



THE SPRINGFIELD FREEDOM CHOIR sang Friday in Amherst's Grace Church directed by Josephine Fullilove. (Photo by Jayne Chandler)

Gospel music rings true

By BARBARA STACK

AMHERST — On Friday night the lovely Grace Episcopal Church in Amherst was filled to standing with people of spirit come to renew their lives in the tradition of Black Christian worship. The event was offered as a gospel concert, contemporary and traditional, produced by Sophia Bilides of the Pioneer Valley Folklore Society.

"This is a traditional form of music that we hadn't produced yet," said Bilides. "We knew that there were a lot of Black gospel groups in the area and we went around and listened to several of them. We're very excited about this program."

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer, professor of music at UMass, opened the evening at the piano with a spiritual written in 1935 by Thomas A. Dorsey upon the death of his wife and infant in childbirth. Boyer stroked the piano and sang, "Precious Lord take my hand." He sang, "I'm so tired, I'm so weak," "Lead me home." A little later he stopped himself and spoke to the mostly white audience. "The vibes aren't just right. This is gospel music here. When you're down and out and you don't have anyone to turn to, you let it moan. That's where I'm at — and a lot of people in Amherst."

Boyer returned to the piano and resumed his worship in song. Soprano Terry Harris emerged into the vaulted sanctuary and joined "In glory I stand." Then he introduced alto Kharmia DeLamos, "When my life is almost gone." "Take your time," Boyer urged. "Yes, take your time," echoed the congregation among the audience. "Hear my cry, Hear my call" sang tenor Nathaniel Anderson. The Year of Jubilee Quartet had

arrived.

For over an hour the four sang, moaned and chanted spiritual music of great power and sweetness and words full of intention and meaning. Boyer introduced his own song, "Why don't you let Him, in your life": "I'm going to talk to you about how I feel, what I've discovered, The rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley."

The audience rose in their first familiar and hearty gesture of accord and appreciation to applaud the quartet's closing song, "I found Peace at the Altar."

The Freedom Choir, directed by Mrs. Josephine Daniels Fullilove, minister of music at Springfield's Third Baptist Church, brought 40 singers, some with trained, some natural voices to perform familiar traditional anthems and spirituals. They opened with "America." "Let Freedom ring." But it was "Down by the Riverside," sung with spirit, the voice of the choir silver-edged by an anonymous soprano voice, which generated the strongest response: clapping, swaying, voices in accord "to study war no more."

While Mrs. Fullilove directed from the piano, the choir was often lead by the well-felt conducting of Mrs. Betty Outlaw, also from the Third Baptist Church. Late in the evening she turned toward the audience and with the power of her strong belief and great voice called out, "I don't believe that he brought me this far just to leave me."

The PVFS began something Friday night. Spiritual practice grows with teaching and repetition. Teachers are among us. I urge the Folklore society to convene this would be congregation again next season.

92 Grantwood Drive
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2 April 1981

Ms. Barbara Stack
86-88 Lyman Road #1
Northampton, MA. 01061

Dear Ms. Stack:

Believe it or not, this letter comes in response to the newspaper clipping of the review of my concert which you sent to me in December of last year. I was determined to respond and I am just now getting caught up. Please forgive the delay in my answering.

I was very impressed with your review of the concert. As you must be aware, such a concert as ours presents several problems for the reviewer who takes a point of departure from Leonard Bernstein, Frank Sinatra or Billy Joel. The aesthetic is completely different and must be viewed from that aesthetic. I felt that you had a basic understanding of what we were all about and were able to comment on it without - as so many critics do - making fun of the whole affair because it is much easier to criticize something with which we are unfamiliar than it is to prepare oneself - and even then with the possibility of making an error.

I am saying, in fact, that it was a good review: observant, analytical, descriptive and synthesized. I want to thank you and your paper for the coverage and hope that in the future you will cover some of the other programs which are of the folk and ethnic nature.

Thanks again.

Sincerely,


Horace Clarence Boyer