like it pulled you right into the presence of God. As diverse as what they’re doing today, I think the choir is a good choir, but sometimes when they bring them into the service, I think the feeling is sometimes it’s far above my head sometimes. Instead of bringing me to worship, it’s bringing me into something that’s sounds good. I want to be brought into worship.

Interviewer: When you say it’s “above my head,” do you mean intellectually?
**Eugene Washington:** When I come to church, I come to worship. And sometimes the music seems like—singing like it’s the opera house. I’d rather hear a song that maybe doesn’t sing as well. That’s what I could appreciate Sister Jones choir. Her choir was not what you call a professional choir, but in every instance no matter what they sang, she made sure it was related to the Bible. When they sung on Sabbath morning, it was sung as if they were singing to the Lord, not singing to the people for appreciation—they’re singing to service God. That’s the only thing that I find. I love the choir; I love to hear them sing. But sometimes they don’t reach me. I don’t know if other people feel that way, but that’s just me.

**Interviewer:** That’s interesting. So the choir that Sister Jones…New Believer’s Chorus… I remember them singing anthems, I remember them singing arrangements of Spirituals. But then they used to sing these songs that were not really in the hymnal, at least not in the SDA hymnals (the current ones at that time). There were these songs they had these messages that were really cool. Do you know what the book was?

**Eugene Washington:** I don’t know if it was a book that she recently sung…but you know being where she’s from, she’s from the South…I think she remembered some of these songs and so we would sing through them. Her daughter would get some things—and we would sort of rearrange some songs for the choir, but they were not in the books, but it was something that she just remembered.

**Interviewer:** I am also wondering if she ever used the *Christ in Song.* I know that was like a real old early Adventist…

**Eugene Washington:** Yeah, she used it. There was quite a few songs she would sing from there. Even when she would sing a hymn, she wouldn’t necessarily sing it like it was written. She would sing Gospel; she would take that song and take apart. One of the songs that I used to think of “Master the Tempest is Raging.” When she get to the chorus, She would break it up. It would almost make you feel like the storm was brewing and then the next part would take you to like the spirit just come down upon you. She had a way with the songs.

**Interviewer:** Sounds like she put in some urban flavor. So I guess there was some kind of African flavor, something that had some of the characteristics of Black culture.

**Eugene Washington:** Even in her singing, she had a certain amount of culture that would reflect elements of that period. There were times now that she also kind take some of the songs and “whiten” it up. One songs I remember it was called, “You Been So Good to Me.” The man that was singing it, he couldn’t sing it because he felt he couldn’t sing it in that [whitened] style. So we were singing it one Sabbath morning. I said to him, “Don’t watch her, stay with me and I’ll give you the beat.” And he sang it with the beat that I gave him…she had to fall right back into…When he got through the thing, they was saying, “Amen” and what not. I told her, I said, “Sister Jones, you’re a good director and you’re a good musician, but some songs you can’t whiten up; some songs you have to leave it alone.” She finally acknowledged that…
Interviewer: That’s interesting she tried to ‘whiten it up’…”

Eugene Washington: Yes, she did. There’s certain things she tried to ‘whiten up’ sometimes.

Interviewer: So when you use the term ‘whiten up’ are you referring to say it had more Eurocentric…

Eugene Washington: Yeah, somewhat…

Interviewer: …more characteristic of the SDA denomination.

Eugene Washington: Well see back in those days that’s what it was like, you know. Like I said, I didn’t know anything about Adventism. When I came in there, as opposed to the Methodist church that I belonged to, I enjoyed the singing, you know.

Interviewer: What was so different about the singing that drew you in?

Eugene Washington: Well, like I said, it was different for each one, mostly. After hearing Sister Jones choir do a concert, I came in. Reverend Wade’s choir was a professional choir in itself, and yet it was a God-spirited choir. You could almost see the presence of God when that choir would come in. And even his direction; his direction was such that it was also in his arms, all in his face when he directed, and you could feel it. Now in the Methodist church like I said, we weren’t there, but we were very emotional in the Methodist church. I came from a shouting Methodist church. If you even sang a hymn, somebody might get up, they shouted all in their seats, all that kind of stuff… that’s the way the Methodist were. So, when I came to Ephesus, although it was good singing, I so missed the [indiscernible] … Methodist way. As time went on, the church [Ephesus] was getting into it…I think by the 70s, 80s…the church was getting hot (to use that word) and they was shouting and getting in to it. They didn’t do before.

Interviewer: They were shouting in the 70s…

Eugene Washington: Yeah around the 70s and 80s…

Interviewer: Do you think the Black Power Revolution or the Civil Rights Movement had anything to do with it the acceptance of…

Eugene Washington: …I don’t think so. I don’t think the church was really into that, you know? I don’t think that had anything to do with it. I think also that maybe some of the ministers that were coming in were maybe a little younger, you know, and so they brought certain situations with them. And just like in that Youth Church, the pastor… what’s the brother that preached… he’s a doctor now… you know who I’m talking about. He’s a young doctor now up in Mt. Sinai…

Interviewer: Oh, Leacroft Green…
Eugene Washington: …right. Now when he first came, he used to sing everywhere; but he brought his own type of music. After him, another minister… started bringing his form of Gospel. You know the last two ministers we had, they are definitely into Gospel, but they are not into anything. I know at one time I offered my help, but they didn’t want my help because they think that I’m not into what they are doing. So I think it sort of starts back in the in the 70’s on up to where we are now. Because, it’s challenging, I’ll put it that, way and I’m this way, what may not work for me, may work for you. I think it’s the only thing about that. I don’t condemn it; I don’t know how you feel about certain things, so if this is something that brings you closer to God then I think it’s ok.

Interviewer: There was a time, I remember in the 90’s, when there seemed to be a total rebellion against anthems and music that had a more classical theme to them. When you look at these sociological papers they’re all trying to look at things from a social standpoint: “People are trying to relate more to themselves, they’re getting away they don’t want to listen to the anthems they don’t want hear that or to sing that because it’s not of their culture.” Do you think that is part of the reason why…

Eugene Washington: I don’t think that happens too much in the main church. ’Cause you see, in the Main Church, most of the people are older. The young people are coming up with a different era and they hear all these songs, they hear all these songs that they’re listening to on TV, on the radio. They’re not into the music we play with the Service. So, it’s not something that’s a turn off to them, but it’s just something they’re not used to. So, in order to keep them we have to use some of their music also, we just can’t force these anthems down their throats. It’s acceptable to certain people…like I said, I would never find myself in the Youth Church. And yet I know a lot of older people that do go to Youth Church.

Interviewer: I haven’t spent as much time in the Youth Church like I used to, and I think it’s because of my responsibilities within the Senior Church. But I keep telling my self I’m going back there. I did go a couple of Sabbaths and I do sit and look at it and all. It’s nothing like when I was back there. In talking about the music, I find that people have said things like, “I need something that is going to relate to me and my ethnicity” or “this music doesn’t relate to me or my culture.” When you look at the music of the denomination, do you think the music shows an acceptance of other ethnicities?

Eugene Washington: Yeah, I do and yet I don’t. And the reason I say that, so far as the Youth Church is concerned, I think there is only one type and that type has to come from a Black source. Now the one thing I didn’t like about the Youth Church – you know they got that big organ back there, and nobody has played it since I left. I tried to get to Omar to play it; he said he doesn’t like it. What they wanted to do was sell that organ and get a Hammond organ. I said, “Omar, as long as I’m alive you’ll never do it. I may not play it, but that organ should stay back there. What are you gonna do when you have someone
that studies the organ?” I said, “If you folks want to get a Hammond organ, take that piano from other side\textsuperscript{272} and put a Hammond on that side. That’s it. [indiscernible]

\textbf{Interviewer:} Sounds like they want to be so much into the ethnic culture, their being Black, that they’re not looking at the fact that they’re …

\textbf{Eugene Washington:} I think Gospel music should not necessarily be Black. There’s a program that I listen to on Saturday night at 7 o’clock, it’s called, [indiscernible]. These are the most devout people; they’re into it, believe me. I thoroughly enjoy it. But it has nothing to do with being Black or White; it’s just Gospel. I think that’s where we lose it sometimes. We become a race and have to be a race of Black people. Music should not be that way. If I’m a white person, I feel like I want to sing that song, I should be able to sing it because it comes from here [the heart], not because I’m a Black or White person. See at least with the anthem, the anthem is a traditional thing. Whites, Blacks – we all can sing it. But there is something about the Black Gospel. I don’t know if you have ever listen to this Gospel that’s on TV. We have something now called \textit{Sunday Best} – did you see it? One of the judges told [one of the finalist], “I like you because you not trying to be Black; you’re just using the sound of your voice.” And that’s what it’s all about.

\textbf{Interviewer:} I’ve been doing some reading on the music guidelines of the church. In the 70’s whatever guidelines they had was so…

\textbf{Eugene Washington:} It was rigid…

\textbf{Interviewer:} …it was extremely rigid! It appeared as if it were totally against music any kind of ethnicity. And even now, at the General Conference Session last year, the new president said, “We’re going back to the way things used to be, where music was good quality music.” There’s some Gospel music that is very appropriate and meaningful. Just because there is a bass and a drum and a keyboard in the background doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be done.

\textbf{Eugene Washington:} I even go back to the choir last week when they sang the last song “Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land.”\textsuperscript{273} I thought they did a good job…and it’s something that you could get into, and it’s Gospel; but did it in good taste and that something you can get into.

\textbf{Interviewer:} That’s a strongly written piece by Glenn Burleigh\textsuperscript{274}…

\textbf{Eugene Washington:} They did such a great job with it. And the young man that did the solo part, he did a great.

\textsuperscript{272} There are two grand pianos in the Youth Church at the moment. The one farthest away from the organ is used most often. Washington is suggesting the removal of one of the grand pianos in order to have space for the Hammond organ.

\textsuperscript{273} “Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land” is a gospel arrangement based on the spiritual “My God is a Rock.” This particular arrangement is by Glenn Burleigh (1949 – 2007).

\textsuperscript{274} Glenn Burleigh was an African-American composer.
Interviewer: So it sounds as if, especially with our youth, there is good gospel or good musical choices – you can have anthems that are not strongly (well) written either – there are good choices and there are not good so choices. Based on your observation, do you feel that the youth are making good choices for music for worship?

Eugene Washington: I don’t think so. The reason being, I guess I always go back to Youth Choir when Ruth was here. And she gave the audience a little of everything, the anthems the Spiritual and the Gospel and I feel that that choir she had, they could go to any church – White church, Korean church whatever you want – and sing because it was something everybody could hear. This Youth Choir that we have now, the only place they could go to is the Black church. I don’t feel that they went to a White church the white would…. I don’t think that they make good choices. I think that music should be a good foundation. I feel that everybody should have to study classically. You see a lot of these Jazz fellas around here they have a good foundation to begin with they studied classic and what not even thought they ran into something else, and I don’t think the young people are in it enough of a good start to get their due. And I’m not able but I wish somebody who’s a little younger would come in and say, “Let’s try some of this. We need to mix it up a little; we’ll do some anthems and do some spirituals.” That’s the way, I think, that’s a road that we should go down.

Interviewer: That’s funny because that’s what happens at other Black churches, at least the other two I am affiliated with, one by marriage – Convent – and Abyssinian. I look at the versatility of the musicians; and they sing everything…

Eugene Washington: The Baptist church that I play for when I first went there, the choirs were not really doing multiple numbers. They were not singing anthems; they were not singing the classical music. So I told them, “Let me take over the choir.” When I first went there, some of the congregation didn’t like that I was bringing these types of pieces, but eventually they accepted it. The choir there didn’t like the anthem; then they got to the point where they loved the anthem and the spiritual. The choir even did some shouting Gospel music. After two or three years we did the Seven Last Words. They liked it. The next year I did the Christmas version of the Messiah; they loved it. Now, since I left (I went there a couple of time), they don’t even use the organ anymore; they use the keyboard. They put the organ in storage. They asked me one day, “Why don’t you come and play again?” “I don’t play on that thing,” I said. I’m sorry, a lot of churches have changed; they have gone to one extreme.

Interviewer: While you been at Ephesus, what church positions did you hold?

Eugene Washington: Oh yes, When I first came of course you know, after about a year or so, I became the assistant to Lonieta\textsuperscript{275}; she was the organist at the time. I became her assistant. Also I became the Treasurer for the NBC Choir at that time. So, those were two positions I held. And then after a while I became the Associate Organist in the main church. So most times when Sister Jones’ choir didn’t sing, I would fill in there

\textsuperscript{275} Lonieta Thompson was the organist in the Youth Church during the 1960s.
sometimes. So I played the Prelude and also the Offertory, and I played for Sabbath School. So, those were the only positions I held.

**Interviewer:** So when you came in you were indoctrinated in the Music Department.

**Eugene Washington:** Got right into it cause somebody realized that I was in the music field. And I guess that Everyl, Brother Wade, and Ruth were the only musicians that they had [indiscernible]

**Interviewer:** Do you remember who served as Minister of Music when you first came into the church?

**Eugene Washington:** I think Professor Wade was in charge of the music department back in those days. And then when he went over to St. Andrew’s to do the same thing. He was in charge of music for years and years….

**Interviewer:** So he was like the minister of music?

**Eugene Washington:** Right, We didn’t call him Minister of Music because Minister of Music implies that you have a degree and he did not have a degree, but he was good at it; he kept the choirs on schedule. I don’t know if he got sick or what, but then Everyl took over for a while. When Everyl left for a while, we didn’t have a musician so Darlene Simmons became the Coordinator. Even though she knew nothing about music, she was able to schedule the choirs, etc. When she left, Joe Merriweather took over and he did it for about 25 years, and now this young man we got now…he started.

**Interviewer:** Seems like we started with…

**Eugene Washington:** Homer Wade…

**Interviewer:** ...musicians. He may not have had a formal degree, but he had some training. And Darlene may not have been, but she at least she sang a little something. Seems like we moved from musician in the position to a non-musician running our musical entity…

**Eugene Washington:** But it’s not only that. It’s a social position now. See, I’m like you, I feel that even if you have to pay somebody, have a person who’s a musician…

**Interviewer:** You can at least play the piano, something….

**Eugene Washington:** So, this man doesn’t play nothing. He sings well, you know… I tell you it’s just one of those things.

**Interviewer:** What do you know about the structure of the music committee today?
**Eugene Washington:** I don’t know anything about it and the reason being, when _____ took over, I cut my service, said I couldn’t take it over anymore. But I am willing to do what I can now. Before he took over, Sister Brown and I did the piano - she played this week, and I think I played the next. _______ came and said he didn’t want us. So I said “No problem.” One Sabbath I did play, but he sort of embarrassed me. He called me that week and asked me if I would play that Saturday. I said, “No problem.” When I got there just before the service started, the guy, he came and tapped me on the shoulder and said, “I’m playing the piano.” So I got up and I told _____, “I don’t appreciate this. I told you I would help, but you don’t embarrass me like that.” I said, “I’m already playing and this man taps me on the shoulder.” And several people came to me, “What happened up there this morning?”

**Interviewer:** It seems as if you have all this experience you could serve in an advisory capacity on the committee…

**Eugene Washington:** I wouldn’t want to do it because I find that _____ is self-centered. I don’t like to put it that way and everything must go his way. And I don’t think he’s open to suggestions, so that’s why I just stay out of it, you know…

**Interviewer:** It’s very interesting to see how the change…

**Eugene Washington:** Right, The one thing I must say, I think there needs to be some kind of structure. So far as when choirs sing. I am sure you have realized that we have not had a choir up there in the choir loft.

**Interviewer:** Yes, I do. I am very aware of that…

**Eugene Washington:** A big church like this should not be that way….

**Interviewer:** I think it hasn’t been that way for years; I think this just started in the past five to seven years or so…

**Eugene Washington:** I don’t thing so. Somehow or other in the past 5-7 years, we had choirs. But in the last two years or so, we come in sometimes and there’s no choir up there. This should never be. Even if you have a choir up in there and they don’t sing everything at least you got a choir up there.

**Interviewer:** I was talking to Sister Gibson and she remembers that there was only one choir that used to serve every weekend and sang Sabbath and also on Sunday evening service. I would say this is before sister Jones choir came out.

**Eugene Washington:** Even when I came in the church, that’s what they used to call is—Tide. The choir sang that Sabbath, you also sang Sunday night. Most churches did not have Sunday night service because it’s dark outside.
Interviewer: We should go back to that, that’s how my mom came to the message from Sunday night service. So I think that we should go back to that, it’s a lot of work. Then too, the pastors don’t live in the neighborhood.

Eugene Washington: That’s another thing too. Not only that, the bus and the transportation and what not, and to try to come back for Sunday night. The church used to be crowded on Sunday night. And the crime in the street was down; a lot of people are afraid to travel at night. I don’t go to prayer meeting on Wednesday evenings not so much because of the walking, but I don’t trust people out there at nighttime. So when it gets dark, I like to go home. So that’s another topic.

Interviewer: Do you feel any of the music at the church relates to you on any level?

Eugene Washington: Yes, I believe and even when your choir sings.

Interviewer: The Chancel Choir…

Eugene Washington: I believe it relates more to me because these are not professional people – I believe you have some help up there. More or less, they are singing something that’s in their range. At the same time, singing something in their range and don’t sing out the message to it. Now, there are some like I say with the Ensemble, I know they are professional people and sometimes, I’ve heard people say, that they can’t comprehend what they saying, the voices are so strong and so refined sometimes when they make the notes, not getting the words. Sometimes, you hear the notes and not the diction.

Interviewer: Those are comments those are issues with any choir. That is the same thing the Director at Abyssinian works on. When you have a large group, and you have trained voices, everybody’s vibrato isn’t on the same. As a singer I keep hearing, ‘Minimize the vibrato.’ So for example, the word ‘our’ you have to go ah-were. You have to put it in there, if not you lose it. And then you lose the message…

Eugene Washington: …You lose it otherwise, the congregation losses it. And see some of the songs they sing are very good…once you lose it then you haven’t helped with the worship…I don’t know I think…what we need to do is rebuild the whole music structure…

Interviewer: Brother Washington, were you at the 1995 special board meeting for the Music Department?

Interviewer: Certain musicians were invited, choir members were also invited. Pastor Smith, it was right after Pastor Jones left.

Eugene Washington: Ok, I know before Pastor Smith came, Pastor Jones came and for a while we didn’t have no choir. Pastor Jones heard about this choir in Philadelphia, they had a beautiful choir up there, all boys choir. Ebenezer choir, he felt that we didn’t have a ---and what he did what was wrong, he disbanded all the choirs. —that’s-where the
problem came in right before Smith came. Pastor Jones—and that's why we had a hard
time getting those choirs back together.

Interviewer: You sure it was Pastor Jones, but what about when Pastor Cox came?
Pastor Humphrey left in ‘78 and then Pastor Cox…

Eugene Washington: I don’t know if he dismissed the choir. The only thing I know that
he did when his wife started organizing choirs and she didn’t come before the board,
because we had a small board at the time. And she told them, “I don’t have to, my
husband is the board.” So, that caused a lot of confusion right there, you know? I don’t
think he dismissed the choir. The only thing that I know he did one year when they had
elections for board members, he did not elect any musicians that year for the first month.
That month, I was-still --at the time---he sent word to somebody tell Brother Washington
I need him in the choir…tell him to come fast and ---he sent word back I don’t care
who’s music is selected ---tell him to come himself….I said, go back and tell Pastor ---“I
am not coming to the choir.” and for a whole month we had no music…he had to go back
and forth----and no body would play….he even went to Everyl and said I need you and
she said you didn’t appoint me----he knew not to get us --after that but that happened for a
whole month. But then when Pastor Jones came---

Interviewer: That’s funny. I kind of found out some information --very interesting of that
meeting—I also found the transcript--I remember reading the notes—I told them in 97 the
music department, you can break it down and start from scratch. You need to hire a
Minister of Music that can read, who can build, for a church of that size, has to there is no
logical explanation as to why we do not have a full fledged program.

Eugene Washington: Going way back I think that the 80’s, Can’t remember-there was a
girl by the name of Ann brown…she was a musician, she played the flute, she had an
orchestra….anyway she became part of the -----crowd and her name came up-----the
only reason-why they wouldn’t do it----Sylvia said why should she come in here-and we
been here all this time and one of us should get the job--I said Sylvia she has a degree---
she has the know how --you might be good at what you doing….but she also-she had her
degree in Music the thing is this: I don’t care if she just come in, she has that ability-------
but she definitely had the degree.

Interviewer: Then is it safe to say that the department has never been run by someone
who has the credentials?

Eugene Washington: Nobody had the credentials--the person that came nearest that was
Everyl.- she had the bachelors and the Masters she had the ==in Music----she was the
one that came nearest….now Ruth had a degree, she didn’t have a degree in music—hers
is in in Education—it’s not for music.

Interviewer: I think the organist has a degree; our current organist is degreed. He has a
Masters… I believe he is more than willing to help
Eugene Washington: I think what happened there, I don’t know if the church has the money, I think he is too expensive, and the church really doesn’t have the money in order to pay for this right now—I wrote the board about that—they should have somebody—in that position because what if someone get sick and then can’t play. Ron can’t go to the piano and play it. But we could start the service….

Interviewer: I could go but I be hitting a lot of wrong notes……I wouldn’t play the foot pedals….

Eugene Washington: Can you play as bad as the man====?

Interviewer: When I practice, it’s not as bad because for some reason, I am more relaxed I am more prepared…I remember I had to cover Lynda [Elliott]276 one Sunday at COTM.277 I played my little thing on the organ…It wasn’t in the right key. The congregation was looking like, huh? I played it in the key I could play. I couldn’t play it in Ab, I played it in C.

