Harlem Vocal Ensemble Traces Roots of Spirituals

By ALLAN KOZINN

When they are heard in the concert hall these days, spirituals straddle the line between folk music and art song, usually leaning in one direction or the other according to the aims and styles of the arrangers and performers. The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, the vocal sextet that performed at Carnegie Hall on Monday evening, focused on the music's folk roots and its ties to the more virtuosic side of gospel singing.

The ensemble was formed in 1966 by Francois Clemmons, a tenor, and Louis E. Smart, a bass, who met during a production of "Porgy and Bess." The other singers in the group are Janet Jordan and Barbara L. Young, sopranos; Ruth Elmore, mezzo-soprano, and Raymond Frith, baritone.

The group's aims are similar to those one hears espoused by early-instrument bands: specifically, they seek to restore the music to something approaching its original sound. In the case of spirituals, that means restoring dialect that has been smoothed over by modern arrangers, and finding a vocal style that is disciplined yet suitably free.

Most of the arrangements, consequently, were either by Mr. Clemmons and Mr. Smart, or were full-ensemble collaborations, with two traditional arrangers, Hall Johnson and William Farley Smith, represented by one setting each. The variety in the settings was striking. Some works, like "Motherless Chile" and "Go Down Moses," were offered in solidly choral, hymn-like versions. Others, like "Ah Gotta Robe," "You Better Min'" and a gorgeous setting of "Balm in Gilead" took a call-and-response form.

All the singers were featured as soloists within the ensemble context, and in some ways the most impressive was Miss Jordan, for although her soprano did not have quite the polish and vocal weight of Miss Young's, she had the agility and range to sail through a stratospheric cadenza at the end of "Go Tell It on de Mountain." Mr. Smart's deep bass and Mr. Clemmons's supple tenor are also among the attractions of the group's sound. Their artfully embellished duet version of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" was one of the concert's highlights.

The final segment of the program was a tribute to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and included a vibrant account of "Free at Last" and a rich setting of "Goin' Home." At the start of the program, and during the King tribute, prayers were read by the Rev. Herbert M. Groce Jr. of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.

Given the group's quest for an authentic performance style, one could argue that piano and conga drum accompaniments are a modern compromise. But Mr. Clemmons, quoted in the program notes, asserted that pianos and percussion were sometimes used by slaves on the plantations where the genre was born. Historical quirks aside, the piano accompaniments, couched in a 19th-century parlor style and played by Joy Hague, were consistently attractive, and Ell Fountain's percussion supported the music's rhythms and pointed up some of its intricacies effectively and unobtrusively.
In repertorio o mamma a Martin Luther King
di scena in Concerto Ensemble
Harlem Spiritual Ensemble

Con il concerto di domani vi aspettiamo Amica della musica

Agenda Città

Taranto

domenica 10 e martedì 11 novembre 1961
The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble will again sing the unique traditional negro spirituals at its two-day Korean concert June 15 and 16 at the Seoul Arts Center following last year’s smashing debut performance here.

Harlem Spiritual Ensemble in Seoul for encore concerts

8 members to perform soul songs June 15-16

The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, which swept Korean concertgoers off their feet in its Korean premier last year, will be back in Seoul for encore concerts.

The eight-member ensemble gives concerts June 15 and 16 at 8 p.m. at the Seoul Arts Center concert hall. On the program of the concerts are 20-odd negro spirituals including such favorites as “A-men,” “Good News,” “Goin’ Home” and “Swing Low Sweet Chariot.” They are sponsored by the vernacular daily Kookmin Ilbo.

The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble made its Korean debut at the Sejong Cultural Center last year and struck a chord with many Koreans with deep religious feeling. It was created in 1986 in order to keep alive the American negro spirituals as both a valid and important art form and an integral part of American history.

Comprised of six singers and two instrumentalists, the group has already achieved success in the United States and abroad. In addition to each member’s individual success in major opera houses and concert halls throughout the world, they are well known for their ability to capture the art, style, and character of the negro spirituals while maintaining human nobility.

François Clemmons and Louis-Edward S الخارج, founders of the ensemble and both outstanding representatives of the negro spiritual, keenly sensed the need to keep this art form alive. They arranged a group of traditional spirituals, gathered their finest colleagues and presented a debut concert at the Harlem School of Arts. The impact of that debut concert led to immediate performances in various parts of the U.S.