Eugene Washington: A woman came to the church at Ephesus one Sabbath said she was singing ‘His Eye is on the Sparrow’, she said I am singing it in E now not Eb. I said, ‘No, problem.”

Eugene Washington: I played it in Bb, See you made the right choice, -that’s what I sing it in E---she never knew the difference.

Interviewer: When you are away from church, do you listen to…..what kind of music do you listen to?

Eugene Washington: Sometimes on Sundays there are certain churches I will go, I love to listen. even on Saturday night——there is a minister at —Reverend Stanley—I love to hear his classical and they play a lot of different types of music ----sometimes he has some good music on there and I love to hear them there are other times too, I listen to classical ……I had some opera, some handle some Gospel—whatever my mood take me into —I’m into all types of music, the only thing now with Gospel-I had a friend of mine that had --I had a friend and they had a group-about 10-12 they were very good in the Gospel===of them they found that they could make more money—they left the Gospel community so they left the Gospel group—I said Charles, I couldn’t do that—he said money===it doesn’t matter—I thought you were a business man—of it is the same thing if you singing for God or singing for the devil. —now that’s what the man told me. And he’s made more money, you know?

Interviewer: That’s interesting….I asked Everyl this hypothetical question…Suppose you have a Jazz Musician, studying the bible and came to the truth of the Sabbath and

276Lynda Elliott (b. 1948) is an African-American operatic soprano. She is a member of Ephesus Church
277Church of the Master
joined the church and wanted to be involved in Music but his style, his whole flavor is Jazz. do you feel that that person should be able to play for worship?

**Eugene Washington:** Well, let me put it this way, If I feel that he is a Christian, just because he’s a Jazz man doesn’t mean he’s not, the only thing I just say when he comes in, you got to modify your playing to a certain degree, because he is a Jazz musician, I would not consider him--if he could fulfill the duties, -and you don’t know whether he’s a Christian or not, because I could say I am a Christian and not necessarily be one. So it’s not up to me personally, to question his Christianity-let him do and let the Lord use him the Lord will find a way.

**Interviewer:** We came on the subject of Joyce Bryant, when she came to the church, Pastor Hudson told she had to let all of that go. She couldn’t sing Jazz anymore, so they sang hymns and spirituals and sacred art songs…if that is the flavor of that person’s flavor…it felt like she was being asked to totally deny her identity,

**Eugene Washington:** I know, And that’s what they did to that poor woman, when she first came to the into the message. I went to her concert on 126th Street and Madison Ave…and she sang well—you know she started entertaining and what not. They didn’t give this woman a chance to grow. if I come from the world, I need to grow, I can’t come in there and be like you and you been there whole time.

**Interviewer:** I keep going back to identity ethnic identity, I’m wondering if the church body the general conference the denomination—ask of people of different back rounds—so all of this when you look in the hymnals—I see very little spirituals, I have maybe seen one or two songs in another language, maybe Spanish, or maybe Hebrew, because it’s like a Hebrew song, like a Shalom for Shalom. It seems to me, people of African descent, that become SDA the music and the culture, we don’t readily accept our own…

**Eugene Washington:** We’ve got to remember, say for instance, your solo and Ida solo. you may sing this one way because you may feel that way. I may sing it ---I know ---- Black folks---you may not feel that way I may go all out….yours could be acceptable mine could be acceptable-why should I change my way of singing that song just because the Adventist people say it shouldn’t be sung that way, I believe that I should have the ability to let my spirit flow within me and you should have the ability to let it flow in you…

**Interviewer:** I guess that is something that bothers me---here we are with a congregation of African descent people and it’s like we are not dealing with the elements of our own culture it’s as if we were asked not to be who we are.

**Eugene Washington:** I don’t know if you know Sister Lynch, she was one of the people that came up to me and said we don’t have that kind of music here. I don’t know where you come from, but we don’t have that kind of music here.” I thought she was kidding,

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278 Joyce Bryant (b. 1928) was a popular jazz singer in the 1950s. She returned to the SDA church in 1955.
but she wasn’t kidding but you know I got to know her after a while, ----I said sister lynch do me a favor----I’m gonna play the organ from the American South. And we became friends after that, but it’s just the idea she told me we don’t have that kind of music.

**Interviewer:** I always wondered if people understood where certain cultural things came from—for example I happened to ask one of my singer friends—we were in Spain taking an trip on the train and I asked him --I come from a relatively conservative Christian back round—but for the life of me-I didn’t understand why people would stand up if somebody was singing or if the preacher started talking ---he said that it’s just a sign to say we are in agreeance, I agree with what you are saying. I didn’t know that. I think sometimes when we see people stand, we think that they want to be seen, or they just want to start dancing and --it never occurred to me that --they are listening they are comprehending ----they are in I am in agreeance.

**Eugene Washington:** But you know who I talked with, Rev. Adula, he’s from Africa. I just wanted to get his feeling on something. He said, “You know in Africa they are very spiritual people—and it’s a lot different here in America.” When they come here they are expected to come down to our way of doing things-----they are so used to having their drums and singing circles, that ‘s part of their culture

**Interviewer:** Well, that’s what happened with Slavery, we were stripped of that. Our ancestors were stripped of their cultural identity. So now here we are generations later, a people that are somewhat kind of lost. – about who we are. So anytime we hear a rhythm that is kind of natural, you want to clap or something. Oh, no! We don’t do that.

**Eugene Washington:** I’m gonna say that I would feel a little=I didn’t do too much of it, what’s this place up in Louisiana, up where they have these different spirits that they talk about? And they feel sometimes part of the music is like voodoo. I done some research on it, I don’t know if that’s true, they claim that they play the drum they calling up the spirit or something like that.

**Interviewer:** In various cultures, that’s what it is. Who’s to say? Africa is a large continent, and there are so many tribes and cultures within that one continent. And of course, there are studies that show that Africa was more Christian than people believe. so who’s to say…

**Eugene Washington:** You know the one thing too that this why they----between Africa and culture, in music there are a lot of people who may not live the lives that we do. A young man joined church about two, three years ago. But he walked up there and he had certain ways about him, that’s his way. When he walked up, someone sitting in back of me “You know we got a couple of them in the church. ….. Now the nice thing is this, you know the man that died that used to play the piano?

**Interviewer:** Harrison.
Eugene Washington: Harrison. One of the sisters said, “You know I heard Harrison died of AIDS, and you know he can’t make it into Heaven.” I said, “What? Why not?” She said, “Well, you know he died from AIDS?” I said, “What’s that got to do with it? I said, “You don’t know his relationship with God.” She says, “Yeah, but you don’t know those kind of people…” I said, “What are you thinking about, those kind of people?” she kept going on. Even Pastor Blue preached about it one Sabbath, about AIDS. One of the sisters told me, said, “I don’t feel sorry for them.” I said, “Why not?” (she said), “Well, they knew what they were getting into.”

Interviewer: A lot of people don’t get AIDS deliberately like that, they don’t live that kind of lifestyle.

Eugene Washington: But that’s what I’m saying. But even if they do, you don’t know what God want, what relationship they had or not. She made it quite plain that she didn’t feel sorry for them.

Interviewer: It seems to me that they are transferring things that other cultures have said about Blacks on to us. That’s sad. That thing about identity disturbs me. I think when I look at the Youth Church and I see the music that’s --- I’m wondering if they are trying to relate to their culture, their cultural identity. What are they doing?

Eugene Washington: If they trying to relate to the culture, that’s ok with me, but I just don’t want them to get out there and be emotionally lifted and having nothing behind it. I remember like I told you before that choir --- we didn’t get a chance to sing.

Interviewer: You didn’t get a chance to sing?

Eugene Washington: No, ’cause he walked out, was getting tired of ---. A choir had gotten up there before we did, and the --- was so glad to be there. -----and then she said, Whoa whoa!” (large gestures to the choir she was directing). They was jumping up over there. They were jumping over there. My choir ---. Mr. Jones said, “What they shouting about?” “I don’t know.” ------“Can we leave, Mr. Washington?” I done come all this way, and even though I played for Shepherd Baptist, they would not shout on ------. If they shout, they was gonna shout on ------. We had to leave, we felt like fools. So, this is what I am saying sometimes, make sure it’s not just emotion, it’s supposed to be more than that. You know, not even getting off the subject, I was talking with a girl she belonged to Abyssinia and we were talking about the last days. You got to be careful of the mark of the beast. “The mark of the beast, what is that?” I said, “Don’t you know the ------, they all got the mark of the beast. You go to church every Sunday and shouting and what not, and no one ----. “People talk about it.” I said, “Well, don’t let them talk about it. It’s in the Bible. That’s the one thing about my church, I’m not bragging on my church, our church has a Bible Study. You don’t just come in there and open up your Bible, you learn something. Some people go to church every Sunday and they don’t learn a thing. - ------

Interviewer: You talk about a lot of social issues and social activism.
Eugene Washington: That’s what it is. It means something people going to Abyssinian. You want the elite, you go to Abyssinian.

Interviewer: That High Church and the music. What I appreciate about Jim Davis, he gives you a balance of everything. We’re singing some kind of anthem every Sunday. anthem, Spiritual and a Gospel. We always sing a Gospel during the Offering, ‘cause that’s when people start jumping up. And that’s another thing, I am not a swayer, I am not a clapper, and the Sanctuary Choir is not necessarily that kind of choir, either. ‘Cause most of the people, the church members, are older and they come from an era where you don’t do that. They have Gospel Choirs, they have Sanctuary Choir. It’s kind of interesting to see during the Offering when we have to sway and clap and I look at the older people. They are resistant to clapping, and I’m resistant myself only because I think a lot of mine comes from my upbringing, my back round.

Eugene Washington: You remember when Everyl’s father used to do the Offertory?

Interviewer: Yes.

Eugene Washington: Remember how he used to talk and the choir would sing something and he would talk again? And those are the sort of things that I liked when I came to join the church. I used to like to watch him quote the Scriptures and the choir would be behind him.

Interviewer: I was thinking I would take my choir back to that too. I think sometimes people need a reminder of why we’re here. The Litany is ok, but when you don’t…..

Eugene Washington: I would love to do a play about old times and what not…and show them how we used to worship. How the Minister come in and somebody do a ----. We even had somebody one night… and it was different from what we do now, the songs we used to sing.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was just thinking about this, that song, ‘Volunteer’. I didn’t realize it was written, it’s an Adventist song, that was written for the NB Department, I don’t know. I remember this song. But they don’t sing it. But look at the mentality of the people. No one wants to volunteer for anything.

Eugene Washington: Back in those days, now, I don’t know if you were into AYS, ----- back in those days, you couldn’t even get into Youth Church, it would be too crowded with young and old people that worshipped together.

Interviewer: It’s a different time and I think everyone is trying to figure out what do we do? How do you reach the youth? How do we reach the young people?

Eugene Washington: Not to cut you off, one thing we don’t do anymore, every year, around late February, and also like this weekend, they would take young people to other churches—and the people from the other churches would--and that was something the
young people would look forward twice a year, and the older people would look for also. But we don’t do anymore, you know? We don’t communicate with other churches.

**Interviewer:** Two years ago, the Chancel Choir went out and sang at City Tabernacle for uh….It wasn’t a Choir Day, I went there two weeks before and the Pastor asked me if I would come back. And I said, “I think I can bring my choir.” Choir said, “Sure, let’s go.” They were out in full effect and happy.

**Eugene Washington:** I know. It’s something we don’t do anymore. All the good things, fellowshipping. One thing we didn’t talk about, my charge. We didn’t talk about my fee.
Excerpt of Interview with
Joseph Merriweather
September 26, 2011

Interviewer: Today is September 26, 2011 I am sitting here with Joseph Merriweather a member of the Ephesus Seventh Day Adventist Church. Thank you for doing this interview.

Joseph Merriweather: Sure. I am happy to participate.

Interviewer: Ok, can you tell me what your Ethnicity is? Are you just African American or are you mixed with Caribbean blood or Haitian or Spanish origin?

Joseph Merriweather: My great-grandfather was a White man, there is white on both of my parents sides.

Interviewer: How do you consider your ethnicity?


Interviewer: What is your education level? Have you completed have you gone to College?

Joseph Merriweather: I went to College and have a Masters.

Interviewer: What do you have your Masters Degree in?

Joseph Merriweather: Behavioral Science.

Interviewer: I know you served in the military. When did you go to war?

Joseph Merriweather: 1951.

Interviewer: Did you fight in the War or anything?

Joseph Merriweather: No, I served in the Medical Corps. I was in France outside of Bordeaux.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what your age range is? Are you 21 and under, or would you say you are 45-54 55-64 or 65+

Joseph Merriweather: I am 65+. I have no problem with giving my age if you want it. In November I will be 83. No medication.
Interviewer: Were you born in NY?

Joseph Merriweather: No, born in Georgia…Augusta.

Interviewer: Are you a Baptized member of the SDA Church?

Merriweather: Yes.

Interviewer: How long have you been a member of the denomination?

Joseph Merriweather: I have been a member for 60 something years. My introduction to Adventism of the SDA Church was in 1936 and I was 6, 7.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate?

Joseph Merriweather: My mother was approached and was invited to attend an evangelistic meeting, and she went. It was about maybe two blocks from where we lived on one of the main streets known as Gwyneth Street. And after a series of meetings, one Sabbath she went to church with two boys and my two sisters, we were home. When she came – we heard she coming – we were playing hide and seek. And then she called us all in and told us that she had found her home. And from that point on we accompanied her to church. She was baptized in 1937 I think it was. And I was baptized in the 40’s, I think 1944, consistent worship since then.

Interviewer: How long have you been a member at Ephesus Church?

Joseph Merriweather: My introduction to Ephesus as a member was 1947. It was about a year and a half, I was in L.A. for a period – you know how they have your membership – technically I been worshipping since 1947 minus that year and a half.

Interviewer: Before your mother converted to Adventism did she go to church before? What denomination?

Joseph Merriweather: She was a quiet person; and we went to a Catholic Church and Catholic School. My first church and my first school was Catholic. And during that period from Catholic [and] Adventism, that had been my only experience with denominations. She had been a Baptist when she relocated from Washington, GA to Augusta but didn’t attend [church]. I think she came to Augusta in ‘25 so from ‘25 to ‘30 something she, if my memory served me correctly, was not a regular attendant. But we went to the Catholic Church and the Catholic School.

Interviewer: Why do you think your mother send you to a Catholic school? Was it a better education?

Joseph Merriweather: She was the essence of a quiet, dignified lady. Only raised her eyebrow and I imagine she was not comfortable in the other, shall I say, Protestant
Churches or whatever. But then that reverence that was in the Catholic church and I guess observing us, and the way we behaved being in the school where the standards were high, she embraced it.

**Interviewer:** So you been here at Ephesus for a while and you’ve seen how our style of worship is. Do you think that it remained the same since you started coming here?

**Joseph Merriweather:** In some areas yes, and in some areas no.

**Interviewer:** How would you describe our style of worship between 1970 to like last year 2010? How would you consider our Church conservative or progressive? How would describe the worship style in the 70’s?

**Joseph Merriweather:** In the 70’s there was reverence. Maybe there are those who presently would say it was conservative. But we didn’t look at it as being conservative. We believed as it relates to reverence the atmosphere the spirit; no moving about on a large scale, no talking, no “Hello, Hello” as people come in. We were in the House of God. And the transition from the Catholic Church, for me, to the Adventist Church, was not a heavy-duty item because it was even more reverence and quietness in the 30’s and 40’s and 50’s and 60’s than it is today, and even back in the year that you were just asking about.

**Interviewer:** I haven’t heard that term used in a while, reverent. Can you elaborate on the term reverent?

**Joseph Merriweather:** Reverent in the sense of – you are now entering into a house of worship, a building that has been designated, is where you are coming to worship God and His Presence is there. So therefore in the Presence of God, your behavior and everything about you should focus differently.

**Interviewer:** Before I go on with the style of worship, I know that you are very involved in the organization of the Youth Church. When did it start and what was the purpose of the Youth Church?

**Joseph Merriweather:** It started in 1951, no 1955. I’m sorry. I was the Youth Leader at that time, and Marvin Brown, Marie Sampson-Brown, Eula Gunther, Dorothy Herron; they were part of the leadership. Our thinking was that since our membership is very large and the Youth then, as they do today, like to have a presence of participation. But since the elders in the Senior Church for the main Sabbath worship at that time, which was jointly, were all seniors. So what role can the Youth play? Then we took a look at how are Youth moved within the Sabbath School Department, from Junior to Primary to Youth, Youth to Senior. So why don’t we have a church where it could be youth in training? And as they mature, get older, then as the Elders and the Deacons and the Deaconesses get older, the Youth can move in and then go about…so that’s what the key was for participation, and they would move forward. That was the main focus, for youth to have exposure and be prepared to function as a team. And then we also had an Elder
over the Youth to counsel and monitor the Youth Elders, the Deacons and Deaconesses. Just a bit of humor, the males didn’t not mind being Deacons and Elders, but the females did not want to be Deaconesses. But that wasn’t the purpose of it, not for any division or anything like that, just be the training. And as I said, at that time the church was full and when it was organized we still had the Senior Church seated to capacity and another two or three hundred in the Youth Church.

**Interviewer:** What was the membership of Ephesus during the time Youth Church started?

**Joseph Merriweather:** It was more than a thousand.

**Interviewer:** Was that was the normal size for a congregation for an Adventist Church?

**Joseph Merriweather:** No, Ephesus here in New York, I think it was the largest among the Black churches of those years.

**Interviewer:** So would you say that Ephesus was one of the first mega-churches?

**Joseph Merriweather:** I think you can…

**Interviewer:** As far as the music and the worship style, was it separate from the Senior Church or did the Youth at that time did they kind of have their own way of worship or was it something that mirrored the Senior Church?

**Joseph Merriweather:** No, it was almost identical. We sang the same kind of hymns, the choirs, we carried out the format of the Senior Church. In fact, there were a whole lot of seniors that worshipped in Youth Church. Oh, I would say you had maybe fifty or more Seniors sometimes a hundred Seniors or more that worshiped in the Youth Church. Same Service, same style, same format and there was no desire to do anything different. Leadership plays a role.

I would like to add just one thing, at a certain period, I’d say two years or so, during the Annual Nominating Committee, then the nominating committee would identify a Youth as a Deacon or some other capacity in the Church…they didn’t go in as a beginner, they already were qualified; there was training.

**Interviewer:** Sounds like the training wasn’t just limited to service in the church. I wonder if it had a impact on their lives and how they interacted with other people?

**Joseph Merriweather:** Sure, because the Youth Church didn’t have to play the role of AYS, the MV. So the Youth Church worship was simultaneous with the Main Church. We started 15 minutes after they got started because of using the facilities, and they ended the same time so that parents and everybody would be ready to leave together.
Interviewer: So it was kind of like an abbreviated service? When I say abbreviated, now the service runs about two hours... so they [in the past] did everything in about an hour and a half...

Joseph Merriweather: No longer than just three hours ago, I was telling a key person, “We started at 11 and ended at 1 many, many, many years.” – special days, whatever it was, because people had to go home and come back. But the Church hasn’t changed; it’s the people, the leadership. The Doctrine and the Tenets, the format of the Church remains the same... a long sermon you don’t give them... it’s not that its an abbreviation, that’s what Behavior Science was all about... structure.

Interviewer: I learned a lot from Lynda Elliott when she had a choir at COTM. She would hold rehearsal for only 90 min; after that, you start to lose people’s attention. So, it just doesn’t make sense to try to push past a certain time if you can see that people’s attention span has gone. They’re not focusing any more.

Joseph Merriweather: The Youth Choir, at that time, was always viewed by the local conference as an ideal example of what a Youth Choir should be like. The music and all had to be the kind of music that that particular choir sings.

Interviewer: So the music then was rather conservative...

Joseph Merriweather: I don’t refer to it as conservative, no. It’s the quality, every kind of music has it’s place, its setting, its environment. During Black History Week, several years ago, a famous Black Minister made an appeal to the young Black African-American musicians, “Please stop selling out the Spirituals and all to Jazz.” By that, he means the hymns, the Spirituals that we sing. By that he means, don’t give it that jazz connotation, don’t give it that Jazz sound. I was pleased because I embraced it. Because jazz is one thing, that’s for the secular aspect of socialization. Spirituals had a spiritual, religious meaning and presence; you could sing it in the church. You didn’t sing it in a nightclub and it has a significant meaning. And then it is really, if my understanding is correct, it is the only true American music.

Interviewer: [The Spiritual is considered] music of the Blacks; it was birthed out of Slavery; but out of Spirituals came jazz, and blues, came all the other...

Joseph Merriweather: The Spiritual came from this country, not from Africa, not from Europe.

Interviewer: Did you know that there was a time within the SDA Church that the Spiritual was not accepted as appropriate music for worship?

279 Dr. Lynda Elliott is a soprano who lives and teaches in New York City. She is also a member of the Ephesus SDA Church.
280 Church of the Master Presbyterian Church is located in Harlem.
**Joseph Merriweather:** I think that had to do with not the Doctrine but the Tenet and a racial thing. As a young SDA, we sang Spirituals; but in a White congregation although we would for a special something they would want you to sing one. Right here in NY back in the 60’s 70’s, there were White churches that wanted you to come and sing Spirituals. That’s what the leadership and people determine a lot...

**Interviewer:** When you listen to the music that is presented in Worship today, do you feel that the music that is presented today identifies with our Black Culture, or Black heritage, Black identity?

**Joseph Merriweather:** Me as a Black person, as an American, as an Adventist as one who has training, I don’t look at it as something that is Black, White, or green. I look at it as is it appropriate. Now, many of the songs, they are not accepted because of the Jazz connotation. They are not accepted with all of the emotionalism, because when a person is really singing from the heart, it is an unspoken kind of thing. You can tell…versus performing.

**Interviewer:** Are you against emotionalism in music?

**Joseph Merriweather:** That’s not what I said. I said one can tell when it’s pretty much sincere versus acting versus a performance.

**Interviewer:** From what I gather from you, you tend to be a very reserved…but do you feel…

**Joseph Merriweather:** I don’t consider Sabbath Service the music that requires the same response as if you are at a concert. Because you are not praising God; you are praising, you are applauding the person who did the performance. That’s how many people perceive it as that, whereas we come to worship God, and we sing to Him and that’s why… but I realize that some people are more emotional than others, so I don’t frown on it. That’s why I said with my back round in Behavior and all, I observe people. You can pretty much tell who is a phony and who is trying to get you worked up for the wrong reasons. Motives are so important. Shirley Verrett, about 5 or 6 times during her life, maybe more, she would be in New York, she would come and worship. And once we found out she was in, we could go to her and she would say, “Sure, of course.” She wouldn’t give you a hard time. She wouldn’t say, “I didn’t come prepared.” [She would] go get the hymnbook, and the quality of the musicians, would bring the house down with “Amen, Amen!” and the tears would flow. Didn’t even think about clapping. And it would usually be a hymn that we didn’t even sing from the hymnal. There are so many beautiful hymns in the hymnal that we don’t use. I tried to get the musicians at one time, I said, “Each of you, once a quarter, learn a new hymn for the congregation; we sing the same hymns over and over again.” That’s why I talked about leadership. See, a lot of this is all fanfare. All churches…the whole world has a new concept of worshipping. These Mega Churches are all designed to eliminate Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, whatever. No, just come to church and praise God any way you want to.
**Interviewer:** Do you think there is a particular way people should worship God?

**Joseph Merriweather:** I can’t say that; I can only relate to my introduction to religion. And now that I have observed and am a part of everything – see, and young people, even today, usually want me to be a part of everything they in. They know it’s gonna be this way, that way; all leads to leadership.

**Interviewer:** Would you say that your idea of worship is based on Eurocentric values?

**Joseph Merriweather:** Personally, I would say yes; but that has to do with my indoctrination. That’s why I said I came from a church, my foundation – put your hands this way, no chewing gum, no talking, getting on your knees – reverence. So when I came into Adventist Church with the additional presence, so it’s been a part of me all my life. Now why would I almost a hundred years old, start acting like –doesn’t make any kind of sense.

**Interviewer:** I was wondering because…

**Joseph Merriweather:** We still sing operas, been around for years and years. You go to hear them every year. I used to go, very quietly, to Carnegie Hall; there’s a section for standing. You just hear what you want to hear and then you could leave. I did that two or three times as a young person, so I’ve always liked music, like the piano. I like what we play, but I don’t like hymns to be playing like Jazz where I want to dance.

**Interviewer:** What do you think about the new style of worship in the Youth Church? Would you say that the youth are trying to stick with the tradition here at the Ephesus Church or are they kind of forging their own?

**Joseph Merriweather:** My observation, again, is Leadership. It’s not the youth. My heart goes out for them, because by the musicians and by Clergy, they’re not given good direction; just do what you want to do and it’s a show off. Some of the Praise Team, some of them, I know on a one-to-one, and those that I know on the one-to-one, they don’t want to act when they are up there. If they move a little bit, it’s because that’s what they wanted to do; they’re not trying to go with it because this is the new thing now or whatever. Leadership in everything – the home – sets the tone for worship. And the musicians, some of them they like these praise songs because they don’t have to show too much musicianship; it’s a cop out a cop out. They’re so unfortunate, and I tell them, “That’s a cop out.” I went to a wedding a few weeks ago. They had a Praise and Worship group before the marriage, while we were waiting. The music was fantastic! The songs were just beautiful, they were dressed nice, they didn’t try to dance, they didn’t try to move, only the Organist. You thought it was just so heavenly. Then at one point, the drummer started (tap) through it, the whole atmosphere changed. That was noise. It wasn’t distracting, but that wasn’t necessary. I don’t know what note it would have been in regards to the sound am I saying that correctly?

**Interviewer:** But drums are different they don’t have pitch you can’t really …
Joseph Merriweather: Then it’s noise…

Interviewer: I wouldn’t call it noise, it’s just sound that doesn’t have a pitch…

Joseph Merriweather: Then if you don’t have a pitch, then it’s not complimenting the ones, the other music where there are notes – $B^b$, $A^b$ – or whatever. And I shared that with the person, not the drummer, but the person that was responsible. I said, “Why isn’t this done in Ephesus on Sabbaths that way?” Do it for the wedding, but at the Church you got to… there was no reverence, no meditation. It should prepare you for the worship service to start, not for entertainment. You are tired out before the worship service starts.

Interviewer: What Sanctuary do you normally worship in now?

Joseph Merriweather: My concentration is more as a senior now, because of the hearing. I got to talking to the musician in the Senior Church and they have to take that into consideration. What I’m saying, and again, if you notice, I use the word leadership, behavior. The choirs have to think about it, the Organist has to think about it, the Director of Music has to take that into consideration. And in this church, who do they come to with their observations? Me! Here again is the motive and purpose: How do you feel about worship? When a choir comes in, and they just waiting for whatever, and they start talking and moving about. A couple of weeks ago, one of the ladies [in the choir loft] had in the first row, a mirror. Maybe you don’t see these things. It’s unbelievable! They’re just texting while service is going on! So how can…you don’t set the tone. That’s why I say leadership; and I tell the leaders – I haven’t spoken to you but last week or the week before, I spoke to Mr. Davey\(^{281}\). I said, “You have a choir right? Why don’t you do something about it?” Quality musician, they can get what you’re getting out of him over the Internet or whatever. But for years, the previous African American musicians they trained and they shared what they knew with people they interacted with. But we don’t do that anymore. In school, your teacher would give you a lot of information, etiquette and all. It wasn’t a part of the curriculum, but that’s the way they taught. Look at the leading Black Colleges now that were established during Slavery. Again I talk about leadership. What new college has been started by young professionals now? Not even in the other communities, other races, a lot of churches, they’re empty. White, Blue, Green, Black, whatever. And getting back to this church, I spent all my years around quality setting and now, even the way some of them dress, the way some of them come. The Praise Team on Wednesday nights give you a concert, want you to sing with them and you couldn’t even hear nothing. Leadership. I tell all my young friends who are professionals “Act the part.” So, I am not against music; it’s the presentation of music.

Interviewer: You were involved in the Music Ministry in the 90’s. Can you tell me how you came to that role, and can you elaborate on how the structure was before you came into office?

\(^{281}\) George Davey is the Head Organist at the Ephesus Church.
**Joseph Merriweather:** I was asked to become the, I’ll just use this word, ‘Coordinator’ and the lead person for the music of the church ‘cause they had the organist and pianist. At the time that I took it over, the Youth Church Choir hadn’t functioned in quite some time. The Senior Church, there was confusion among – they said that musicians are temperamental, prima donnas all that – so they approached me as it relates to leadership and coordination. I don’t mind; I’ll be the President, the CEO, but I’ll never the Treasurer. Really. After you pass counting from one to ten I wouldn’t be the finance person, but I would be Chairman of the Board, I would be CEO. In addition to my leadership, I also have good communication skills. You must feel good about yourself whatever you do; not in an egotistical way, but if you don’t have competence in self, how you gonna have competence with other people? The Bible says, “Love your what…”

**Interviewer:** “Love your neighbors as yourself.”

**Joseph Merriweather:** Right. So who comes first? You! So if you don’t love yourself, you’re not gonna be nice to your neighbor. So when people are hateful and mean, that’s because they are not comfortable with themselves. See then my expectations in everything are very high, high in the sense of do it correct, if you know how to do it. If you don’t know how, reach out. So the Youth Church, now I’m in Senior Church, the Music Department was at a low level, so I spoke with the respective musicians – and I think with you and two or three other youth – we have several meetings regarding getting something started. We had dinner away from the church, got a group going extremely well. And we started a Male Chorus, had it scheduled on a weekly basis, functioned extremely well. Some of the key singers and plus – I like to see musicians train each other, not make it easy by bringing in somebody – there are many voices that can be trained. You started singing in the church, and many others, most Black musicians, started in the church… So within the first year we had a structured Music Department in the church: organist, pianist, choir director and two Senior Choirs, a Youth Choir, a Male Chorus. Everybody got a schedule, had meetings to go and it’s functioned very well. There are some pieces I won’t say about why things kind of petered out --- but here again your motives and when you do things for the wrong reasons. So for about four years it ran slowly; the pianos were tuned on a regular basis, the organ was serviced on a regular basis...

**Interviewer:** How long were you in Office?

**Joseph Merriweather:** For five years, and then politics started.

**Interviewer:** Politics are everywhere; you can’t get … As far as your role, are you saying your role was purely Administrative?

**Joseph Merriweather:** On a whole, musically. Since I have an ear and since I know how to read – I have some music books too, I read music too – so when I’m talking to a musician I know what to say how to say it and challenge them, “I’m not the organist, you

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are. Now do you know the stops, do you know how to play it, do you know how to make music? You get paid for that, not me. This doesn’t sound good, can you make it better?”

**Interviewer:** So as far as introducing music to the church that comes from an African background, a Black background, African-American, Haitian-American, Caribbean, do you think that our church really addresses those needs musically within the Service?

**Joseph Merriweather:** It’s not a need. Music, per se, is a need. Now, I grew up in this church, from 18 until now. Those Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Barbadians, hand full of Costa Ricans, hand full of Antiguans; some from the smaller islands – but the Barbadians always had quality music; their country is known for quality music – a lot of Black Americans. Jamaicans not as much as the Barbadians, but they were noted for their quality English style, for they came from a Baptist Church, an Episcopal Church, a Methodist Church; they still had that. So all of what you see now is after the Civil Rights struggle, after the 60’s and 70’s when everybody just came in and just said, “I’m gonna do it my way and this is the Caribbean way,” and that’s a lot of goulash! Should I have said that word? Forgive me.

**Interviewer:** When we look at the Adventist Hymnal, most of the hymns or songs come from a Eurocentric background. There are a couple of hymns that are written by or arranged by African-Americans, but for the most part, there really isn’t a lot there. Let’s say the Pastor is preaching and asks an appeal song. The song that would fit the message is not found in our church hymnal, but comes from other Black churches or other denominations…

**Joseph Merriweather:** Keep in mind that Adventist hymnal is worldwide. The hymns that we sing here are all over the world among Adventists. Sure they were written years ago; they all had religious connotations. You can usually find the scripture where the hymn is from. This is before Black in America, whatever. Now, I’m not opposed to new songs. I’m not opposed to singing hymns that were written by whoever. It’s whether or not that falls in line with the teaching of our Message. That’s why I say Spirituals. Spirituals, technically, were not necessarily written for the Church. It was a message.

**Interviewer:** And not all Spirituals are not religious.

**Joseph Merriweather:** That’s correct. That’s what I’m saying.

**Interviewer:** They actually fall under various… Spirituals is the folk music.

**Joseph Merriweather:** It was a message, ‘I looked over yonder’, that was a message being given. Now, what do you consider Black music, or am I to ask you that question?

**Interviewer:** I would consider Black music as any music that is conceived by African Americans, or I should say, people of African descent – and in the religious context, I’m

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283 An Appeal Song is synonymous to the Invitational Hymn in the Baptist Church.
looking at Spirituals, Traditional Gospel, and Contemporary Gospel. Now, I’m under the belief that all Gospel is not appropriate for Worship; I agree with you on that context because I feel that it should be something that is totally related to the Scripture, and it also needs to match our Doctrine, what we believe our Church teaches. I also believe it has to have a strong Biblical base. But as far as style, I don’t believe that – I know some people get a little uncomfortable with certain instrumentations in church, and I have to admit, I am a little uncomfortable with certain instrumentation, only because that was the upbringing or the history that was imposed upon me as a child growing up here. Growing up in this church, we didn’t have drums in the church (at least not for worship), we didn’t have electronic instruments in the church – not for worship. And that’s only because that’s what was tradition in our church at that time. I’m a little different now. I think that everything should be done decently and in order and there should be a balance. I don’t believe instrumentation should supersede the voice.

Joseph Merriweather: I concur with you and gonna piggyback. Take Mahalia Jackson, her songs they all had a spiritual connotation. Like anyone else, certain songs you like the style and certain ones you don’t; but many heard her music. As an example, you see the trends of the world; society brings about a lot of this confusion, too. By that I mean, years ago you had orchestras – Benny Goodman and all – man, society, let’s take one instrument—and all those bands we used to have, they’re not around anymore because these hanky tank, one instrument has replaced them.284

Interviewer: The one instrument… are you referring to the electronic keyboard? Why do you think that instrument has taken the place of other instruments?

Joseph Merriweather: That’s just the way the world turns and how my ingenuity, my ability my skill….

Interviewer: Do you think economics has anything to do with it?

Joseph Merriweather: That made it even worse, because you put so many people out of business, like the clarinet, the saxophone…

Interviewer: True. But do you know how expensive it is to hire an instrumentalist? Instrumentalists are expensive.

Joseph Merriweather: I understand, but that’s how the world turns. Keep in mind man has made some things difficult for himself. We start something, and then after 10 years we eliminate it. There is nothing better than hearing the instruments being played by a personality. Different sound. No electronic instrument can sound like a person blowing a trumpet. And so many good things that was done has been eliminated by what we call modern technology; it’s good, but keep it going. There is nothing better than hearing the various instruments.

284 Merriweather feels that the electronic keyboard has replaced the need for orchestras and bands because of the keyboard’s capability of sampling all or a large majority of instruments.
Interviewer: You mentioned Mahalia Jackson. Do you think her type of music is appropriate for church?

Joseph Merriweather: It’s how you use it certain songs, what service, and it depends on the singer.

Interviewer: I wonder if our church – looking at the music – has things or elements that are representative of our own culture. When I go to Europe (Germany) and go to the Adventist Church, they’re not using the hymnals that we use. They use the Chorales because that is indigenous to their area. In Amsterdam, they do have some of the hymns that we sing here in the States, but they also have pieces that are indigenous to their area. Here it is the Adventist Church has become this worldwide denomination, but at the same time, there are certain cultural identities that are just not even represented. And I think when it comes to worship we tend to be so Eurocentric in our mindset that we don’t even look at possibly implementing things that would have us to be more proud of our identity.

Joseph Merriweather: See keep in mind, there’s no other country in the world – there’s 200+ countries that are organized by the union as a country, I think it’s 211 or 209 – there’s not another country in the world like America. With all kinds of people from everywhere, no other country. England, France, Germany, you name all of them; none of them have the kind of presence that the United States has. I have to compliment the United States sometimes on all the different kinds of people. We say you can worship the way you want to, you can do this the way you want to; but man is trying to fight that now. And it’s those foreigners that have come to make up now – they’re citizens, “Oh we gonna change this; we gonna change that.” No! So within the U.S. the kind of setting where even African Americans… even if you want to start something the Europeans, France and all, not want you to do it. Take New York City. Years ago when I was your age and younger, you had a lot of Jews in Manhattan. The last Bakery – no I meant to say Germans in New York, you had a lot of Jews; you don’t have them anymore. You had a lot of Irish; you don’t have them anymore. You had a lot of Italians. Old expression: The Italians built New York, the Irish ran it and the Jews owned it. That’s why the Police Department mainly Irish, the Fire Department mainly what…Italian. The Education the School system mainly Jews. A Black here, a Black there, a Black here, a Black there …and now with all the different Hispanics and the Asians. So what is really American Music? Now, most of the Opera, am I correct, is European?

Interviewer: Yes. True. There are some American Operas but the form the style is …

Joseph Merriweather: America has been more open, and that’s why I say, “God Bless America.” But now, how many African musicians, American musicians have published African music as if they’re Hymns or this way or what is it?

Interviewer: There are, but they’re in the Baptist hymnal, they’re in the A.M.E. You find them in the other seven, Black denominations.

Joseph Merriweather: Ok now that is something that can be turned around.
Interviewer: In the Seventh-day Adventist Church they did come up with some new music that they use for Praise and Worship, and some of the pieces were written by African Americans. I actually know some of the composers; some of them are of African descent. However, when I listen to the pieces, the music doesn’t sound like them, it doesn’t sound like it has any of our identity….

Joseph Merriweather: What is in the African American music?

Interviewer: I’ll tell you some elements of African music: rhythm. Rhythm is a strong element of African or most cultural or ethnic music. Rhythm and certain instrumentation, when it’s used here in our church, we tend to look at it like it’s considered taboo.

Joseph Merriweather: I still don’t follow you what you mean rhythm?

Interviewer: Rhythm, beats, drumming and other elements, musical structures, chord structures…

Joseph Merriweather: See, the African American, all of the West Indian Islands and all of pretty much the Hispanic Islands there has that native African introduction in many things. So, I guess in the… few decades ago, I say thirty years ago, it’s been something that you can say African American… Like the Puerto Ricans, the Dominicans, the Panamanians, all of those Latina islands, they don’t want to admit, but their beat pretty much is the African beat, the introduction of the African to their islands. But then they want to say that this is the Caribbean beat…

A lot of the African musicianship has been stolen and converted into somebody else’s music…

Interviewer: That’s possible, but I want to stick to SDA music. When we look at the guidelines from 1970 or so, they were very specific to say that we should not listen to music that has strong, rhythmic beat, certain chord structures, chord progressions – things of that nature. They felt that is was inappropriate for worship. When you look at those guidelines, and the things that the General Conference says that we should stay away from, they’re elements that come from people of various ethnicities. What’s been happening lately, some of the elements we can’t get away from; it’s still here…

Joseph Merriweather: Here again, if I may, presentation is so important.

Interviewer: Hypothetically, there is a Jazz musician who has been studying the Scripture…who becomes convicted in the truth of the SDA message and they want to participate in music in the church, does this person have to let go of his style to participate in the Church?

Joseph Merriweather: If he or she is a true musician, he can take this group of words and develop those words into music without it having a jazz sound or jazz beat.
Interviewer: So you are saying that this person has to lose their identity, lose their essence, and characteristic of….

Joseph Merriweather: No, because Jazz was not designed for Church. Jazz was not designed for Church. When you think of Jazz what do you think of? A Night Club; you think of that. That’s what I am saying. When you go to a nightclub you don’t sing, “God Bless America,” you don’t sing, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” Different words, different beat. That’s why I said the Chambers Black Minister said, “Please don’t take the Spirituals and give it that Jazz sound.” Let the Jazz remain where it’s supposed to be. Let the Church music remain where it’s supposed to be, the Secular music where it’s supposed to be; the playground music…whatever.

Interviewer: Are you aware of music of African culture?

Joseph Merriweather: Give me an example.

Interviewer: In most African cultures, music is not set apart or categorized as sacred or secular; it’s music. They use music in every facet of life. There’s always music for work, play, for worship, at home, those kinds of things. But in the Eurocentric culture, they tend to categorize music as – they put things in boxes – this music is appropriate for worship, while another type of music is appropriate for secular music. But if you listen to it, especially early music, it doesn’t sound that much different. The elements are the same, same chord progressions or the style of writing is the same. The only difference that gives it the category is when a composer states what the music is for. Here’s a modern example: Duke Ellington, famous Jazz musician, actually wrote three sacred cantatas, using the idiom he was familiar with. He said, “This is the text, and this is what it is used for. This is a sacred cantata…”

Joseph Merriweather: Here again, is what I said that a musician should be able to know how to arrange and compose his music for the Church or Club or whatever. A true musician can do that…

Interviewer: A ‘true musician’, however, but it sounded as if you are saying they basically have to lose their identity…

Joseph Merriweather: No, but what I’m saying, the sound for a Church would not the same sound for jazz, for a nightclub. That’s what I am saying. A true musician should be able to do that…to compose the music that it would be appropriate for Church. The same way they use their vocabulary. That’s the beauty of English, more so than any other language; you have so many ways of expressing yourself without using this word or without using that word, and the more advanced you get in education, the larger your vocabulary gets. There are some words now, a person come in and I wouldn’t even know what they mean. Look in the dictionary; all those words. I can say, “Shut up.” “Would you please keep quiet?” “No more talking.” – all means the same thing. Now you use those words in the appropriate setting if you consider yourself a person with a good computer. So the same way with music.
Interviewer: I understand what you mean, but then it sounds…

Joseph Merriweather: That’s why I say Shirley Verrett, an Opera singer, would come and sing and just the house…

Interviewer: There are some people who come and sing a hymn in church who study opera and sing, and the members say, “Oh, I don’t like to hear that opera stuff. I want to hear my hymns just sung like hymns.”

Joseph Merriweather: I’m saying a true musician knows how to give it in a Spiritual setting. That’s what I am saying. I have heard some songs being played on the piano. You remember Brother Wade; he would say to me, “Oh, I like that.” And I would say, “That’s by a Jazz musician.” It didn’t sound Jazzy it had that spiritual, you know… It’s a challenge but my point is…

Interviewer: What kind of music do you listen to at home? Do you listen to mainly sacred?

Joseph Merriweather: I listen to everything. And when I say everything, you know why? Because I want to keep abreast of what’s going on and then I can talk about it; it doesn’t influence me. I can hear Jazz and I’m not inclined to dance, I’m not inclined to want to go to a club. But I want to know what’s the latest this, what’s the latest that, because I’m in the world…

Interviewer: So you’ve even listened to rap music?