Clemmons once said, “We always use the original dialects and character of the songs when we sing them. We want them to sound exactly the way they did when slaves sang them in the fields and in church. We even spell the titles the way that the slaves pronounced them.”
Mercoledì gli Harlem Spiritual
Il celebre complesso vocale eseguirà canti religiosi afro-americani

La Società dei Concerti S. Cecilia, che ha sempre diferenziato le sue proposte spaziando tra la musica classica, il balletto, il jazz, presenta per il prossimo mercoledì 11 marzo un interessante show-concerto di spiritual.

Sul prestigioso palcoscenico del teatro Grande saliranno otto musicisti di colore che costituiscono l'Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, una formazione collaudata da oltre cinque anni, che ha riscosso grandi consensi sia in America che in Europa. Il fondatore e direttore artistico del gruppo è François Clemmons, che ha lavorato con compagnie prestigiose come la New York City Opera, la Houston Grand Opera, la Los Angeles Opera, mettendo in evidenza le sue grandi doti di tenore e la sua preparazione classica. Con lui saranno il soprano Janet Jordan e Barbara Youngs, il mezzosoprano Denise Lock, il baritono Raymond Frith, il basso Louis Edward Smart; il pianista Hal Beasley ed il percussionista Eli Fountain, che pure vantano importanti curriculum come solisti.

Questo particolare complesso vocale è nato per contribuire a mantenere viva nella sua semplicità originale e nelle sue manifestazioni più autentiche lo spiritual, forma d'arte che rimane un capitolo essenziale della storia della musica americana.

L'Ensemble è una delle pochissime formazioni professionistiche esistenti che si dedica esclusivamente a questo tipo di musica, con rispetto ed amore per una tradizione che dura da oltre due secoli. Gli spiritual sono dei canti popolari religiosi afro-americani le cui radici affondano nel periodo antebellico, quando questa musica costituiva l'unico mezzo per cercare sollievo alle sofferenze, speranze in un cambiamento. Sono sostanzialmente differenti dal gospel, sia nella forma meno scarna ed essenziale che nel contenuto che si distacca dalle originali matrici popolari. Avvicinati con maggior interesse e spirito di integrazione alla cultura occidentale, gli spiritual è in seguito diventato determinante per i movimenti per i diritti civili, quasi strumento di lotta ai tempi delle battaglie non violence di Martin Luther King.

Anche i testi, redatti nei dialetti usati dagli schiavi di colore del secolo scorso, sono rappresentativi del tipo di retaggio culturale e contribuiscono a mantenere inalterate le radici.

L'Ensemble ha ora portato a nuova vita questo genere musicale realizzando addirittura seminari e concerti nelle scuole americane, oltre che nei teatri. È della primavera '91 la registrazione di un album uscito per l'Arcadia che contiene un intero concerto dell'Harlem Spiritual Ensemble.

Punto di forza della loro esibizione è l'espressività e l'estensione di ogni voce, enfatizzate dall'accompagnamento musicale ridotto a pianoforte e congas. Il concerto dell'Harlem Spiritual Ensemble inizierà alle ore 21.

Il botteghino del teatro Grande sarà aperto mercoledì 10 e mercoledì 11 dalle ore 10.30 alle 12.30 e dalle 15.30 alle 18. I prezzi dagli spettatori sono di L. 40.000 per la platea, 35.000 per la galleria 35.000 per la galleria, 25.000 per la galleria, 15.000 il biglietto da 10. (c.a.)
Harlem Spiritual Ensemble heard

By Theodore Charles Stone

The first Chicago appearance of the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble at North Park College Friday night, February 14 was welcomed by a capacity audience which responded several times during the concert with standing ovations.

The performance was presented in conjunction with the college's observance of Black History Month emphasizing significant contributions of African-Americans, both past and present to the rich heritage of our country's culture.

Comprised by six singers and two instrumentalists, the large responsive audience was completely thrilled and even joined in clapping their hands with the ensemble in several of the Spirituals.

Members of the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble from New York, N.Y., include co-founder/director Francois Clemmons, tenor and Louis-Edward Smart, bass; sopranos, Janet Jordan and Barbara Young; mezzo soprano Ruth Elmore and baritone Raymond Frith with Hal Beasley, pianist and Morris Anthony McCormick, percussionist. With each member being a professional soloist on his own, the blending of voices was absolutely perfect for this kind of performance.

Spirituals are Bible stories set to music. They originated in the cotton and corn fields on the plantations in the South, and are a genuine basis for the true American music.