Joseph Merriweather: Some of it. If it becomes vulgar, then no. Like some of the West Indian music, I frown on it because it’s vulgar. That’s not for anybody. It should not be that way. We take so many beautiful things and just bring about so many distractions that we no longer can appreciate it any more. There are many people who know how to move their body, without it being vulgar; and I’m just amazed at how they can do it and it’s a part of God’s creation, ‘cause God made the body.
Interview with
Ron Liburd
August 4, 2012

**Interviewer:** Thank you. I want to make sure I’m getting this on the interview, make sure I have it on tape. I’m going to ask you a series of questions. Some of them are multiple-choice. Some of them are open-ended. And you know, just answer. There’s no pressure. Just answer to the best of your ability. If there’s a question of something that you don’t feel comfortable with, you can just say, “Well, I prefer not to answer.”

So, if you can tell me what your age range is. I have here 21 and under, 22 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to…

**Ron Liburd:** 45 to 54.

**Interviewer:** Okay. I’m going to make sure I lock that up.

**Ron Liburd:** I’m 47, girl.

**Interviewer:** I know. It’s okay. It’s all right. And if you can tell me what’s your highest education level achieved.

**Ron Liburd:** Masters in Human Resources, and a Masters in Public Administration.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So if you could tell me what do you consider your ethnicity? Do you consider yourself African American or Caribbean American, Caribbean? Do you have like any Haitian or African roots or Spanish roots or you’re a hodge-podge?

**Ron Liburd:** I mean, I’m a US Citizen, so it’s like African American? Like, how do you…? Caribbean American African… is that what it is? You see what I’m saying? Because it’s… I have to say I’m black.

**Interviewer:** Okay. You like to say you’re black. Okay. All right. I don’t have that option here. I could put ‘other’.

**Ron Liburd:** But if you really want me to define what category I fall into as related to your study…

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Where were you born?

**Ron Liburd:** I was actually born in Saint Kitts, but I’m an American citizen.

**Interviewer:** Where is Saint Kitts?

**Ron Liburd:** Saint Kitts is British.
Interviewer: It’s British.

Ron Liburd: Yeah. Saint Kitts is British.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Ron Liburd: Saint Kitts is British but I grew up in the Virgin Islands - Saint Croix, Saint Thomas, which is like US.

Interviewer: So it’s still kind of like… Now the British West Indies, is it still considered Caribbean?

Ron Liburd: Yes, they are.

Interviewer: It is. Okay. So Caribbean American is fine. I could also put you down as Caribbean because I have a lot of people who are listed as different, various ethnicities because, you know. When you deal with Blacks, it’s not like you just one [ethnicity]. You know, it’s like a hodge-podge.

Ron Liburd: Right. Exactly. And that’s one of the things I don’t really like to get into, that dual identity thing because I’m like, we all one; but some people are like to get into [indiscernible].

Interviewer: Oh, the nationalistic stuff. Okay. So you said your country of origin is Saint Kitts.

Ron Liburd: Yes. Saint Christopher, Saint Kitts.

Interviewer: Saint Christopher. I went there. No, I didn’t. I was going to take a boat but I didn’t from Saint Thomas. I was going to do it but I didn’t do it. So you’re from Saint Kitts. Okay. And of course, you’re not a girl. I’m going down my list here.

Are you a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Ron Liburd: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you always been a member?

Ron Liburd: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. SDA, I guess I can put your age.

Ron Liburd: P.K.285 son…

285 P.K. stands for Preacher’s Kid.
Interviewer: Oh, so you’re a PK? So where does your father pastor?

Ron Liburd: My father pastured in Anguilla. He pastored in Saint Thomas. He pastored in Saint Croix. That’s one of the reasons why we moved around so much.

Interviewer: So how many times have you all moved?

Ron Liburd: Three times.

Interviewer: Wow.

Ron Liburd: Yeah, three times. It’s Anguilla, Saint Thomas, Saint Croix. He never actually worked in Saint Kitts but we went when I was born because I think that’s when I was so young. We lived in Jamaica as well. He studied in Jamaica for a year.

Interviewer: Did he go to…?

Ron Liburd: West Indies College.

Interviewer: West Indies College. What is it called now?

Ron Liburd: Caribbean University.

Interviewer: Caribbean University. Oh, wow! Okay. So what is it like being a PK?

Ron Liburd: Pfft.

[Laughter]

Interviewer: Why should I ask that question? My brother-in-law is a PK.

Ron Liburd: One of the things… okay. Can I say the pros about being a PK and then the cons?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Ron Liburd: The advantages of being a PK is that you get a lot of the Seventh-day Adventist traditions instilled in you as a child. And you also get a chance to get exposed to different worship styles. When I say that, I’m referring to different, within Adventist culture, the different churches and what this church may do this and that church may do that. And how they order of worship is, because every church had a different order of worship, even in the Caribbean. That’s one of the advantages. I mean, the instillness of traditional Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, which I hold dear.

And then the disadvantages are that sometimes you are not allowed to have your own thinking as it relates to Christianity when you were growing up. You understand what
I’m saying? You couldn’t do certain things. You were not allowed to have your shirt out of your pants because you are the pastor’s son. You’re not allowed to sit with those kids that are misbehaving because you’re the pastor’s son.

**Interviewer:** Get out!

**Ron Liburd:** You were not allowed to be late to Sabbath School because you are the pastor’s children.

**Interviewer:** Shut up, Ron!

**Ron Liburd:** I’m telling you the things that I had to go through. You were not allowed to miss Wednesday night or Sunday night prayer service.

**Interviewer:** Get out! You all have Sunday night prayer service?

**Ron Liburd:** Sunday night prayer service and there was an afternoon prayer service because you are the pastor’s son. The pastor’s children will not miss church. When the church was open, the pastor’s there with his wife and the kids unless they’re sick. Those are some of the disadvantages.

**Interviewer:** Get out!

**Ron Liburd:** And the other disadvantage is that you’re not exposed to other people’s style of living because you’re very sheltered. You know what I’m saying? So even though some of the protection is because they didn’t want you to be a part of or be aware of. Part of it was like, “Can I just know so I can make a decision for my own self?”

**Interviewer:** So wait a second. So was your father always an Adventist?

**Ron Liburd:** No, he wasn’t. Neither of my parents were always Adventists. Guess what they were before?

**Interviewer:** What? Anglican or Catholic?

**Ron Liburd:** How did you know?

[Laughter]

**Interviewer:** Because most of the people in the Caribbean are either…

**Ron Liburd:** Right. My mom was Methodist; and she was a staunch Methodist, too, because my mom and her father and her siblings were very much involved in the Methodist Church in Saint Kitts. My father, on the other hand, he was an Anglican Episcopal Church of England. And you know that’s hard on church. And I think that’s
one of the reasons why I have such a strong appreciation for music because it was played throughout the house. And my mom liked it too because she played piano.

**Interviewer:** Based on the exposure…

**Ron Liburd:** Right. And that’s why I always say that education is a strong exposure, which ultimately leads to appreciation. Once you’re exposed to something, then you get to appreciate it. Hence me, that’s why I like classical music and anthems and the pipe organ because my dad was an organist and my mom was a pianist. And I remember my mom when we were like 2 and 3 and 4 buying the record, *The Sound of Music.*

**Interviewer:** Oh, okay.

**Ron Liburd:** And she used to buy The King’s Heralds\(^\text{286}\) and she used to… and the Heritage Singers\(^\text{287}\) And I remember my dad purchased a [recording] of Handel’s *Messiah*. And I think it was, I don’t remember which. I have to go back and ask him but I know it was an Adventist church that recorded the *Messiah*. And we had the record at home. And I remember looking at that particular record and playing it as many times as I was growing up.

**Interviewer:** So okay, I know I’m just kind of trying to ask some more questions about the background because I find that very fascinating that… I think that a lot of people who are not… I’m finding people who are not always Adventist – or if they have family members that weren’t always Adventist – sometimes they tend to have different perspective about life and how they interact with people.

So when did your father become an Adventist?

**Ron Liburd:** My father became an Adventist in the ‘60’s.

**Interviewer:** In the ‘60’s?

**Ron Liburd:** Yes. I think it was probably like around 1960 something. And to get clarity, I can actually call him right now if that’s okay with you.

**Interviewer:** Oh, okay. So hold up, he became an Adventist in the ‘60’s.

**Ron Liburd:** I’m going to tell you exactly when he became an Adventist.

**Interviewer:** So your parents were married before they became Adventist?

**Ron Liburd:** They were married… I’m about to ask him that.

\(^{286}\) The King’s Heralds are an Adventist quartet.

\(^{287}\) The Heritage Singers is an Adventist mixed group whose music was popular between the 1970s and the 1990s.
Interviewer: You don’t have to be that specific.

Ron Liburd: He’s at home. He’s retired; he’s got nothing to do.

Interviewer: Don’t be surprised if he’s out.

Ron Liburd: And he had a Ph.D., too. He would be excited that you’re doing something like this.

Interviewer: So while we’re waiting on, how long have you been at Ephesus?

Ron Liburd: I’ve been on Ephesus since 1987.

Interviewee’s Dad: Hello.

Ron Liburd: Hold on. Dad, how are you?

Interviewee’s Dad: Hello?

Ron Liburd: Dad, can you hear me? You can hear me?

Interviewee’s Dad: Yes.

Ron Liburd: It’s Junie. What’s wrong with you?

Interviewee’s Dad: I couldn’t make your voice.

Ron Liburd: Okay, because I have you on speakerphone. I’m in an interview and I have someone. I’ve being interviewed by a doctoral candidate who is an amazing chorister and choral director at our church. Can you hear me? Can you hear me?

Interviewee’s Dad: Wait, wait. Let me put this phone down.

Ron Liburd: Yeah. Get the real phone.

Interviewee’s Dad: Okay.

Ron Liburd: I said, I’m [being] interviewed by a choral director at Ephesus; and she’s a doctoral candidate. And you love her voice because you heard her singing. You said, “Oh, man. Who’s that?” Her name is Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming.

Interviewee’s Dad: Oh, yeah.

Ron Liburd: He knows you.
**Interviewee’s Dad**: I remember who that person is.

**Ron Liburd**: Right. The voice you love.

**Interviewee’s Dad**: Yeah. Really, she’s stunning.

**Ron Liburd**: She’s here now with me in an interview. She’s interviewing. She’s working on her doctorate in vocal performance at the University of Kentucky. And the question that I have for you is, Daddy, when did you become a Seventh-day Adventist? What year was that?

**Interviewee’s Dad**: ’59.

**Ron Liburd**: What is it?

**Interviewee’s Dad**: ’59.

**Ron Liburd**: ’59. See? 1959. Now when you became a Seventh-day Adventist, was mommy also a Seventh-day Adventist at that time?

**Interviewee’s Dad**: No.

**Ron Liburd**: What year did she become a Seventh-day Adventist?

**Interviewee’s Dad**: Maybe ’62.

**Ron Liburd**: Oh, okay. So when you guys got married, were you already Seventh-day Adventists?

**Interviewee’s Dad**: Yeah.

**Ron Liburd**: Okay. Does that answer all your questions?

**Interviewer**: Yeah. Okay. That’s cool. Yeah, that’s good. We’re good.

**Ron Liburd**: What happened?

**Interviewee’s Dad**: You were laughing at me.

**Ron Liburd**: No, I’m not laughing at you. I’m laughing with you. We just wanted to know some of the… She asked me those questions but I was off.

**Interviewee’s Dad**: Ah.

**Ron Liburd**: Yeah. Okay?
Interviewer: Thank you, Mr. Liburd. Thank you.

Ron Liburd: And Jeryl thanks you.

Interviewee’s Dad: Okay. Goodbye.

Interviewer: All right. So then, in your case, even though your parents were not always Adventists, you were always an Adventist. That’s kind of cool though. Okay. Yeah, because I’m noticing there are some people who haven’t always been like that.

Let me see. So you said you were at Ephesus…

Ron Liburd: I actually visited Ephesus for the first time in 1989. And then I started coming back full-time in 1993 because I was in college from 1991 to 1993 in Ohio.

Interviewer: Right. I remember you would just come by and visit. So how many years is that, then?

Ron Liburd: From ’93 to… Almost 20 years.

Interviewer: Okay.

Ron Liburd: …19 years. That’s not long. You get people who were born there at 40 and 50. That is not a long time.

Interviewer: 70, 80.

Ron Liburd: Right. But 19 years…

Interviewer: I find that interesting that you haven’t always been, at least your parent’s weren’t. This is funny. I’m also finding that a lot of… Was he a minister at any other church?

Ron Liburd: No, just the Adventist church. And he went from being a minister to teaching, being a teacher. He left the Adventist church as a minister to teach at Florida A and M University. He would still get speaking engagements at Seventh-day Adventist churches. He would still attend but after he got his PhD at Vanderbilt University, he wanted to educate Blacks and the church couldn’t afford to pay him.

Interviewer: But you know, that’s funny though because my brother-in-law, his father was actively preaching. He was out in California but they needed to move closer to the East Coast. They needed to be closer to his family because there was some sickness in the family. So he wanted to be nearby. Now I didn’t realize that he was still… you know… it’s just that when he moved to Florida, there was no church. There wasn’t a vacancy. So he’s teaching now too but I mean, I just found that.
Ron Liburd: I wonder if he ended up teaching like Pastor Jones… Clifford Jones ended up teaching, Pastor Jack…

Interviewer: Jack is still, he’s still preaching. He’s at Mountainside288. But I think…

Ron Liburd: He probably should teach. They’d probably do better. Financially, for them… that was my dad’s thing. My dad was like, “I’m doing better as the chair of the Theology Department at FAMU,” – getting six figures – where the church wouldn’t give him that much. He was so brilliant. He actually got an offer, believe it or not, to be the minister after Forbes at Riverside, but he turned it down. And my dad co-authored a book with the minister who followed Forbes, Baxter.

Interviewer: So he would’ve gone and been a pastor of a non-denominational church and have services on Sunday?

Ron Liburd: Exactly. Mm-hmm. Because his thing would’ve been like, it has nothing to do with religious beliefs. It’s about preaching Jesus. You understand what I’m saying?

Interviewer: Yeah, I understand what you’re saying but I don’t know. I don’t know. To me, I will find that… It just seems like it’s a conflict to interest.

Ron Liburd: You’re right. I agree with you. But they offered the job. That’s probably one of the reasons why he turned it down – because he didn’t really want to do that. And I think two, is because he was looking for a time. He’s like, “I’m not going to be bothered with the church and politics.”

Interviewer: You see Forbes is gone.

Ron Liburd: Yeah. He’s in research. He’s into Archaeology.

Interviewer: Oh, but you know that’s also important too. Okay. So what do you consider the style of worship at Ephesus? Do you think that…

Ron Liburd: Are there some options for that?

Interviewer: Well, do you feel that we’re kind of conservative or do you feel that we’re moderate? Some people said that there’s aggressive, you know, do you think it’s a live service or do you think it’s just… Or do you feel that we’re still kind of, you know.

Ron Liburd: Traditional? Conservative?

Interviewer: I mean, what do you think? What word would you call the service?

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288 Mountainside SDA Church in Decatur, GA.
Ron Liburd: I think in the past, we were traditional conservative. I think now we’re moderate.

Interviewer: Okay. Why do you say moderate?

Ron Liburd: Because now we have drums which never actually happened before. But it’s not a consistent usage of drums. And even some of our rendering of choral music is not totally classical. We do have classical as well but then we always mix it up, even in your execution of some things that you do. It’s light, inspirational which never used to happen. Some hand clapping. So I would say moderate.

Interviewer: Okay. So which sanctuary do you worship the most in? Senior Church or…?

Ron Liburd: Senior.

Interviewer: Why do you find yourself in the Senior Church?

Ron Liburd: That meets my spiritual needs.

Interviewer: Okay. When you say, meets your spiritual needs, you mean…?

Ron Liburd: The music and the style of worship. I believe that people worship based on their need. They don’t want to admit it, but most people actually worship based on their need. And I believe that the people who actually go to Youth Church, they go there because they’re looking for a need in the style of worship there, i.e. gospily [gospel-like] songs. You know, whereas in the Senior Church, the people that worship there they’re looking for a certain style, not too gospily, more anthem, more structured SATB. And it meets them for their worship style and their needs as it relates to their spirituality. And I don’t fault that or anyone because I believe that everyone has a different level of spirituality. And that’s why I have issues with people who may say, “Oh, you’re being dead.” Somebody may say, “Oh, you’re too lively.” I believe that people should be able to worship as they see fit and make choices. And that’s one of the unique things about our church, too.

Interviewer: So okay, so you’re saying that our church is unique in a sense because you can choose. You can get your praise on. If you want to have your conservative praise, you get your conservative praise. If you want to get your shout on, you get your shout on.

Ron Liburd: Right. Whereas in the past, as you were cognizant, as you’re very cognizant of, the Youth Church was to set up as a training ground, a training tool to go into the Senior Church and it really was the same. It was constant from one sanctuary to the next.
Now what’s happening is I find a lot of adults in the Youth Church because they want that style of worship over there. And then you find little trickles of youth in the Senior Church, because they don’t really want that style over there as well. Now an interesting thing to do is to find out those young people which might 2 or 3 of them why they’re in the Senior Church. What are they looking for? And if you ask them, they’ll tell you, “I don’t like the Youth Church” and find out what their background is. Some of it has to do with their background, and how they grew up. But that’s a whole other research project.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that’s outside the scope of this research.

**Ron Liburd:** It is; but I do believe that people, what’s happening is that most of the parishioners, they’re choosing their church of worship based on what their needs are. What they’re looking for in their spiritual walk. And what takes them to another level to meet God or see God’s face.

**Interviewer:** Why don’t you just tell me what church offices or committees or roles have you done in the church?

**Ron Liburd:** Ninety-five percent (95%) of it has been in the music department. I was Youth Music Coordinator. I can’t remember the year, for the life of me.

**Interviewer:** Oh, really? I might be able to find that out.

**Ron Liburd:** Yeah, find that out. I was Youth Music Coordinator. I came after Clinton [Aurelian].

**Interviewer:** After Clinton. So what happened with the music in the Youth Church?

**Ron Liburd:** Back then when the music, after Clinton, what was happening back then…

**Interviewer:** I’m listening.

**Ron Liburd:** Yeah, that’s okay. I’m trying to remember what we had. There were, I think, maybe if Sylvia Williams, if her children’s choir was still in effect. I’m trying to think. I think it was. I can’t remember the way it was. But I know that when I was in charge, a young man named Arden Altino, he was on that organ every single Sabbath. I make sure of that.

**Interviewer:** Oh, Altino.

**Ron Liburd:** Arden, he’s their cousin. A, R, D, E, N. Arden Altino

**Interviewer:** He’s related to that Altino?

**Ron Liburd:** He’s their cousin. Arden. A, R, D, E, N.
Interviewer: I remember. Okay.

Ron Liburd: He was on that organ every single Sabbath.

Interviewer: On the organ…

Ron Liburd: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: On the Allen…

Ron Liburd: Mm-hmm. He played that Allen every single Sabbath. I remember that… And I remembered that because it was after Harrison [Watkins].

Interviewer: Yeah. Harrison died in ’95.

Ron Liburd: Right. It was after Harrison. And back then, we didn’t have… What was the Fellowship Choir operating then?

Interviewer: That’s possible.

Ron Liburd: I don’t remember. But I know a lot of it was a lot of music that was happening back there was actually more solos and duets.

Interviewer: So why was that? Why was their more solos and duets instead of the choral?

Ron Liburd: Yeah, I always wondered myself why too. And it probably has something to do with… I didn’t think I did a good job at that. I think I was still finding myself in the church and I didn’t have a lot of the help after Harrison. I think you were not around as much either because you were at Mannes. I don’t remember what was going on.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was at Mannes in the late ‘90’s… late ‘90’s. I was spending my time at Senior Church.

Ron Liburd: Yes, you were. Yeah, because you had kind of disassociated with music as you were taking a break. But anyway, there wasn’t a lot of help that I had back there.

Interviewer: I found it kind of frustrating to work back there.

Ron Liburd: I did as well. I found it very frustrating. I was working with Neil Reid.

Interviewer: Now what happened? Speaking of which, were you around when he changed that whole ministry thing?

Ron Liburd: I was the person, one of the back there with him.
**Interviewer:** Okay. So from my understanding here, he changed the entire structure or the organizational structure of the Youth Church.

**Ron Liburd:** Yeah. And then I was heavy under Rayborn. No not Rayborn. Oh, gosh, not Rayborn. I’m sorry. What’s the name of that man? Trinidadian… he’s in a Conference right now. You know who I’m talking about…

**Interviewer:** Trinidadian…

**Ron Liburd:** He’s in a Conference right now. Roger Wade.

**Interviewer:** Oh, Roger Wade.

**Ron Liburd:** Roger Wade came in while I was working. What year was that? Can you find out what year that was?

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

**Ron Liburd:** Who came before him?

**Interviewer:** Who was before Wade?

**Ron Liburd:** Yes, wasn’t it, what’s his name? Neilly?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Ron Liburd:** Who’s in between Neil Reid and Roger Wade that I worked as music coordinator in the Youth Church.

**Interviewer:** So I’m listening. I’m thinking. I’m still looking for my questions.

**Ron Liburd:** And Merriweather was the Senior Church Music Coordinator.

**Interviewer:** So what was the whole point of changing the organizational structure of the department? Do you know what?

**Ron Liburd:** No, because when I came in it was already changed. Because when I took that position it was already changed. Clinton was there when he actually changed it.

**Interviewer:** Then what were you responsible for?

**Ron Liburd:** I was responsible for just coordinating the music. Getting people to come in and sing.

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289 Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
Interviewer: So it was just mainly finding people outside of the church or inside of the church.

Ron Liburd: Inside… Jackie Bethea would sing a lot… inside, outside. I’m trying to remember what I actually did in the Youth Church. I really am. This is all short lived

Interviewer: Okay, from what I’m hearing, it sounds as if there really wasn’t any music structure back then.

Ron Liburd: There was not. And I didn’t implement any either because I was really, honestly frustrated. I was more appreciative of the style of worship in the Senior Church because the Youth Church was so chaotic to me.

Interviewer: So what was chaotic about the Youth Church?

Ron Liburd: There was no structure. There was absolutely no structure. I felt the right hand didn’t know what the left hand was doing. And I also felt as if no one had an interest in the appreciation of choral music, which to me was such a major part of any church worship service. And the music that was becoming a lost art form, which I always said was becoming a lost art form, was not something that the other young people appreciated. Seems I was the only one who had appreciation for it.

Interviewer: So then there was no choir.

Ron Liburd: No choir.

Interviewer: No functioning choir.

Ron Liburd: No functioning choir. Not that I can recall. Unlimited, I think probably was their functioning briefly. Unlimited, with June group... And I’m trying to remember...

Interviewer: Didn’t Edison have a choir back there too?

Ron Liburd: He did but that was before.

Interviewer: That was under Clinton?

Ron Liburd: Was Edison [Liburd]\(^\text{290}\) there when I was Youth Church Coordinator?

Interviewer: I don’t remember.

Ron Liburd: I have to go back. This is getting to be so ancient.

Interviewer: Yeah, it’s about trying to figure out what happened.

\(^{290}\) Edison Liburd is Ron Liburd’s cousin.
Ron Liburd: I’m trying to remember did the Fellowship Choir even exist then.

Interviewer: The Fellowship Choir I think was around the...

Ron Liburd: What year was that? Because I remember it was under the ministries.

Interviewer: It was in the ‘90’s.

Ron Liburd: It was in the ‘90’s, right?

Interviewer: Yeah. It was in the ‘90’s, like around the late ‘90’s…like maybe ’96, ’97.

Ron Liburd: Because the Fellowship Choir sang in the Youth Church a couple of times.

Interviewer: Yeah, we sang in the Youth Church and we sang in the Senior Church. We didn’t have a regular rotation.

Ron Liburd: Right. At the time when I was back there probably…

Interviewer: Wow.

Ron Liburd: I can get that cleared out after I refresh my memory.

Interviewer: Yeah. But it’s about finding the minutes. I guess I’m asking, I keep going back to that structure. I guess I’m trying to get an idea of what it was like to have to serve in that area and not really be able to do the job.

Ron Liburd: Right.

Interviewer: I’m just wondering, what happened?

Ron Liburd: There was nothing in place to do the job.

Interviewer: I’m like, dang! What happened?

Ron Liburd: There was nothing in place to do the job. And part of the problem was that the structure that was back there, not even so much the music, but the structure was not one that allowed you to have a music structure.

Interviewer: Really.

Ron Liburd: Yeah, I didn’t get that. Like when I got to the Senior Church, I felt as if there was a better structure to administer some sort of a structure even though that had flaws, too. But that was easier. It was easier too, than in the Youth Church because it’s almost like they didn’t have an appreciation for it.
Interviewer: That’s interesting. I didn’t even realize that you were like back then in the Youth Church. I didn’t realize that.

Ron Liburd: Yeah, I didn’t like it.

Interviewer: You didn’t stay back there long either...

Ron Liburd: No, I didn’t like it at all, to the point where when I gave up that Youth Church position, I gladly gave it up. And Roger Wade was like… I’m trying to remember who followed me.

Interviewer: Was that Omar? Or you didn’t have any.

Ron Liburd: I’m trying to remember. Was it Sharon Hollingsworth? Some might have followed me. I’m going to find out who though.

Interviewer: And Sharon Hollingsworth, didn’t she come from Dimensions of Hope?

Ron Liburd: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay.

Ron Liburd: I think she followed me. No, no, wait a minute. Did she?

Interviewer: So the structure after Reid left was just in such a chaotic state that it just… I mean, it was…

Ron Liburd: Oh! I hate to say this. This is about to be on record?

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Ron Liburd: One of my biggest problems was the First Elder. And I know exactly who it is but it shall remain nameless. The first on the back there really did not support what I was trying to do. That was the problem.

Interviewer: Okay. Oh…

Ron Liburd: Him and I…

Interviewer: I wonder why…

Ron Liburd: Because he wanted more praise and worship. I wanted more anthems.

Interviewer: Oh, Phil Wesley.
Ron Liburd: No.

Interviewer: …was back there too. I know. Mm-hmm.

Ron Liburd: Yes, he was. But I had already left when Phil started.

Interviewer: Okay.

Ron Liburd: But Phil was back there as Youth Church person. I was there during Neil Reed and Roger Wade. The first elder back then…

Interviewer: Okay. Then so you think that was…

Ron Liburd: Oh, I know that was it. It was coming back to me now because I had blocked all that out, because you know I don’t hold on to that stuff. That was the issue. That was the big issue. I wanted a certain style. He did not. And he told me I was too dead.

Interviewer: He told you…

Ron Liburd: Oh, yes, he did.

Interviewer: Well, I think that’s kind of…

Ron Liburd: Verbatim. And that what I want was not reaching and that I need to have… I said, “How do you know it’s not reaching?” so I just decided to disassociate myself totally. And I just started sitting in the Senior Church.

Interviewer: So I’m trying to figure out…

Ron Liburd: That’s exactly what happened.

Interviewer: But then if at the time you were the coordinator and well, I still think that the whole thing was just jacked up because… Well, when I say jacked up I would say that not only was… I saw the decline in the Youth Church where we had this whole mix-up of our services and why we changed from a musician-driven department to a more lay person driven department. And a lot of it I think started in the Youth Church. It started in the Youth Church.

Ron Liburd: Go ahead.

Interviewer: Well, that’s very interesting. That whole…

Ron Liburd: But that was the reason. He was very resistant to what I was trying to implement and I literally buckled and gave up and decided not to even… as a matter of fact, I remember I didn’t even finish out my term. Whoever was responsible, I just said,
“You can do it. You can have it.” I’m trying to remember who was the person who I literally gave the…

**Interviewer:** Was it Garry [Graham]?

**Ron Liburd:** Was it Garry?

**Interviewer:** Was it Garry right after you, because I know Garry…

**Ron Liburd:** Garry was back there but it was the person before Garry. Was it Garry?

**Interviewer:** I don’t know.

**Ron Liburd:** I’ve got to remember who it was, Jeryl. I’ve got to remember who it was. I don’t remember who it was. Who was working with Roger? Whoever was working with Roger Wade… did Garry work with Roger Wade? Whoever worked with Roger Wade, it was that person because worked with him. I was the first person that he came and…

**Interviewer:** It could have been Garry. It could’ve been Garry.

**Ron Liburd:** It probably was Garry. Yes, it was Garry. It was Garry, yes.

**Interviewer:** Because I think at one point Nilsa [Salmon-Graham] was directing one of the children’s choir…

**Ron Liburd:** Yes, it was Garry.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Ron Liburd:** Yes, and at the time I left there; I was assisting Joe [Merriweather]. I wasn’t doing… I was assisting even when I was Youth Church music coordinator assistant, whatever, but then I was still assisting him, but I was not Youth Church music coordinator.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Ron Liburd:** Yeah. I was still working with him when I was not church music coordinator. I remember that, because Clinton and Peter and all those guys were on the Music Committee. And I was practically just doing the schedule for him anyway. That’s when I had the Male Chorus and all those…

**Interviewer:** So do you feel that there’s been a change in the music that’s used for service?

**Ron Liburd:** In regards to…
Interviewer: In regards to, I mean, well since the time that you’ve been at Ephesus, do you feel that you’ve noticed a change in the music that’s used for service? Senior Church? Youth church? Whichever one you want to… That question is like, so open.

Ron Liburd: That’s an open question. Maybe I should answer it like this. I know that the Ephesus in the past was the Ephesus that was more appreciative of choral music as it relates to SATB, traditional anthems, Spirituals, not a lot of inspirational songs. What’s happening now is, in the Senior Church that is becoming more of a constant. In the Youth Church, it’s not a constant. It’s definitely a 99%, well 100% deficiency. I don’t know if that helps with the answer to your question. But if you’re saying have I seen a change? I’ve seen a struggle in the Senior Church to hold on to the traditional anthems, gospel, SATB with a quality sound. I’ve seen that struggle.

Interviewer: Why do you think that’s a struggle in the Senior Church?

Ron Liburd: I think it’s a struggle because one, we have a lot of people who have left that were great singer. Either died or relocated down South. Part of the other issues as well is that some of the people who probably can sing don’t want to sing because they’re looking up they’re saying, “Well, they got good singers up there. I don’t need to do it.” But I think that’s a small percentage. But it’s still a factor. It is a factor. And then the other part of that equation is that you have people who culturally, as tradition as Seventh-day Adventists, can appreciate that type of music, but they really, honestly cannot sing. And so that has created a struggle for the Music Department, for a lot of the choral directors. For my appreciation in terms in what I want to hear any given Sabbath – and sometimes I have to knock myself in the head and be like, “You really don’t need to do this, Ron Liburd,” – but because I’m such a sucker for perfection and I really honestly just love music and love musicians to a fault, it becomes a struggle for me sometimes to not want to walk into the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church and not think that I’m at Westminster Abbey or Saint Thomas Episcopal Church. And that’s why sometimes to a fault, I try to maintain that high quality of anthems, which was always in the past.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. It was always there.

Ron Liburd: Always there. But I just hate to see it be [indiscernible] and I sometimes do it, one, because I love quality music and I want quality music. But two – and I’m being honest – two because I want the church members to walk in there and be like, “Wow! This is great!” Three, I want the visitors to be able to come back. That’s why I really do it. I don’t believe that you can spend enough money.

Interviewer: It’s like marketing.

Ron Liburd: Right. It is. That’s why I do it. If somebody walks up to me and say, “Oh, wow, I really like that.” I’m like, “Yes! I’ve achieved my goal. Come back.” Because I believe that music is a calling card. It really is; the biggest calling card. So I don’t know if I’m digressing from your question.
Interviewer: No, that’s part of it. I know you haven’t been around, I know you’re still relatively new to our congregation and all, but can you kind of just give me your perception of the ethnic demographic of our congregation? This is just your…

Ron Liburd: I think it’s still… This is interesting. Ephesus is still the largest African American Seventh-day Adventist Church in the northeast. With that being said, there’s still a lot of West Indians and people of other cultures as well. It is the most mixed congregation. If you look at all the Northeastern Conference of 155 churches, which is probably 156 now, it is still the largest diversified, culturally, church. Even though it has a large, and I hate to say West Indian, a large amount of… Even though the congregation is culturally diversified, it still has the largest African American population of Seventh-day Adventists in the Northeastern Conference, 155 churches.

Interviewer: So you’re saying that Ephesus still has the most…

Ron Liburd: …African Americans, yes. And that’s a beautiful thing because guess what, this is an African American…

Interviewer: So then you’re saying that most of the churches in Brooklyn and the Bronx are West Indians?

Ron Liburd: Absolutely, yes.

Interviewer: Caribbean?

Ron Liburd: Yes. Yes, mon, they are. Yeah. And what’s very surprising knowing that the background of most of those people are probably Episcopal, whatever, you would think that their worship structure would be something more traditional. But it’s not because even they are going to like, drums and whatever, their style of worship, I think only Bethel291 and I think one other church…

Interviewer: Hanson Place292…

Ron Liburd: Yeah. Even that’s kind of like… borderline. Yeah, and Hanson Place…

Interviewer: Because you know Hanson Place is the West Indian church in the Northeastern Conference.

Ron Liburd: Yes, right.

Interviewer: Yeah. It’s the church made up of – I mean, that’s when you look at their history – because they actually wrote a book about their history.

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291 Bethel SDA Church in Brooklyn, NY.
292 Hanson Place SDA Church is also in downtown Brooklyn, NY.
Ron Liburd: …yeah Trinidadians and Jamaicans. There’s more Trinidadians now… a lot of Trinidadians.

Interviewer: Okay.

Ron Liburd: They’re stronger.

Interviewer: But that’s interesting as you were saying that because I never…

Ron Liburd: Ephesus is the most…

Interviewer: …has the most African Americans.

Ron Liburd: Think about it.

Interviewer: You mean, people, black folk.

Ron Liburd: Yeah, think about it. You have, like, your family, Sandy Byrd’s family… Well, I’m just dealing with downstairs.

Interviewer: Bernice Wiseltier and her family, Wessie Jones and her family…

Ron Liburd: Searcy…

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Ron Liburd: …Harvin, Maurice and his mom; just the whole section. The one who used to count money with your Mom. What’s her name? Greene?

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. Right, right. Mm-hmm.

Ron Liburd: And you can just look at the downstairs and you’ll see a host of African Americans. And then if you go upstairs, there’s another host of African Americans as well. If you look at the whole… you have Judge Rashford, you have Pecola Lester, the people that sit in the very back row… I mean, you can come across… then you come around you got Sister Gooden…

Interviewer: But no, she’s from Barbados.

Ron Liburd: She is? I thought she’s from America.

Interviewer: Yes, she’s Bajan.

Ron Liburd: I didn’t know that.

Interviewer: I didn’t know that either.
Ron Liburd: Yeah, I didn’t know that. But okay, you got the Lynches and then you got the Prices.

Interviewer: But the Lynches not totally because…

Ron Liburd: Right, but she is half, right. But you know, you got…

Interviewer: Okay. All right.

Ron Liburd: It’s still a large… and you have Caroline Jones… I mean, you still have a large African American population that you could not find in any other Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Interviewer: Yeah. Even with some of the new people that are coming in… one other lady that sings in the choir, she’s… yeah. Mm-hmm. Do you think that Ephesus will ever get back to becoming a neighborhood church?

Ron Liburd: It can, but it has to be the right leader. That’s all I’m going to say.

Interviewer: Okay. Wow! I didn’t realize that there were that many Americans in our church. It’s still kind of… but we do have like a Spanish population. We have people from Costa Rica. We have people from Panama…

Ron Liburd: Right. But even with that, we still have a lot of… Even with the culture. And that’s what I say there’s so many different cultures…

Interviewer: Even though the Caribbean…

Ron Liburd: And there’s not a lot of Jamaicans. The Jamaicans are just louder.

Interviewer: It’s funny though because I think in the past, I don’t even think in the past there wasn’t a lot of Jamaicans.

Ron Liburd: Even when you hear Jamaican names…

Interviewer: …There’s a lot of Antiguans.

Ron Liburd: They are there as well. There are not a lot of Jamaicans. There’s only Sharon Blake, Roy Blake…

Interviewer: …There’s only a few. Let me see. So we talked about the music style used for worship and some of the changes and stuff. What else do I need to…
**Ron Liburd**: If you look at it, yeah, a lot of them are Americans still in that church. No, this is the only church like that of the Seventh-day Adventist church that’s predominantly [African American] in the Northeastern Conference. Right…

**Interviewer**: We kind of need that, though…

**Ron Liburd**: We do need that. That’s why I think it’s easy for us to lose our identity if we don’t be careful, because people will walk into the church and think it’s a Caribbean church. When they had the Community Guest Day and they were talking about the whole cultures of the Caribbean, I thought it was very inappropriate. You go to do the Welcome and you’re talking about the different cultures of different islands when this is an African American church in Harlem? And that’s how you welcome your visitors by you talking about the culture?

**Interviewer**: Yes, but you know…

**Ron Liburd**: You welcome the visitors and you say, “*Here’s it’s what we have*” - or make that a whole separate program. Nobody really cares about where you’re from. You put too much emphasis on where you’re from and it becomes too competitive and it turns people off. The visitor I was invited I was like, “*Oh, I don’t feel welcome here.*”

**Interviewer**: Really?

**Ron Liburd**: Yeah, my neighbor.

**Interviewer**: Oh, wow.

**Ron Liburd**: You don’t want that. I go to the pastor and he said, “*You’re right. And I was concerned about that.*” He’s African American; he understands.

**Interviewer**: Yeah. But strangely enough, when the church was founded there was a Caribbean population in the church. As matter of fact, J.K. Humphrey is Jamaican.

**Ron Liburd**: Yeah, you told me that last week.

**Interviewer**: Yeah, but I think too… but Elder Strachan was from the South. Or I should say, I think… I know that he ended up staying in the South, retiring in the South. But I would just say he was American, born here in this country. I think we’ve always had a Caribbean influence and population. I think a lot of it was kept at bay because of the immigration laws. So around the ‘70’s, the ‘80’s, that’s when we really started getting that explosion of people coming over. Then I think the influence of the church, of the denomination, is so strong in other parts of the world that when people come over, you know, it’s easy for them to connect.
Ron Liburd: That’s true. And then you have many migrations from different – they come from either Costa Rica, you have from Africa. So there’s that, too. I think June and her family did. Her father is from Costa Rica…

Interviewer: But I think their family was here for a while.

Ron Liburd: Her momma was from here, right?

Interviewer: Her mother’s Costa Rican too. So then with that being said, do you feel since we have a larger West Indian population or Caribbean population at the church that the music should reflect some of that culture?

Ron Liburd: I don’t see music as reflecting… Okay. I have to be careful in choosing my words because… I believe that because we’re a black church we should be still somewhat, you know, executing black music, you know, during Diving Worship Service. But I guess I’m partial because I feel and I understand what your question is – your question is, shouldn’t we try to have music that should meet the different cultures of the people that we are serving?

Interviewer: I mean, not every week but maybe like, if it was programming, maybe once a month. Because I know that sometimes George comes up with like old songs… what is it? Psalm 100 or 150 for my choir…

Ron Liburd: I don’t mind that as long as it’s executed in quality. My issue is quality. Can it be done in a quality manner? That’s what I get back to.

Interviewer: So for example, what are some of the songs that you hear – well, I don’t know – have you heard any songs in the Caribbean? When you were in the Caribbean in the churches there, did you hear any songs that were not necessarily out of the hymnal but that were reflective of that community or that area of the country?

Ron Liburd: I did.

Interviewer: But you never really…

Ron Liburd: Did I like them? Did I listen to them? Not!

Interviewer: I think a lot of that probably had to do with…

Ron Liburd: My standard was so high, Jeryl. I’m sorry, baby. My standard was so high. It’s my parents. It’s not me. It was everything I did. My parents are like your parents. You have to have a certain standard. Get education. Get this. Get that.

Interviewer: It’s funny though, because, I think, in this country the Negro Spiritual is something that is – when we think of Black music and Black culture – the Negro Spiritual is like the Mother music, the Mother genre. So when you hear gospel and stuff, it’s kind
of like an offshoot or a hybrid of the Negro Spiritual, which is [believed to be] the Mother music for Jazz and the Mother music for Blues and all of those things. And it’s here in this country, in the United States; it is something that is indigenous to this area. Even though we may still have the most African Americans in our congregation, the whole tone of our conference right now and even our own church is Caribbean, Haitian, and Spanish. There are so many different cultures and ethnicities. My sister’s father-in-law say, “If you really want people to participate in worship, give them something that people can relate to.” Of course, they can relate to a hymn and stuff, but sometimes if they hear something [song] that sounds like something [that they heard back in their native country…

Ron Liburd: But guess what, that’s the…

Interviewer: That’s like the back wood song, right? I mean, but every musical culture has something to that effect.

Ron Liburd: They do. In Barbados, they have this guy. His name is Joseph Knowles; Google him. Joseph Knowles has his following. And he was known to be like a lead gospel artist in the Caribbean. And a lot of his music was very repetitive. And there was no usage of the vocal techniques or the voice. So it was like, “Aah, ahh.” For me, that is not something I can appreciate.

Interviewer: Okay.

Ron Liburd: And I think that’s part of what I look for when I listen to music. It’s the voice to the ears, because you know music is noise, but it’s beautiful noise.

Interviewer: It’s organized chaos, yeah. Organized.

Ron Liburd: Organized chaos. That’s better. You understand what I’m saying?

Interviewer: But you know, I still think that there is something that’s kind of a moving about hearing [people from] other cultures sing their music.

Ron Liburd: That’s right. That’s why I don’t knock people when they do what they want to do it because I realize that this is something that they want to do it. It’s about freedom to choose. But this is not something I would appreciate. That’s why I have to have an open mind. That’s what I say; I try to have an open mind.

Interviewer: Because you know it’s funny, I’m even wondering one day…

Ron Liburd: J.293 don’t like no gospel; but he knows they like it at his church.

Interviewer: Oh, he does it?

293 J. is the Music Director at a one of the churches in the Harlem community.
Ron Liburd: What? You know the discussions we’ve had about how low their music is?

Interviewer: But he can wail it out, boy!

Ron Liburd: Because he knows that’s what they want. That’s what I’m talking about. But he says, “I know that’s something low.” But he knows that’s what they want, not because he likes it.

Interviewer: I think that’s probably part of why our denomination has not looked at – or when you look at the music guidelines – why you’re [advised to] refrain from this, refrain from that. All of the music – that is, all of the characteristics, I would say – that you find in black music [we are advised not to entertain it]. But there is some beauty to it. Here’s something interesting that I just found out. I didn’t realize that in the Adventist church, they use the “line” their hymns, too, in the early church. Where did they get “lining” from? [They got it from] way over in England.

Ron Liburd: Right.

Interviewer: But it’s a technique that was used in the South, too. And when I go down South, to the backwoods of Georgia, and I hear those people singing them parallel fourths – when I know they could use a third and a sixth right here or something like that – it’s something… it’s an eerie, soothing kind of sound. And just to feel the people stomping… I mean… but that’s black music. For example, for the life of me, to this day I do not know the tune to A Charge to Keep I Have. It’s a hymn that they used in the Sunday School in the South, southern Sunday School and stuff. But every time I go down to the South, I hear a different tune. I mean, people are still slurring up to the same notes, slurring down and stuff. But it’s such a style that is just so different. And there are people from that are in our congregation who came from that. And that was a part of their spiritual upbringing.