When blacks were brought to this country as slaves, they were forced to abandon their African culture. Two things however, weren't forgotten: their great sense of oral tradition and the highly developed understanding of complex rhythm. Both of these factors were incorporated when slaves accepted religion — Christianity — and began composing their own religious songs. Then, this is their own words, the Bible stories set to music became a new creation — the spiritual.

Today there is a growing acceptance of this musical form and many African American composers, musicians and performers are gaining considerable popularity in this special area.

One cannot forget that ragtime, jazz, blues, swing, gospel, rock and roll all have stemmed from the spiritual. The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble made a great impression.
Harlem Spiritual Ensemble

Snažni crnački glasovi
Koncert u «Lisinskom» kao programsko osvježenje

MLADEN MAZUR

ostovanje autentičnih Negro Spiritual grupa
nisu u nas česta, kao
da je nastup Harlem
Spiritual Ensemble
u velikoj dvorani «Vatroslav Lisinski»
dožao kao malo programsko
osvježenje Majstorskog ciklusa
Koncertine direktije Zagreb. U
nizu izvrsnih ansambla tog tipa koji djeluju u nekim središtima Sjedinjenih Američkih
Država (Oakland, Philadelphia), Harlem Spiritual Ensemble
predstavio je crnačke duhovne pesme njujorskog, odnosno
harlemskog crnačkog okružja. Pri tome valja spomenuti
da je nekoliko pesama predvođenih osnivačem ansambla Francoisem Clemmonsom, porijeklom iz američkog Juga.

Kao i svi sastavi koji izvode
crnačke duhovne pesme, i Harlem Spiritual Ensemble
svoje interpretacije gradi na
tradiciji zborenog pjevanja poznatog iz američkih baptističkih crkvi, nastojeci pri tom ostvariti određenu autentičnost a cappella aranžmana Francoisa Clemmons-a. Sve to sest snažnih crnačkih, turbulentnih muških i ženskih glasova uz relativno skromnu i ne prečesto korištenu instrumentalnu pritjeriju, nastoji obogatiti i odgovarajućim scenskim nastupom (ulaz nastava na pozornicu koji uz izvedenje klasičnih spiritual-tema, «Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child» i «Go Down Moses», dočarava robovsku proizvodnju crnačkog obroka na američkom Jugu).

U osjetljivom a cappella dijelu programa, pjevačima ne bi trebalo zamijetiti neke manje intonativne i druge nepreciznosti, budući da se one mogu svesti pod autentično izveden crnačkog spirituala. Veću su pozornost i odsežljenost publike privukli rasumljivo melodirni izleti ansambla u sferu ritmiziranog, tako zvanih swinging spirituala, s nazdočnoj autentičnosti elemenata spirituala poznatih kao «call and response» u izvedbama skladb i «I Wanna Be Ready», «You Better Mine» i «Amen». U takvim se izvedbama mogao, naime, u manjej mjeri uočiti namjerni bijeg od autentičnosti rustikalnosti i izvornog tipa interpretacije, u nastojanju da se postigne viši stupanj sofisticiranosti izvođenja toga glazbenog fenomena crnačke glazbe. Ansambi je u tome i uspjao postigavati interpretativnu sredinu između uobičajenog crvenog pjevanja i sasvim koncertantnog pristupa jedne Marion Anderson.

U ansamblu Harlem Spiritual Ensemble istakla se velikim rasponom glasa sopranistica Barbara Young, zatim tenor Francois Clemmons te snažni bas Lousa Edwarde Smarta.

Na kraju valja spomenuti da članovi Harlem Spiritual Ensemblea izdvojili samo skladbe iz područja Negro Spirituala, a ne Gospel songa, koji se pojmovi često miješaju u svim tim nastojanjima pred mnogo brojnom zagrebačkom publikom, u nedjelju 28. travnja, zacijelo uspjeli.
‘Sisters’ explodes with sounds of freedom

African-American cantata sings songs of slavery with tenacity

By Tom Strini
Journal Sentinel music critic

The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble came to Milwaukee for the first time Friday evening, for a Pops concert with assistant conductor Andrews Sill, the Milwaukee Symphony, actresses Sheri Williams Pannell and Constance Clark Riemer, and Ella Washington’s 17-voice Heritage Chorale.

The six African-American singers, led by exuberant tenor Francois Clemmons, brought with them Linda Twine’s “Sisters of Freedom.” It is a cantata woven of spirituals, new musical material, brawny orchestrations by Joseph Joubert and quotations from fiery texts by Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth.