Ron Liburd: Good point.

Interviewer: So that’s why I’m wondering is it possible if we were to maybe like have something, you know, if we wouldn’t know some Caribbean, some songs or some spiritual songs that we sung that… I know Donnie McClurkin,294 in one of his albums he did a nice medley [that consisted of Caribbean gospel songs] stuff. I don’t know what the songs are, but there are things that minister to… you see what I’m saying?

Ron Liburd: Yes.

Interviewer: It reaches people where they are. And since our congregation is predominantly…

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294 Donnie McClurkin is a world-renown gospel singer and pastor who is based in the New York City area.
Ron Liburd:  Let me tell you this. Can I tell you something? While I understand what you are saying and I concur on some levels that you should meet people, at the same time, people come to the church because they’re looking for a certain style. I keep that in mind.

Interviewer:  Really?

Ron Liburd:  Mm-hmm. Do you know what made me move to Ephesus? My sisters, when they visited there… because we were going to North Bronx.

Interviewer:  Oh, you were all at North Bronx? There are a lot of Caribbean folk out there.

Ron Liburd:  No, not North Bronx. I take it back… Grand Concourse.

Interviewer:  Oh, that’s another West Indian church. That’s in Greater New York Conference.

Ron Liburd:  And when I first came here in 1989, that’s where they took me. And my Aunt Emelyn and Edison were going to Ephesus. And they said, “Come visit us on Saturday at Ephesus.” We went down there to visit them because I was in town briefly. And I went there and I said – I forgot what choir was singing. I knew it was Everyl and…

Interviewer:  Collegiate?

Ron Liburd:  …one of those choirs. And I said to my sisters, “Now this is where we all need to be...” and they were like, “That is to true. We ain’t coming back to Grand Concourse Church.” And that’s why Diane and Rholda moved to Ephesus. And I left and went back because they are here. I was then in college. They decided to come to Ephesus; that’s what we liked. So my point to you is, people come because they’re looking for that quality and structure, which I dare say, is not found anywhere else but other Adventist church within the Northeast. Ephesus is still that standard and staple for order, for a certain style that people are really looking for. So we got very mindful, while I hear you.

Interviewer:  No, I’m just…

Ron Liburd:  I hear you because you’re concerned about, which is good…

Interviewer:  No, I was just asking a question…

Ron Liburd:  ...because you’re concerned about pleasing the masses. But at the same time, the masses are there [at Ephesus] because the masses want to hear that. If they didn’t want to hear, they would leave. I’m telling you. People are very clear when it comes to their worship service. There are some people who will come to church

295 Diane and Rholda are Ron Liburd’s sisters.
regardless, but there are those who come there specifically with that mindset in mind, that when they come here, they’re going to hear quality music and they really want to hear it. We [his family] did not look at any other Seventh-day Adventist church in the conference because they don’t have that style that we have at Ephesus, the structure. They’re looking for that.

**Interviewer:** So even with, the sound [from the choir] being as polished as we would like…

**Ron Liburd:** …we’re still better than most. We’re still better than most. And when we put the extra quality in – and you know what I’m referring to – it enhances people’s worship experience. That’s what they’re looking for. That is what’s ministering to their souls. So not only what you recommend then would minister, but dare I say that the majority of them are there and continue to come because they’re looking for that. They want that to be their style of worship.

**Interviewer:** All right.

**Ron Liburd:** Even the young. There are some young college kids who are living in the area who are like, “Yeah, that’s the only place to hang out.” There are two young people who said that they would not go to another Adventist church in the area. There’s a young lady who’s attending. She’s a minister’s daughter. She went to Oakwood. I forgot her name. But she says, “I can’t go to the Youth Church.” I said, “Come go with me.” And this is somebody who is in her late ‘20’s, a marketing exec. So what I’m saying is, you may have the mindset like, “Oh, I like the Youth Church,” But there’s still a lot of people who really want that [traditional sacred music]. They’re looking for that. They can’t find it and they’re Seventh-day Adventist… They can’t find it in any other church. Abyssinian is the church for the young people to go to if they want to get quality music on a regular basis. If they want to hear the other one, they go to First Corinthians. They have that choice amongst the first-day Baptists. We have to give them that choice as Seventh-day Adventists here in the northeast. Ephesus is the choice of quality anthem worship service, traditional Seventh-day Adventist, which is becoming in a loss form of worship.

**Interviewer:** Okay, I’m going to move on to… We will be talking about this all day. But what do you know about the music structure at Ephesus?

**Ron Liburd:** It’s one that needs to be revamped. They need to hire a Minister of Music.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Ron Liburd:** …one. Two… that’s what I know about it. The way it’s set up right now, they’re not really paying a Minister of Music. They’re paying a head organist, probably some money for pianists, choristers, whatever. But the structure should be set up where you have a minister of music in-house, somebody who is qualified to do that position.

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296 Abyssinian Baptist Church.
And having someone who’s just administratively running it works, but it’s like really having…what’s the word…a patch on a sore that’s going to make the sore reappear. They need to hire a minister of music. With that being said, there are monies that need to be channeled to make that happen, whether it be from conference level or whatever. One of the problems that I have within our structure, our Seventh-day Adventist structure, is that there’s not enough emphasis being placed on music within the churches. They will hire somebody to be the Religious Liberty Coordinator, or the hire the ministers for all different churches, but they don’t think about that you’re having people going to the universities studying music but not actually saying, “Okay, we got all these young people who are studying ministry. We’re placing them in different churches and finding jobs for them. But we got all these people studying music, why can’t we place them too? How are they going to survive?” You got nurses, doctors. The only place that you can actually survive who’s studying music is in the church, unless you send them out to the world.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. And that…

**Ron Liburd:** That’s the problem. And we have not appreciated musicians within our churches, or put prerequisites, put certain entities in place so that musicians are taken cared of once they leave our schools. We give them all the tools they need while they’re in the university. But when they come out, we don’t take care of them. We expect them to just fly on their own. And then we disrespect them by not wanting to pay them when they do sing, play, whatever.

**Interviewer:** People who play [a keyboard instrument], they do get a little bit more…they’re higher on the totem pole…

**Ron Liburd:** But we respect the teachers in our schools. We find jobs for them, gladly in our schools. We don’t give the musicians the same respect that you them find in jobs in our school or in our churches. We should probably be the most [indiscernible] place for them to be. And I think that needs to be looked at.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Ron Liburd:** That’s my opinion.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So I mean, as far as Ephesus is concerned, do you think they have a music education program? Do you feel that we are educating people about music?

**Ron Liburd:** I think Ephesus is trying to do that, like Cathy with the Bell Choir. You have done a good job at that with your Chancel Choir and electing Courtney to carry on with that. They’ve done a lot of that. So I think within the Senior Church with Cathy, I don’t just want to say Senior Church, but her and yourself, there’s some education. But the deficiency really is in the Youth Church. I want to see that be revamped to include somebody who’s a music educator back there. I think it will definitely help in terms of a training ground for musicians and ultimately be effective to worship in the Senior Church.
Interviewer: Yeah. So then it sounds like even with the Youth Church, it’s still about transitioning.

Ron Liburd: Right.

Interviewer: I mean, so that’s the way it should be but it seems as if some folks don’t want to transition.

Ron Liburd: Right. They really don’t. But you got to give it to Omar. He has been driving to me that he really wants…

Interviewer: Is that why he’s been bringing what’s her name over?

Ron Liburd: He’s been bringing that lady over, and asking Chantal to check him out. He’s been telling them to come and been like talking to them. He really, really… honestly, I got to give him his part. He’s been talking to you. He knows you’re busy but he really does not want… He wants more.

Interviewer: I think it has to be. It’s about vocal longevity. It’s about teaching…about people understanding that there’s just a certain protocol that we should be able to adhere to. And it’s about educating. I sat back there [in the Youth Church] one Sabbath when Mae came because I knew she was singing. She sang the spiritual and she sang a “torn down” gospel.

Ron Liburd: I bet they liked that.

Interviewer: Yeah. But with the spiritual, they were very quiet. That’s a good thing in a sense because it’s about listening. You have to be able to listen to it. And I think because we’re not getting that at the schools… I’m looking at R. T. Hudson when Mrs. Gardner left. When they moved Mrs. Gardner to the classroom, even though she was there for a minute, they lost the choir. I was at Northeastern for like a semester and a half. I had to leave because...the interest was just elsewhere. It was not with the music. And I even spoke with Mr. Chung, too. And it was just a really bad breakdown…very bad.

Ron Liburd: I blame the Conference and conferences for that.

Interviewer: Well, I think they need a rationale. And I got to buy Cheryl Wilson Bridges book because she really talks about that. She actually works for one of the

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297 Chantal Wright is the founder/director of Song of Solomon Inspirational Ensemble, an independent high school age choir based in Harlem.

298 Mae Carrington, a soprano who lives and performs in the Harlem community.

299 Northeastern Academy, the high school sponsored by Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
conference, that White conference where CPC is. CPCS is Community Praise Center. So she is assigned to that church, but she’s paid by the conference.

**Ron Liburd:** And that’s the way it should be. And that’s my point. Why is it like that?

**Interviewer:** But it’s something. She also mentioned was the fact that it was something that she had to pray about. She prayed it about. They prayed it about. Before she even took the position, she said that she had to go in and pray about it. She says, “Lord, you know if I do see these things we’re going to need.” She wrote it up, gave it to the pastor. He says, “I don’t know if we could do all these things. I see what you’re saying, but I don’t think we’re going to be able to do all of this.” But it all boils down to prayer, prayer, fasting, prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer and prayer.

**Ron Liburd:** You’re right.

**Interviewer:** And I think when you do what music ministry is not the same mentality as secular music. When you’re working in music ministry, there’s just a certain way that you have to go about things, whereas in the professional, in the worldly sense, they have their procedural things that you need to do in order to make or achieve it. So where would you like to see our music department at Ephesus in about the next 10 years?

**Ron Liburd:** I knew you were going to ask that question. With the minister of music in place and with quality choirs, SATB Youth Church to Senior Church. Period. That’s it.

**Interviewer:** That’s it?

**Ron Liburd:** Yeah. I want to see a minister of music. We have choral, choirs, whether it’s male or whatever. And the same in the Youth Church. It’s SATB music. So it’s not just gospel. It’s a trade-off between both.

**Interviewer:** Do you see our music program being opened up to the community? Do you see us do more in the community within 10 years?

**Ron Liburd:** I hope we can. But first we have to take care of a lot of in-house matters. You can’t reach outside when your house is dirty. I’m just saying.

**Interviewer:** I know, it’s like saying, “Come on over…”

**Ron Liburd:** …You know what I’m saying…

**Interviewer:** …and your place is looking busted.

**Ron Liburd:** Yeah. You have to clean up your own house first, and then you can think about reaching out to others outside to come in and dine with you, to share in your joy and your ministry. What are you trying to do? I tell you, I’ll been sitting back and
watching, and enjoying it. I’m sure it’s going to be good. I’m looking forward to that retreat. But you being the head, Jeryl…

**Interviewer:** Well, but you know it would have to be a Board action because it was a Board action that changed…

**Ron Liburd:** With some guys you have to circumvent things. You have to go to the conference level and tell them what you would like. Hence, Bridges.

**Interviewer:** But she didn’t start…

**Ron Liburd:** No, I’m saying she went through the channels. I’m just saying that’s she did something; the Conference is paying her now. Just do what you got to do, because at the end of the day, guess what… if you’re paying tithes, you can talk to any conference member you want. You’re a shareholder, baby. What?

**Interviewer:** I know. Yeah.

**Ron Liburd:** That’s how you got to see yourself.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Do you think we have something in place right now to nurture young musicians?

**Ron Liburd:** Yeah, only the Bell Choir.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So for example, there’s a young child at our church who’s taking piano lessons. Do you think that we are training her properly? When I say properly, I mean do you think that we’re giving her enough experience to…

**Ron Liburd:** She should gain more experience. She should be able to play like during Sabbath school, for Divine Worship Hour. I believe that you had mentioned that. And I thought about that, and you know, you’re right.

**Interviewer:** We’ve covered all of my little questions with my open-ended questions. I think we’re done. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

**Ron Liburd:** You’re welcome. Anytime.
APPENDIX C
THE SENIOR CHOIR
Of
EPHESUS SDA CHURCH

These brief notations are dedicated to the faithful members of the Senior Choir who love the service of the Lord. In this writing there is nothing new but several reminders of music matters too important to forget.

There are some things in choir service that are so basic that too often they go without saying, and so what is written here is a somewhat neglected statement that I pray will be useful and helpful to all.

Blanche Cox,
Directress
HELPFUL MUSICAL HINTS

Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. (Psalm 147:1)

Only one who has personally experienced Christ's redemptive work can have a harmonious life that produces a true song upon the lips. Hence, such a person should desire to proclaim that message as effectively as possible to others so that they too may desire the source of his inner joy.

Any Christian with reasonable musical talent and a sincere desire for service can, under proper leadership, make a valuable contribution to his church's program through the choir. A church choir, however, can have a worthy ministry only to the extent that each individual member realizes the importance of church music and desires to develop his own talent. As individuals become aware of their musical development and increase in spiritual effectiveness, they will realize greater personal satisfaction and joy in Christian service.

As we serve our Lord through the medium of music, may this hymn express the there of our ministry:

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace.
Glory to God and praise and love
Be ever, ever given
By saints below and saints above,
The Church in earth and heaven.

It must be emphasized that even if it were possible to achieve the ultimate in technical mastery, in the sight of God singing would still be heard as "sounding brass or tinkling cymbal" if the motives for service are not sincere and spiritual.

1. Spiritual Concepts for a Church Choir Member

A. A realization by each member that the three main attributes of a church choir member are:
   1. Spirituality
   2. Musicianship
   3. Sociability

A. A realization by each member that he has a vital place in one of the great heritages
B. of the Christian Church. From the time of Hebrew worship and throughout the Church's history, choirs have been one of the important factors in group worship.

C. A realization by each member that the main purpose of a choir is not mere entertainment or the display of individual talent. Rather, it is the blending of many talents and personalities into a composite force that has unusual possibilities for providing inspiration, warmth, and unity to a service. Music can often present spiritual truths that are accomplished in no other way.

D. A realization by each member that during a service he personally should serve as an example to the congregation as:

1. A leader for attitudes of reverence and worship.
3. A leader of responsive Scripture readings.
4. A leader with regards to his general alertness, attentiveness, and respect to the pastor and his message.

E. In general, a genuine conviction on the part of each choir member that his entire life, conduct, and reputation must be consistent with his privileged ministry – that of a leader in the worship and praise of God.

Vocal Helps

A. The two most important objectives of choral singing are:

1. Good tone.
2. Effective interpretation of the message of the song.

B. Characteristics of good tone are:

1. A quality of roundness, richness and pleasantness rather than one of flatness and harshness.
2. A feeling of flow, flexibility and ease rather than a sense of strain.
3. A steady, unwavering quality rather than one with a "wobble."
4. A forward, projected quality rather than one that is throaty and breathy.
5. A quality of clearness and naturalness rather than one of distortion and affectation.
6. The quality of correct pitch---good intonation.
7. A sensitive, expressive quality--one that reflects the emotional meaning of individual words.

C. Clear, pure tones are dependent upon singing the right vowel for each syllable of each word.
The Five Main Vowel Sounds
1. a (may)
2. ee (me)
3. ah (lot)
4. o (know)
5. oo (too)

D. Diction. Not only is good tone closely related to good diction, but there must be a certain amount of exaggeration in choral diction, more than that used in speaking, if the words are to be understood.

Breathing

A. Steady, unwavering tones are dependent upon proper breathing habits.

B. A buoyant posture, whether one is sitting or standing, is a prime prerequisite for good breathing.

C. The capacity for greater breath control will increase as one gains singing experience.

D. The entire breathing process is much like the playing of an accordion. As the body is filled with new air, there must be an expansiveness in the body to make room for that air. As the air is used, there will be contraction in that bodily area.

E. Keep the chest raised as much as possible. However never allow any bodily muscular action to cause a tension in the throat. At all times the throat must be relaxed.

F. Always take more breath than is needed. Take each breath from the pit of the stomach. Gradually control the use of that breath with a feeling of a steady pull in and up from the upper stomach or the area between the cavity of the chest and the abdomen.

G. Work quickly for each new breath by simply relaxing and enlarging the entire area around the ribs, the lower chest, and the abdomen, without heaving the upper chest or shoulders, or without making audible noises through the mouth.

H. Replenish the breath before it is completely exhausted so that pushing, straining, and gasping are avoided.

I. The ability to sing an extended phrase on one breath is dependent upon the following factors:
1. Anticipating the difficulty of the phrase by taking a good deep breath before beginning the phrase.

2. Pacing or conserving oneself—not letting out all the air on the first few notes. (This holding back, however, must be accomplished by the body, not by the throat.)

3. Maintaining a relaxed throat and jaw position throughout the entire phrase regardless of how high or low the phrase may go.

4. Using all the bodily support possible—pulling in and up with the diaphragm to the very last note of the phrase, then quickly resetting oneself for the beginning of the next phrase.

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS INVOLVED IN SINGING

A. There should be a feeling of expansiveness and intensity around the entire abdominal area, while the head remains erect, yet perfectly relaxed.

B. There should be a feeling of a free, open throat—a feeling that the tone actually originates from the stomach and merely passes through the throat's opening, as a steady pressure from the diaphragm keeps the tone flowing evenly.

C. There should be a loose, dropped jaw that is slightly tucked in from the rest of the body.

D. There should be a sufficient opening of the mouth (generally the width of two fingers) with the lips in a slightly puckered position.

E. There should be a feeling that the vocal cords are maintained in a relaxed, vertical position rather than in a strained or spread position.

F. There should be a feeling that the tone for each-vowel: sung has a composite quality of "yawniness," nasalness, and yet forwardness as it is finally projected and directed by the tongue through the opening of the lips.

G. There should be a feeling of fullness and roominess in the throat, allowing the tone to flow freely.

H. There should be a slight sensation of increasing this roomy feeling as one ascends or descends in pitch. Never think of having to strain to sing high or low tones, or that these tones have to be sung with "another voice." This relaxed, open-throat sensation should never change regardless of how high or low, how loud or soft one is to sing or regardless of whatever the vowel sound might be.

I. There should be a relaxed, arched tongue, the tip of which rests easily against the
lower front teeth.

J. There should be an alert, flexible tip of the tongue that can quickly add the necessary consonants and do so without disturbing the relaxed jaw position.

1. On words which have the “d” and “t” consonants, this is accomplished by an explosive, forward push of the tip of the tongue.
2. On words which have the “l” consonants, this is accomplished by the tip of the tongue flipping down quickly from the roof of the mouth.
3. On words which have a “th” consonant, the tip of the tongue must work in cooperation with the upper teeth --i.e. “there,” “then,” etc.
4. On words such as “blood,” the tip of the tongue must work in cooperation with the lips.
5. On words which have the “wh” consonant--i.e. “what,” “when,” “where,” “why” – the tip of the tongue must work in conjunction with a slight blowing action through the lips.

K. When humming, there should be a feeling of a down jaw, closed but relaxed lips, and teeth that are slightly separated.

L. There should be a feeling when beginning a song or a new phrase that one has already prepared his bodily support as well as his mouth and jaw positions for the first vowel to be sung. Don't prepare to sing after the tone begins. This only makes for poor tone and poor attacks.

M. There should be a feeling when releasing a tone that the jaw is maintained in the same relaxed position throughout the duration of the tone, while the tongue and bodily support coordinate to put on the final cut-off. This keeps the throat open and the cut-off free from any harsh "barking" sounds. (the higher the pitch of the note to be released, the greater the problem of achieving this type of smooth cut-off, necessitating even greater use of one's bodily support).

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

A. Know the over-all character and mood of each song you sing. Ask yourself such questions as these: “Is this a song of adoration, praise, joy, comfort, assurance, etc.?” “Whom am I supposed to be representing as the singer?”; “To whom am I singing?”; “What effect should the message of this song have upon the listener?” Then be willing to let yourself get completely into the mood of the song, even though at first there might be a feeling of self-consciousness. (Truly effective interpretation for most beginning singers generally seems overly exaggerated.)

B. Be able to express in your own words the meaning and emotional connotations of all of the individual words in the song.
C. Be aware of contrasts between words, phrases, or verses of a song. Make these contrasts apparent and meaningful.

D. Keep a motion and intensity to the music. Don't let it become sluggish and wordy. Stress the important words of each phrase--don't labor on the unimportant words. Don't make all words of equal importance--make the adjectives point toward the nouns, etc.

E. Make repeated words or phrases intensify and emphasize the thought by use of contrasts--making the repetition louder, softer, faster, slower, more emphatic, etc., but never letting repetition result in monotony.

F. Keep your mind as well as your voice alert throughout the entire song so that it is worthy of your audience's attention.

   1. Connect the thoughts between Words; phrases; and verses when there is a relationship.
   2. Be aware of a phrase with a series of descriptive words or thoughts, making sure that each word or thought within the series adds to the total meaning of that phrase.
   3. Give sensitive expressiveness to individual words that have particular color and importance.
   4. Make quotations apparent when they occur.
   5. Be aware of the question-answer relationships found in many songs.
   6. Anticipate the climaxes in a song and be ready to make them inspiring when they occur.

G. Give the right stress to each syllable of each word in general in the same proportion that the syllables are stressed when properly spoken.

   Example - Fa'-ther; can - pas'-sign; be – gin

H. Never let a tone become stagnant. Do something with any tone held for any duration. Either swell the tone, diminish the tone, or possibly combine both ideas.