The piece packs a punch—an audience of 1,300 stood up and cheered for it—and not only because of its hot-button subjects, slavery and the tenacity of the spirit of freedom.

The texts, read with clarity and intensity by Pannell and Riemer, fit into the musical flow the way recitative fits into opera. The cantata gathers sonic and emotional mass and momentum throughout its 40 minutes. It surges to ever-larger climaxes, but it also ebbs into intimate moments, in which single unaccompanied voices draw in the ear before the next orchestral swell overwhelms it.

The excellent Heritage Chorale sang from memory, like the Harlem sextet. Joubert uses the choral group cannily, as harmonic glow behind the featured singers and to lend a warm, human voice to orchestral harmonies. In a slave-auction sequence, they serve as a Greek chorus of suffering people, with a repeated “mama, mama, mama” as a family is broken up. They sing it in quiet understatement, and this is typical of the piece. This is not sentimental, manipulative music. It makes its case with plain-spoken dignity.

Assistant conductor Andrews Sill, in his subscription debut, presided more than ably over this large and complex cantata. He was secure and commanding with the music, and awake to its subtleties and shadings of accent. More important, he understood its big rhythms, its dramatic arc, its way of accumulating weight and power.

“The Sisters of Freedom” occupies the second half of this program. The first is given to the Largo from Dvorak’s “New World” Symphony, Copland’s “John Henry, A Railroad Ballet,” and a set of mostly over-arranged spirituals.

The Milwaukee Symphony Pops, with the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, conductor Andrews Sill, the Heritage Chorale and actresses Sheri Williams Pannell and Constance Clark Riemer. Repeat performances at 8 tonight and 7:30 p.m. Sunday in Marcus Center Uihlein Hall, 929 N. Water St.
Night of spirituals is both rousing, formal

By J.D. MOORE JR.
Staff writer

The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble's opening selections Friday night at the Folly Theater were a bit misleading: The six singers processed slowly, faced the audience and sang with great formality and dignity.

Then Francois Clemmons, their founder, director and tenor, warmed up the audience with arias to jazz, barbecue and baseball — "those Kansas City Monarchs" — and introduced the "formal program."

With that, the piano player hit some rie chords, the drummer began to beat, the lights brightened and the ensemble launched into a toe-tapping rendition of "Ah Wanna Be Ready" (to walk in Jerusalem just like John).

The old Negro spirituals started to sound like we wanted them to — alive, passionate, full of religious fervor.

Fingers wagging, swinging side to side, the ensemble really cranked it up through a series of familiar songs, inviting the crowd to sing along on "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

After this rousing setup, the concert changed gears as the esteemed operatic soprano Martina Arroyo presented some of the best-loved spirituals in classic arrangements. Her position on the program, unfortunately, placed her at a disadvantage, as did her sometimes uncertain pitch.

These arrangements, which turn the timeless slave longings into art songs with elaborate piano accompaniments, seemed to take the spirit out of the spirituals.

Yet the program's two tendencies — high art and folk tradition — were soon reconciled in composer Linda Twine's wonderful "Sisters of Freedom," a cantata that received its world premiere in this concert.

Commissioned by the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, the piece portrays the lives of abolitionist slave women Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman in a multimedia musical and drama for the ensemble, both as a group and as soloists, plus a soprano and two actresses.

Twine has taken the rough canvas of the Negro spirituals, then cut and resewn them into something contemporary and timely. The Folly audience was enraptured.

The highly rhythmic sections, such as "The Runaway," got the ensemble rollicking, while the sections for soprano Arroyo's subtle timbres lent delicacy and tenderness to the tale. Her sustained soft notes at the end of "The Ole Ship of Zion" were simply lovely.

Special note must be made of Cheryl Collins and Donette Sherree, young actresses who gave us Truth and Tubman, respectively, with astonishing physical presence. Let's hope we see more of them both.

The sold-out concert was jointly sponsored by Rockhurst and William Jewell colleges.
Strong solos enhance evening of energizing spirituals

By ERIC HANSEN
Contributing Reviewer

"As a stone gathers momentum when it rolls down a hill, so the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble built to a climax Friday night at the Folly Theater. Not because the singers went downhill, but because they were definitely on a roll.