**WATCHING THE DIRECTOR**

A. Keep your attention concentrated on the director at all times. Don't let your eyes wander around the audience. Don't get into the habit of simply staring into the music when it really isn't necessary.

B. Hold your music at eye level so that you may easily observe and reflect the director's facial and hand movements.
C. Be continually thinking ahead so that attacks, releases, special effects, and climaxes do not catch you unaware. Know the music especially well at these places so that you can give the director your undivided attention, thus assuring him that he is free to interpret the song without fear of not being followed.

D. A director's right hand is the rhythm or tempo hand. His down beat will always identify the first beat of each measure.

E. A director's left hand is for the purpose of showing his intentions for interpretation, cueing the entrances of various parts, and indicating releases.
   1. An open palm means to sustain or increase the volume of tone.
   2. A down palm means to decrease the amount of volume of tone.

PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS

A. Sense your individual responsibility of properly preparing yourself both spiritually and musically for every service.

B. Prayerfully desire and expect to impart an inspiration and blessing to the congregation. Don't be content merely to get through the song.

C. Reflect the meaning and mood of a song with your face as well as with your voice.

D. Be aggressive – be a leader in the matter of attacks even at the expense of making a mistake.

E. Sing with a spirit of spontaneity; yet listen to the voices immediately around you as you try to make your voice blend with their voices. If you hear only yourself, you are singing too loudly. If you can't hear yourself, you aren't singing loudly enough.

F. Maintain your poise and keep going no matter what happens. Forget past mistakes. Make up in the new phrase what you may have missed in the previous phrase. Remember, even though you have made a mistake or you hear the mistakes of others, the general effect may still be pleasing and the mistake unnoticed by the average listener.

G. Be natural and friendly with the audience, yet keep a poise and dignity with regards to such matters as rising, sitting, conspicuous clothing or accessories, personal conversations, undue coughing or clearing of throats, especially before or after a special number, or any action that might attract attention to you rather than to your ministry.

H. Stay within the character of the song even when not singing – during the introduction, interludes, postludes, rests, solo parts, etc. During these times center your attention
on the director, not on your music or on the audience. Breathe deeply during these times, look relaxed and poised, and be anticipating the next entrance.

I. Try to follow the other parts in the music as well as your own. Know the relationship of your part to the other voices – i.e. always know where the melody lies, or a part that might have an important melodic movement, so that the other parts can be subordinated to it, etc.

J. With the exception of special effects, the basic rule of good choral singing is smoothness. When it is necessary for you to breathe within a phrase, try to sense when your partner is going to breathe, so that everyone within your section breathes at various times (staggered breathing), thus assuring a sustained, smooth phrase.

K. Guard your voice carefully. Do all that is possible to keep it in the best condition at all times. Refrain from excessive yelling and straining, staying in drafts, undue physical fatigue or heavy eating just before singing.

L. Miscellaneous:
   1. Hold the music with the left hand so that the right hand is free to turn pages quickly and quietly.
   2. Stand with the weight of the body on the forward part of the feet, generally keeping the left foot slightly forward.
   3. Keep the arms slightly out, from the body, reflecting the buoyancy of your posture.

ORGANIZATIONAL REMINDERS

A. Group participation requires individual discipline and determination. Never allow yourself to become careless and indifferent. Whether in practice or performance, singing God's praises and fellowshipping with other like-minded Christians should be a joyous experience. Make each choir meeting a happy occasion for you and for the other members.

B. The spiritual effectiveness of any church choir is directly proportionate to its loyalty and morale. Factors that can undermine this are:
   1. Erratic attendance at rehearsals.
   2. Habitual tardiness at rehearsals.
   3. Missing the service after attending the rehearsal.
   4. Singing in the service without attending the rehearsal.
   5. Unrelated foolishness and lack of attention during rehearsals.
   6. Unfriendly attitudes towards other members, or the formation of little cliques within the choir.
   7. Ill feelings that are voiced publicly rather than privately to the director, such as immediate dislikes to new music, new ideas or suggestions, etc.
8. Members who are more concerned about displaying their individual talent or satisfying personal interests rather than working for the good of the entire group.

9. Voicing opinions to others regarding one's disrespect for the director or the organization, especially to those outside of the organization.

10. In general, any action or attitude that dampens the enthusiasm of present or future choir members.

The various details involved in successfully administering a church choir are far too complex for any one person. There must be organizational structure and cooperation from each member with regards to such matters as: group administrator and assistant to the director (president); distribution, collection, and maintenance of the music (librarian); social and sick details; (social chairman); maintenance of robes (robe chairman); finances (treasurer); records, correspondence (secretary); as well as a willingness by every member to lend assistance whenever needed. There should be a real desire on the part of every member to see the choir continually improved and enlarged.

CONCLUSION

At all times, whether -in practice or performance, one must keep in mind this basic principle: if a ministry for the Lord is worthy of our-service, it is also worthy of our very best effort and effective use of our God-given talent. To that end may our lives be dedicated and ministries blessed, that He alone might receive the honor and glory. ...whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 1 cor. 10:31
Ephesus Collegiate Choir (c. 1990)
Everyl Chandler Gibson, Director
The Senior Choir (c. 1982)
Blanche Cox, Director

New Believers Chorus (c. 1963)
Rosa Lee Jones, Director
The Larkettes (c. 1979)
Sylvia L. Williams, Director

Children’s Chorale (c. 1990)
Sylvia L. Williams, Director  Eugene Washington, Accompanist
Ephesus Bell Choir (2010)  
Cathy Hall-Nixon, Director

Ephesus Chancel Choir (2011)  
Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming, Director  George Davey, Organist
APPENDIX E
Seven Last Words: A Dramatic Presentation
(Bensheh Morgan)
Seven Last Words: A Dramatic Presentation
Levon Downs (soldier) and Omar Adams (Christ)

Seven Last Words: A Dramatic Presentation
Morris Adams (Simon of Cyrene) and Omar Adams (Christ)
Seven Last Words: A Dramatic Presentation
Omar Adams (Christ) and Marsha Williams (Mary Magdalene)
Seven Last Words: A Dramatic Presentation
Omar Adams (Christ) and Nicholette Douglas (Mary Mother of Jesus)

Seven Last Words: A Dramatic Presentation
Last Scene
PART I

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PART TWO

PROGRAM NOTES

The Doctorate of Musical Arts degree requires the candidate to perform three recitals and a lecture recital. One recital may be substituted with a principal operatic role. Program notes from the aforementioned recitals are included in this section of the paper.

The first recital took place on February 20, 2005, and featured music of Mozart, Strauss, Liszt, Bachelet, and various African American composers. The second recital was a sacred recital, featuring the music of Bach, Bernstein, Barber, Rorem, and African American composers. This recital took place on November 29, 2005. The operatic role selected to replace the third recital is the role of the Queen of the Night in a modern production of Mozart’s *Magic Flute*. The performances took place on February 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2006.

The lecture recital, which took place on November 27, 2012, chronicled the musical culture of the Ephesus SDA Church, and featured the repertoire of the various musicians, performers, and composers who have graced her facility.
Program One
Solo Vocal Recital

University of Kentucky School of Music
Presents

Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming, Soprano

William Cooper, Piano

In a
Sunday, February 20, 2005
Singletary Center for the Arts

Recital Hall
PROGRAM

Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!, K.418                        Wolfgang A. MOZART
                        (1756-1791)

Vier Letzes Lieder                        Richard STRAUSS
                        (1864-1949)
Frühling
September
Beim Schlafengehn
Im Abendrot

Oh! Quand je dors                        Franz LISZT
                        (1811-1886)

Chère Nuit                        Alfred BACHELET
                        (1864-1944)

Excerpts from Field of Wonder                        Harriett DAVISON WATKINS
                        (1923-1978)
Stars
In time of silver rain

Excerpt from Three Dream Portraits                        Margaret BONDS
                        (1913-1972)
Dream Variation

Come with me                        Harry T. BURLEIGH
                        (1866-1949)

Fi-yer!                        Hall JOHNSON
                        (1888-1970)

Guide My Feet                        arr. Jacqueline HAIRSTON
                        (b. 1939)

Ride up in the chariot                        arr. Betty JACKSON KING
                        (1928-1994)
“Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio” (K. 418)

This aria was written as an insertion aria for the Vienna performance of Pasquale Anfossi’s *Il curioso discreto* in June 1783. The opera premiered in Rome at the Teatro della Dame in 1777. The libretto is based on an episode in Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. Giovanni Bertati is often cited as the author of the opera’s libretto, while others name Guiseppe Petrosellini as the librettist. Mozart also wrote two additional arias, “No, che non sei capace” (K. 419) and “Per pietà, non ricercate” (K. 420).

The aria is inserted at the end of the first act. In an attempt to test his bride’s fidelity, Marchese Calandrino persuades his friend, Count di Ripaverde, to court Clorinda. Clorinda, after several attempts by the Count, finds herself in love with two men. At the beginning of the aria, she talks about her confused state; however, at the end of the aria, she acquires a strong resolve and sends the Count away.

*Vier letzte Lieder for soprano and orchestra*

*Vier letzte Lieder* (translated “Four Last Songs”) were composed in 1948 when Richard Strauss was 84. The work premiered on May 22, 1950 at the Royal Albert Hall in London by Kirsten Flagstad, soprano, accompanied by the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. Unfortunately, Strauss did not live to hear the premiere.

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The text for the work comes from two poets, Joseph von Eichendorff (*Im Abendrot*) and Hermann Hesse (*Fruhling, September, and Beim Schlafengehen*).  

*Ruhe, meine Seele! Op. 27, No.1* (Karl Henckell), originally composed in 1894 for voice and piano, was also orchestrated in 1948. It has been suggested that *Ruhe, meine Seele!* should have been included in the grouping and placed as a prelude to *Im Abendrot*. Though the songs were not conceived as a set, they were published together as a set and given the overall title Four Last Songs by Ernst Roth, friend of Strauss and the chief editor of Boosey & Hawkes.

The subject matter for this group of songs is death, more specifically, the acceptance and completeness of death.

“**Oh! Quand je dors**, song for voice and piano, S. 282i”

“Oh! Quand je dors” was the first of seven poems of Victor Hugo set to music in 1842. There are two versions of the song published – the first version published in Berlin in 1844, while the second version published in 1859. Out of the many vocal songs composed by Liszt, this is his most popular. This song displays Liszt’s ability to capture the idiomatic style of French mélodie. “As a body of works, Liszt’s songs have fallen into general neglect, but “Oh! quand je dors” haunting melody and subtle intensity – not to mention its piano accompaniment, which is considerable more manageable than those of many other Liszt songs – have helped to secure a place for it, along with a few other favorites, in the repertory.”

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301 According to Denis Arnold, there is a fifth song that wasn’t completed at Strauss’ death.

302 Ibid.

“Chère Nuit”

Alfred Bachelet was a French composer and conductor who was prominent during the early twentieth century. He has written three operas, the last one, Un jardin sur l’Oronte, being his most successful. Bachelet wrote a number of choruses and songs. “Chère Nuit” was written in 1897 based on a poem by Eugène Adenis. This work, by which Bachelet is best known, was written for Dame Nellie Melba – an Australian soprano who was the first Australian to receive worldwide recognition as a classical musician.304

Excerpts from Field of Wonder

Harriette Davison Watkins was an accomplished concert violinist. She was a graduate of Oberlin Conservatory of Music. She continued her studies at Cleveland Conservatory of Music, Juilliard, and Columbia University. Mrs. Watkins, one of the founders of Music Among Friends, played with many organizations including the Harlem Symphony and the Symphony of the New World. She was married to jazz French horn player, Julius “Phantom” Watkins.305

Field of Wonder is a cycle of four pieces for voice and piano, based on the poetry of Langston Hughes. The work is unpublished.

“Dream Variation,” from *Three Dream Portraits*

*Three Dream Portraits* by Margaret Bonds (1913 – 1972), a work based on three texts by Langston Hughes, was written for two singers associated with the New York City Opera – Adele Addison (“Dream Variation”), and Lawrence Winters (“Minstrel Man,” and “I, Too”). The work was premiered by tenor Lawrence Watson in 1959 at a National Association of Negro Musicians concert given in Columbus, Ohio.

Dream Variation, the text is set in two stanzas, while the piano is through-composed:

The vocal part of “Dream Variation” begins with an ascending melody, similar to that of “Minstrel Man,” with Bonds having veiled the tonal center. After the introduction, the tonic is not heard until the end of the first strophe, although even here quartal harmony (chords build on fourths) tempers the effect of its presence. Imagery is suggested by the use of an ascending scale pattern in the bass with the words “to fling my arms wide,” by the character of the piano part with the word “dance,” and by the repose of the accompaniment on the word “rest.”

“Come With Me”

Harry T. Burleigh is mainly known for his concert arrangements of Negro spirituals; however, he was a prolific composer of American art songs. During his tenure as music editor at G. Ricordi, Burleigh published a collection of art songs. “Come With Me” was published in 1921 and features the text of Lura Kelsey Clendening, a contemporary author of *Ropes of Sand* (1907).

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“Fi-yer!”

Francis Hall Johnson, a native of Athens, Georgia, was a choral director, composer, arranger, and violinist. He has coached hundreds of singers, including Marian Anderson and Shirley Verrett. He was also the founder and director of the Hall Johnson Singers. Hall Johnson is known for his choral and solo arrangements of Negro Spirituals. “Fi-yer!” is the title piece from Hall Johnson’s 1959 operetta by the same name.

“Guide My Feet”

Jacqueline Hairston is a professional pianist, composer, and vocal coach based in the Oakland/San Francisco area. She received her musical training at the Juilliard School of Music, Howard University School of Music, and Columbia University (Master’s in Music). While her education was in classical music, her professional career has given her experience in many realms, particularly in the world of Negro spirituals. Hairston’s list of commissions for original compositions and arrangements is impressive and includes the names of Florence Quivar, Kathleen Battle, Denyce Graves, Shirley Verrett, Grace Bumbry, Benjamin Matthews, William Warfield, Robert Sims, and New York’s Opera Ebony.
Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!
qual è l’affano mio;
ma mi condanna il fato,
a piangere e tacer.

Arder non può il mio core
per chi vorrebbe amore
e fà che cruda io sembri
un barbaro dover.

Ah conte, partite, correte,
fuggite lontano da me;
la vostra dileta Emilia v’aspetta,
languir non la fate è degna d’amor.

Vier Letze Lieder

“Fruhling” (Hermann Hesse)

In dämmrigen Grüften
träumte ich lang
von deinen Bäumen und blauen Lüften,
von deinem Duft und Vogelsang.

Du kennst mich wieder,
Du lockst mich zart, es zittert
Durch all meine Glieder
Deine selige Gegenwart!

Oh, God, how I would like to explain to you
Oh, God, how I would like to explain to you what my anguish is;
But fate condemns me to weeping and silence.

My heart cannot burn
for whom it would wish to love,
and a barbarous duty makes me seem cruel.

Ah, Count, depart, run, flee far from me;
Your beloved Emilia awaits you.
Do not make her languish,
she is worthy of your love.

Ah stelle spietate!
nemiche mi siete.
Mi perdo s’ei resta,
oh Dio! mi perdo.

Four Last Songs

“Spring”

As in a gloomy vault,
I dreamt so long
Of your trees and blue breezes,
Of your fragrance and
The songs of your birds.

Now like a miracle you lie unfolded
Before me in lustrous adornment,
Flooded with light.

You know me of old;
You draw me to you tenderly,
And your blessed presence send
A quivering through my every limb!
“September”

Der Garten trauert,
Kühl sinkt in die Blumen der Regen.
Der Sommer schauert
Still seinem Ende entgegen

Golden tropft Blatt um Blatt
Nieder vom hohen Akazienbaum.
Sommer lächelt erstaunt und matt
In den sterbenden Gartentraum.

Lange noch bei den Rosen
Bleibt er stehen, sehnt sich noch Ruh.
Langsam tut er die (grossen)*
Müdgeworden Augen zu.

“October”

The garden mourns;
Rain falls cool upon the flowers.
The summer quietly shivers
Towards its close.

Leaf after leaf drips golden
From the tall acacia tree.
Summer, astonished and spent,
Smiles on the dying garden dream.

It tarries long among the roses,
Yearning for rest,
And slowly closes eyes
(large and) weary.

“Beim Schlafengehen”

Nun der Tag mich müd’ gemacht,
Soll meine sehnsuchts Verlangen
Freundlich die gestirnte Nacht
Wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.

Hände, lasst von allem Tun,
Stirn, vergiss du alles Denken,
Alle meine Sinne nun
Wollen sich in Schlummer senken.

Und die Seele unbewacht,
Will in freien Flügen schwebe,
Um im Zauberkreis der Nacht,
Tief und tausendfach zu leben.

“Whilst falling asleep”

The day has made me weary,
And my yearning desire will be gently received
Like a tired child by the starry night.

Hands, rest from all doing;
Brow, cease from all thinking,
For now all my senses would sink
Into slumber.

And my unguarded soul longs to move in flight unfettered – to live deeply;
Thousandfold, in the magic circle
Of the night.
“Im Abendrot”

Wir sind durch Not un Freude
Gegangen Hand in Hand;
Vom wandern ruhen wir (beide)*
Nun überm stillen Land.

Rings sich die Täler neigen,
Es dunkelt schon die Luft,
Zwei Lerchen nur noch steigen
Nachtträumend in den Duft.

Tritt her und lass sie schwirren,
Bald ist es Schlafenszeit,
Dass wir uns nicht verirren
In dieser Einsamkeit.

O weiter, stiller Friede!
So tief im Abendrot
Wie sind wir wandermüde –
Ist dies etwa der Tod?

*Omitted in the song

Oh! Quand je dors (Victor Hugo)

Oh! Quand je dors,
Viens auprès de ma couche,
Comme à Petrarque apparaissait Laura,
Et qu’en passant
Ton haleine me touché…-
Soudain ma bouche s’entr’ouvrira…

Sur mon front morme
Où peut-être s ‘achève
Un songe noir qui trop longtemps dura.
Que ton regard comme
Un aster s ‘élève…
Soudain mon rêve rayonnera!

Puis sur ma lèvre
Où voltige une flame,
Éclair d ‘amour que Dieu même épura,
Pose un baiser,
Et d ‘ange deviens femme…-
Soudain mon âme s ‘éveillera!

“In the evening glow”

Through joy and sorrow
We have gone hand in hand;
Now we (both) rest from our wanderings,
Here above the still countryside.

Around us the valleys slope away,
The air already darkens;
Only two larks dreaming of the night,
Rise up in the haze.

Come, and leave them hovering;
It will soon be time to sleep,
And we must not stray
In this solitude.

O wide, still peace!
Deep in the twilight,
How weary we are of wandering –
Can this be death?

Oh, When I slumber

Oh, when I slumber,
come close to my couch
Like to Petrarch appeared Laura.
And when in passing
your breath touches me,
Then my lips will suddenly open…

On my mournful forehead,
where perhaps is ending
A dark dream, which lasted too long,
Let your glance like a star arise;
Suddenly my dream will become radiant!

Then on my lips, where a flame is
fluttering, Lightning of love, by God
Himself made pure,
Place a kiss and change from angel into
woman,
And suddenly my soul will be awakened!
Chère Nuit (Eugène Adenis)

Voici l’heure bientôt.
Derrière la colline
Je vois le soleil qui dècline
et cache ses rayons jaloux…
J’entends chanter l’âme des choses,
Et les narcisses et les roses
M’apportent des parfums plus doux.

Chère nuit aux clartés sereines,
Toi qui ramènes le tendre amant,
Ah! descends et voile la terre
De ton mystère, calme et charmant.
Mon bonheur renait sous ton aile,
O nuit plus belle que les beaux jours.
Ah! lève-toi! Ah! lève-toi!
Pour faire encore
Briller l’aurore
De mes amours?

Dear Night

Soon the hour will come.
Behind the hill
I see the sun setting
And hiding its jealous rays…
I hear the soul of things singing
And narcissus and roses
Waft to me perfumes most sweet.

Dear night of serene clarity,
You who brings back the gently lover,
Oh, descend and veil the earth
In your mystery, tranquil and charming.
My happiness is reborn
Under your wing,
Oh night more lovely
Than the lovely days,
Oh, arise! Oh, arise!
Perhaps to revive once more
The shining dawn of my love?

Chère nuit aux clartés sereines,
Toi qui ramènes le tendre amant,
Ah! descends et voile la terre
De ton mystère, calme et charmant.
Chère nuit, Ah! descends!
University of Kentucky School of Music
Presents

“Soli Deo Gloria”: An Experience in Sacred Song

A Recital Presented

by

Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming, Soprano

and

Cliff Jackson, Piano

With

Cliff Jackson, Piano
Emma Robinson, Violin
Ella Chang, Violin
Benjamin Karp, Cello
Brandon Craswell, Trumpet
Seth Morris, Flute

Tuesday, November 29, 2005
7:30PM

Central Christian Church
205 East Short Street
Lexington, KY
PROGRAM

“Mein glaubiges Herze”  
from Also hat Gott die Welt Geliebt, BWV 68  
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)  
Cliff Jackson, Organ  
Benjamin Karp, Cello

“Komm in mein Herzenshaus”  
from Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, BWV 80

“Ich folge dir gleichfalls” from Johannes-Passion, BWV 245  
Seth Morris, Flute

Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, BWV 51  
Arie – “Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen”  
Recitativ – “Wir beten, zu dem Tempel an”  
Arie – “Hochster, mache deine gute”  
Choral – “Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren”  
Seth Morris, Flute

Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, BWV 51  
Arie – “Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen”  
Recitativ – “Wir beten, zu dem Tempel an”  
Arie – “Hochster, mache deine gute”  
Choral – “Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren”  
Seth Morris, Flute

INTERMISSION

Excerpts from Mass  
Meditation No. 1  
Meditation No. 2  
Meditation No. 3  
“A Simple Song”  
Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)  
Cliff Jackson, Piano  
Benjamin Karp, Cello

“Lord Jesus Christ”  
from The Prayers of Kierkegaard  
Samuel Barber (1910-1981)  
Seth Morris, Flute  
Benjamin Karp, Cello
Alleluia

Ned Rorem
(b. 1923)

Great Day

arr. Thomas Kerr
(1915-1988)

Steal Away

arr. Roland Carter
(b. 1942)

Don’t Feel No-ways Tired

Jacqueline Hairston
(b. 1939)

Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming, Soprano
Cliff Jackson, Piano

Reception Following Recital
“Mein glaubiges Herze” from *Also hat Gott die Welt Geliebt, BWV 68*

*Also hat Gott die Welt Geliebt, BWV 68* was written in 1725. It was first performed on May 25, 1725, the second day of Pentecost. The libretto for this cantata was written by Christiane Mariane von Ziegler, who Bach seemed to favor, since he wrote nine cantatas based on Ziegler’s poetry. He did take some poetic license to adapt the librettos to his music, much to Ziegler’s dissatisfaction. In the soprano aria, “Mein glaubiges Herze,” Bach borrows the ritornello from one of his earlier cantatas, *Was mir gehagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd, BWV 208*. Although many people are aware that “Mein glaubiges Herze” comes from Cantata 68, the cantata is not well known.

“*Komm in mein Herzenshaus*” from *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, BWV 80*

*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, BWV 80* is based on the famous chorale “A mighty fortress is our God” written by Martin Luther. Bach composed the cantata for The Feast of the Reformation. This liturgical holiday was celebrated every year on October 31, in honor of the day that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the castle church at Wittenburg in 1517. The soprano aria, “*Komm in mein Herzenshaus*” is the fourth movement in the work; “its small scale and reflective character provide relief from the prevailing grandeur of the work.” [Robins]

“*Ich folge dir gleichfalls*” from *Johannes-Passion, BWV 245*

*Johannes-Passion, BWV 245* is one of the two surviving passions in completion. According to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Johannes-Passion,*
Bach’s first large-scale choral work for Leipzig, was first performed at Vespers in the Nicolaikirche on Good Friday (April 7, 1724). The text for the work is not cohesive; Bach adapted the text himself from pre-existing passion poems. Bach’s use of text helps to shape or paint the tone of various arias in the work. For example, the aria, “Ich folge dir gleichfalls” (I follow you), has a flute obbligato that “follows” the soprano melody.

**Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, BWV 51**

*Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, BWV 51* was originally written for the fifteenth Sunday after Trinity (1730), during Bach’s seventh year as Kantor of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. It is believed that Bach wrote the text for this cantata because the text doesn’t correspond to the readings for its appointed Sunday. There are several scriptural references to praise and thanksgiving, making this the perfect cantata for any time of the year.

The first movement is a da capo aria in ritornello form and very jubilant. The trumpet obbligato is intricately balanced with the soprano voice. The second movement is a recitative separated into two parts. At the word “lallen” (stammer) Bach displays his interest in word painting with a particularly elongated phrase that is both meandering and jagged.

The third movement is a dal segno aria. The text, a prayer for God to bestow his mercies every new day, is set to a complex, wide-ranging melodic line that has an instrumental quality.

The final movement starts as a violin duet, while the soprano sings the chorale tune “Nun Lob’, mein Seel’, den Herren,” exhorting all to “give praise, glory, and honor to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” The lengthy “Alleluja,” rejoined by trumpet, is a
noteworthy example of the virtuosic demands Bach often places on soloists. Its rollicking exuberance lends a particularly joyous tone to the cantata’s conclusion.

“A Simple Song” from *Mass: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers*

*Mass: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers* was composed by Bernstein for the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. on September 8, 1971. It was directed by Gordon Davidson with additional texts by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Schwartz, sets by Oliver Smith, costumes by Frank Thompson, and choreography by Alvin Ailey. The piece follows the liturgy exactly, but it is juxtaposed against frequent interruptions and commentaries by the Celebrant and the congregation, much like a running debate. On the narrative level, the hour-and-a half long piece relates the drama of a Celebrant whose faith is simple and pure at first, but gradually becomes unsustainable under the weight of human misery, corruption, and the trappings of his own power.

“Lord Jesus Christ” from *Prayers of Kierkegaard*

*Prayers of Kierkegaard* was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation in 1942, but Barber did not complete the work until January, 1954. Barber selected several prayers interpolated through Kierkegaard’s writings and sermons, written between 1847 and 1855. They are found in his journals, in *The Unchangeableness of God* and in *Christian Discourses*. The work was first performed by the Boston Symphony on December 3, 1954, with Charles Munch conducting, Leontyne Price, soprano and the Cecilia Society.
“Alleluia”

Ned Rorem is considered one of the most prolific composers of the American arts song, with over 500 songs listed in his catalog. “Alleluia” was written in June 1946. Dedicated to Jennie Tournel, a popular mezzo-soprano of the era, “Alleluia” was first premiered by Janet Fairbank, soprano, and Henry Jackson, piano, in New York City at Carnegie Recital Hall in the fall of 1946. Though Rorem is a self-proclaimed atheist, he has composed a wealth of music for the church. In his book Pure Contraption, he states that his compositional thrust is the listening audience and using texts that he believes in. This is true even of texts consisting of one word – Alleluia.

“Steal Away”

Roland Carter, distinguished composer-arranger and conductor, is UC Foundation Professor of Music at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Carter served as Head of the Cadek Department of Music and Conservatory for six years (1989-1995). Prior to returning to his hometown to accept this assignment, he served as Chair of the Department of Music for three years at Hampton (Institute) University and director of its internationally acclaimed choirs for nearly a quarter century. Carter’s list of presentations during the past thirty years is impressive, which includes concerts in the nation’s most prestigious venues and with major orchestras, lectures, workshops, master classes, and festivals for schools, churches, colleges, and universities throughout the country. His compositions and arrangements are performed by music organizations throughout the world. He is founder and CEO of MAR-VEL, a publisher specializing in
music by African American composers and traditions. "Steal Away" was commissioned by The “Negro Spiritual” Scholarship Foundation in 1997.

“Great Day”

Thomas H. Kerr, Jr. was a longtime distinguished Professor of Piano and Composition at Howard University. Revered as the organist for the Campus Chapel, Kerr composed a large number of works for piano, organ, solo voice, and choir. Most of Kerr’s compositions are unpublished.

“Don’t Feel No-ways Tired”

Jacqueline Hairston is a professional pianist, composer, and vocal coach based in the Oakland/San Francisco area. She received her musical training at the Juilliard School of Music, Howard University School of Music, and Columbia University (Master’s in Music). While her education was in classical music, her professional career has given her experience in many realms, particularly in the world of Negro spirituals. Hairston’s list of commissions for original compositions and arrangements is impressive and includes the names of Florence Quivar, Kathleen Battle, Denyce Graves, Shirley Verrett, Grace Bumbry, Benjamin Matthews, William Warfield, Robert Sims, and New York’s Opera Ebony.

“Don’t Feel No-ways Tired” is an arrangement of the spiritual that incorporates the traditional spiritual arrangement with a gospel flair.
TRANSLATIONS

“Mein glaubiges Herze”

Mein glaubiges Herze,                  My faithful heart,
Frohlocke, sing, scherzo,             Rejoice, sing, be merry,
Dein Jesus ist da!                    Your Jesus is here!
Weg Jammer, weg Klagen,              Away with sorrow, away with lamentation
Ich will euch nur sagen:              I will only say to you:
Mein Jesus ist nah.                   My Jesus is near.

“Komm in mein Herzenshaus”

Komm in mein Herzenshaus              Come dwell in my heart
Herr Jesu mein Verlangen.             Lord Jesus, my desiring!
Treib Welt und Satan aus              Drive world and Satan out
Und lass dein Bilt in mir erneuert Prangen! And let Thine image find in me new glory!
Weg, schnöder Sündengraus!           Away, contemptible horror of sin!

“Ich folge dir gleichfalls”

Ich folge dir gleichfalls mit       I likewise follow you
Freudigen Schritten                  with eager steps
Und lasse dich nicht,                And will not forsake you,
Mein Leben, mein Licht.              My Light and my Life.
Befördre den Lauf                    Show me the way,
Und höre nicht auf,                  And don’t stop
Selbst an mir zu ziehen,             Guiding, pushing,
zu schieben, zu bitten.             and questioning me.

Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!

Aria

Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!        Praise God in every land!
Was der Himmel und die Welt          Whatever creatures are
An Geschöpfen in sich halt,          Contained by heaven and earth
Müssen dessen Ruhm erhöhen,          Must raise up this praise,
Und wir wollen unserm Gott           And now we shall likewise
Gleichfalls jetzt ein Opfer bringen,  Bring an offering to our God,
Dass er uns in Kreuz und             Not since He has stood with us
Allezeit hat bei gestanden.          At all times during suffering and necessity.
Recitativ
Wir beten zu dem Tempel an,  
Da Gottes Ehre wohnet,  
Da dessen Treu,  
So täglich neu,  
Mit lauter Segen lohnet.  
Wir preisen, was er an uns hat getan.  
Muss gleich der schwache  
Mund von seinen Wundern lallen,  
So kann ein schlechtes Lob  
Ihm dennoch wohl gefallen.

We pray at your temple,  
Where God’s honor dwells,  
Where this faithfulness,  
Daily renewed,  
Is rewarded with pure blessing  
We praise what he has done for us.  
Even though our weak  
mouth must gape before His wonders,  
Our meager praise is still  
pleasing to Him.

Arie
Höchster, mache deine Gute  
ferner alle Morgen neu.  
So soll für die Vatertreu  
Auch ein dankbares Gemüte  
Durch ein frommes Leben weisen,  
Dass wir deine Kinder heissen.

Highest, renew Your goodness  
every morning from now on.  
Thus, before this fatherly love,  
A thankful conscience shall display,  
though a virtuous life,  
that we are called Your children.

Chorale
Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren  
Gott Vater, Sohn, Heiligem Geist!  
Der woll in uns vermehren,  
Was er uns aus Gnaden verheisst,  
Dass wir ihm fest vertrauen,  
Gänzlich uns lass’n auf ihn,  
Von Herzen auf ihn bauen,  
Dass uns’rer Herz, Mut und Sinn  
Ihm festiglich anhangen;  
Drauf singen wir zur Stund:

Glory, and praise with honor be to God the  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!  
He will increase in us what  
He has promised us out of  
grace, so that we trust fast in  
Him, abandon ourselves  
completely to Him, rely on  
Him within our hearts,  
so that our heart, will and  
mind depend strongly on Him; therefore we  
sing at this time:  
Amen, we shall succeed, if  
We believe from the depths of our hearts.

Arie
Alleluja!

German translations courtesy of © Pamela Dellal, translator, Web publication: http://www.uvm.edu/~classics/faculty/bach ©
Program Three – Operatic Role
UK Opera Theatre Presents

The Magic Flute
By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – Libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder
Enlightened English Translation by Sally Stunkel
February 2, 4, 9, 11, 2006 – 7:30pm
Lexington Opera House

Creative Team

Producer
Dr. Everett McCorvey
Director
Sally Stunkel
Musical Director/Conductor
John Nardolillo
Vocal Coaches/Accompanist
Nan McSwain
Stephen Penn
Cora Hughes

Program Coordinator
Marc Schlackman
Production Supervisor
Bob Pickering
Set Designer
Tanya Harper
Lighting Designer
Lucy Brown
Costume Designer/Builder
Bob Haven
Assistants to Costume Builder
Bravo Guild
Assistant Stage Manager
Brittany Manning
Assistant Conductor
Robert Seebacher
Assistant Conductor
Eric Paetkau
Supertitle Translation
Sally Stunkel
Supertitle Formatting
Michael Turay
Catalyst/Projection Designer/Coordinator
Jon Fox
Assistant to Catalyst/Projection Coordinator
Shawn-Allyce White
Marketing/Publicity
Sheila Ferrell
Operations Manager, Opera House
Tom Haberman
Technical Supervisor, Opera House
John Ferguson
Supertitle Operators
Colleen Lauve
John Vest
March Media
Videographer
Jeremy Tackett

This production is sponsored in part by the Ralph and Ann Mason Opera Endowment,
The Lucille Little Opera Endowment, the State Research Challenge Trust Fund, The
Opera House Fund and the Lexington Opera Society, Inc.
The Magic Flute Cast

In Order of Appearance

Tamino                Yuell (Chuck) Chandler
First Lady                Mary Joy Nelson
Second Lady             Tiffany Fox
Third Lady                 Brandy Hawkins
Papageno                         Jacob Cook
Queen of the Night           Jeryl Cunningham*
                                 Adrienne Schram^  
Pamina                Darla Diltz
Monostatos              Mark Kano
First Spirit                Amanda Maddox
Second Spirit          Lauren Hatter
Third Spirit             Sarah Klopfenstine
Speaker              Eric Brown
Sarastro              Edward White, Jr.
Tamino’s Guide                Owen Sammons
Papageno’s Guide           Jeremiah Muwanga
First Man in Armor           Jeremy Cady
Second Man in Armor                Bradley Williard
Papagena               Amanda Balltrip*
                                 Kali Wilder^  
Pamina’s Understudy           Anne Fuchs

*denotes performance, February 2, & 11
The Magic Flute (Die Zauberflöte), the last singspiel composed by Mozart, was first performed on September 30, 1791 at the Theater auf der Wieden in Vienna. In the summer of 1791, Emanuel Schikaneder, impresario of the Theater auf der Wieden, commissioned Mozart to compose music to a libretto that he and Karl Ludwig Giesecke created for the popular, common-folk theater. The first performance could have been considered a family affair. Schikaneder not only wrote the libretto, he sang the role of Papageno, the bird catcher. Mozart served as conductor; his sister-in-law, Josepha Hofer was the Queen of the Night. Anna Gottlieb, the first Barbarina, sang the role of Pamina; Johann Joseph Nouseul sang the role of Monastatos.

There are many scholars who believe that The Magic Flute is an allegory based on Freemasonry. David J. Buch, in an article entitled, “Die Zauberflöte, Masonic Opera, and Other Fairy Tales,” believes that Mozart and Schikaneder did not intend to create an allegory. Based on his examination of the libretto, he believes that the Die Zauberflöte does not fit the main criteria of 18th century allegorical literature – the ability for the symbolism to be easily recognized – “the symbolic material either had a direct connection to royal patronage or evoked a theme with broadly popular interest for the audience.” Rather, Buch believes that while there are some Masonic elements in the

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308 Rushton states, “Other parts were taken by members of the company including Schikaneder’s brother and the wives of Schack and Gerl.”

Die Zauberflöte, the opera is heavily based on a fairy tale, Lulu, oder die Zauberflöte.\textsuperscript{310} Regardless of the controversy over the work being an allegory, a Masonic Opera, or a fairy tale, Die Zauberflöte is a favorite among many opera lovers.

The University of Kentucky Opera Theater (UKOT) production of Magic Flute substituted the Schikaneder libretto for a more enlightened English version written by director, Sally Stunkel. When asked why she created this version of the text, Stunkel felt that although she loved the music, directing it was “less appealing:”

It’s filled with cardboard archetypes…and, unless one has a somewhat post-modern approach to the show, these characters are always less appealing to a character-based director. Also I always found it odd that “enlightened” characters such as Sarastro speak in such racist and misogynistic terms. And why, for goodness sake, do wise people in opera have no sense of humor? Why can’t holy types teach with wit, irony and a sense of the ridiculous?\textsuperscript{311}

Stunkel borrowed philosophical ideologies from the “pages of all the great thinkers”\textsuperscript{312} – from Buddhism to Christianity, including Sufi sayings, Maori proverbs, and words from Lao-Tsu, the Talmud, and modern author, Og Mandino. The result was a production that reflected a more inclusive, modern sensibility of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century – “a vision of a harmonious and enlightened world.”\textsuperscript{313}

To Stunkel, the true heart of the story is the emotional, psychological, and philosophical journey made by the two young lovers, Tamino and Pamina. The real tests of these characters, in Stunkel’s view, are not the showy and mysterious “Trials of Fire and Water” of traditional productions, but instead the far more dangerous struggles to shed their earlier misconceptions about who they are and who they can become.\textsuperscript{314}

I sang the role of the Queen of the Night on February 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 11\textsuperscript{th}. In the opera, the relationship between Sarastro and the Queen of the Night is unknown. However, in

\textsuperscript{310} From Wieland’s Dschinnistan.
\textsuperscript{311} “Magic Flute Director’s Notes”, Playbill for Magic Flute,
\textsuperscript{312} Playbill for Magic Flute
\textsuperscript{314} Powell, 1.
this new production, Stunkel creates a history with Sarastro and the Queen. The two were in a relationship with each other, perhaps married, and very much in love. Their love produced a daughter, Pamina. At some point in their relationship, they had a major disagreement that resulted in their separation. Pamina, who has only lived with her mother the Queen, has been told all of her life that Sarastro is an evil being, when in actuality, it is her mother who is the evil one.

This role is very challenging because of the stamina needed in the first aria, “O Zittre Nicht.” In this aria, the tessitura sits in the middle part of the voice and the passages are long and legato. The second part of the aria moves and contains a series of melismas that moves to the one high F. The second aria, “Der Holle Rache” is easier to sing because the tempo is consistent and the tessitura is in the upper end of the voice.

The set and costumes in earlier productions “showed Islamic influences and neo-classical architecture appropriate to the Enlightenment.” However, for the set design, UKOT utilized a combination of photos and moving images that were projected in the background of the traditional set. An updated version of this technique was used in UKOT’s production of Porgy and Bess in January 2011.
Program Four
Lecture Recital

University of Kentucky School of Music
Presents a

Doctoral Musical Arts Lecture Recital

“We Sang Alleluia! Praise the Lord!”
Sacred Music at a Seventh-day Adventist Church
in Harlem

Presented by

Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming

with

Cliff Jackson
Piano

Tuesday, November 27, 2012
8:00 PM

Schmidt Vocal Arts Center
412 Rose Street, Room 213
Lexington, KY 40506
PROGRAM

Introduction
Ephesus SDA Church and Seventh-day Adventists

In the Beginning: Jennie Irvis (1882 – 1963)

Musicians, Performers, and Composers

Jesse J. Rowe (n.d.)
John Saw de Angels
Rise, Mourner, Rise

Joyce Bryant (b. 1928)
Eternal Life

Shirley Verrett (1931 – 2010)
Honor, Honor

Dr. Walter J. Turnbull (1944 – 2007)
Audio Clip from 1974 - “Kyrie” from Mass in G Major

Lynda Elliott (b. 1948)
The Publican
I Talked to God Last Night

Edwina Humphrey Flynn (b. 1950)
Rockin’ Jerusalem

Pamela A. Mann (1947 – 2010)
Teach Us to Pray

Angela M. Brown (b. 1963)
Watch and Pray

Timothy Amukele (b. 1976)
A Diligent and Grateful Heart
Stand the Storm

Questions and Answers


VITA

JERYL CUNNINGHAM-FLEMING

Place of Birth: New York, NY

Education

Master of Music Degree, Mannes College, The New School for Music
Major: Vocal Performance
New York, NY
1999

Bachelor of Music Degree, Oakwood University
Major: General Music and Vocal Performance
Huntsville, AL
1991

Professional Positions

Assistant Director
The American Spiritual Ensemble
Lexington, KY
2009 – Present

Choral Director, The Chancel Choir
Ephesus SDA Church
New York, NY
2007 – 2011

Voice Instructor
Song of Solomon Ensemble
New York, NY
2004 – 2005

Choral Director, The Voices of Praise
Ephesus SDA Church
New York, NY
2000 – 2001

Musical Director, The Ephesus Ensemble
Ephesus SDA Church
New York, NY
1999 – 2001

Associate Conductor, The Girls Choir of Harlem
The Boys Choir of Harlem, Inc.
New York, NY
1994 – 1995

Vocal Instructor
The Boys Choir of Harlem, Inc.
New York, NY
1987 – 1988

Performances

Harlem Opera Theater
Concert Series
Soprano Soloist
New York, NY
2011
**Handel, *The Messiah***  
Soprano Soloist  
Ephesus SDA Church  2011  
Abyssinian Baptist Church  2010  

**Gershwin, *Porgy and Bess***  
Ensemble  
New Jersey State Opera  2010  
Ensemble (Clara Cover)  
Belgium, Italy, Munich  2008  
Italy, Hannover, Madrid  2007  
Sweden, Japan  2004  
Germany, Amsterdam  2003  

**Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte***  
Queen of the Night  
University of Kentucky  2006  

**Monteverdi, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea***  
La Fortuna  
University of Kentucky  2004  

**Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro***  
Contessa Almaviva  
University of Kentucky  2003  

**Mozart, *Don Giovanni***  
Zerlina  
Mannes College of Music  1999  

### Scholastic and Professional Honors

- **Lymon T. Johnson Graduate Fellowship**  
  University of Kentucky  2001-2006  

- **Second Place, Advanced Upper Division**  
  National Association of Teachers of Singing, Eastern Regional Auditions  1999  

- **First Place Winner**  
  Canticum Dominum Sacred Music Competition  1998  

- **First Place College Division**  
  Alabama Music Teachers Association Auditions  1988  

- **First scholarship recipient**  
  Tennessee Valley Opera Association  1987  

Delta Epsilon Iota Academic Society  

Jeryl Cunningham-Fleming