The Ensemble blends six very individual voices and two very tasteful musicians to preserve the American negro spiritual. Founder and director Frances Clemmons allowed for solo space for each of her singers. "Dere Is a Balm in Gilead" contrasted the sweet sound of coloratura Veronica Lewis with the heavier approach of lyric Stephanie Beadle. Beadle has a deep, intense vibrato and she kept her obvious vocal power appropriately under control.

Clemmons's tenor solo in "Little Boy" was the perfect projection of the text, with a very subtle accompaniment by pianist Jeffrey Marler. Clemmons also did well in "I Wanna Be Ready to Put on My Long White Robe," a freestyle solo with just enough ornamentation to add color without grandstanding.

Bass Richard Bellazzin's solo rendition of "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" was deep in every sense of the word.

"Done Made Mah Vow to Duh Lawd," was a fine showcase for La'Shelle Allen's dusky mezzo voice, but without accompaniment her pitch level tended to climb, also a problem for baritone Raymond Prith in "Hush, Hush, Somebody Callin' Ma Name."

"Have You Got Good Religion?" might have been answered with a "No," judging by the paucity of "Amen" from the audience, but after some good-natured clapping from Clemmons the Williams Jevelt audience of about 900 loosened up enough to contribute some hand clapping and sung responses as directed.

The ensemble setting of "Ain't- a-Day Good News" had the broadest range of intensity and textures of the concert. Clemmons made it clear how important the spiritual has been to the American civil rights movement when he dedicated "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round" to the movement. Allen put out a high-intensity solo in this song that put her out in front of the energized ensemble.

Before closing with "Free At Last," Clemmons made reference to the relationship between the song and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech at the March on Washington. It remains for others to carry on King's civil rights work, but we can be glad we have the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble to preserve the music that played a part in it.
Ensemble brings spirituals to life

Harlem Spiritual Ensemble — City Hall Theatre — January 22, 23 and 24

From Gregorian chants to divinely inspired classical to the current explosion in so-called Christian rock, religious and/or spiritual music has taken on many forms over the centuries, though few can compare in the area of sheer exuberance to the American "Negro" spiritual.

Though the origins of this rich and varied style lie in the sorrows and degradation of slavery, there is a proud and distinguished tradition behind the once very popular form, which encompasses everything from work songs and hymns to hollers and fiddle or banjo tunes.

Somewhat incongruously, in fact, the American black spiritual frequently constituted an integral part of the repertoire of such classically trained African-American singers as Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson, whose embracing of the genre no doubt contributed to its undisputed stature in the first half of this century as probably America's greatest indigenous music.

For whatever reason, the form that prelates jazz, country, soul and gospel, eventually fell out of favour in the early 1950s — a historical fact that the New York-based Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, which consists of six singers and two instrumentalists and was founded in 1986 by tenor Mr. Francis Clemmons and bass Mr. Louis E. Smart, has been diligently (and often brilliantly) trying to reverse.

Currently in Bermuda to fulfill a three-night engagement that ends tomorrow night, the Ensemble, which made its Carnegie Hall debut in 1981 and has toured extensively through Europe and North America, certainly conveyed and indeed transmitted its passion last night — to the extent that a full house of audience members sang along, clapped their hands and tapped their toes with abandon.

Such collective exaltation was triggered almost immediately with the sextet's opening number, a rousing, full-bodied version of "Go Down, Moses," one of the genre's standards.

This, in due and extravagant fashion, was followed by a number of spiritual classics — "You Better Min," "Tis the Ole Ship of Zion," "In Dat Good Ol Righteous Way" — each of which, no doubt, were included to show off the tremendously, often glorious talents of individual ensemble members, who last night consisted of group maestro Mr. Clemmons, bass Mr. Richard Bellazzin, baritone Mr. Raymond Frith and a trio of luminous sopranos: Ms. La'Shelle Allen, Ms. Stephanie Bondle and Ms. Veronica Lewis.

Of course, many, who were present during last night's performance, a truly inspiring experience that was more than amply supported by pianist Mr. Jefferey Markert and percussionist Mr. Paul Valdes, might point to the singing of "The Auction" (a poignant, highly operatic set piece that vividly recalled a 19th Century slave market) or the moving six-number finale as their favourite or most memorable moments.

For this reviewer, it was easily the number that accurately closed the first act, "Free At Last," an extremely joyous song that was performed in recognition of Martin Luther King Day and in memory of such anti-slavery dynamo as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman.

Typical of the (hopefully resurrected) spiritual, it was also a song — with performance to match — which proved that the loveliest of flowers can spring from the bitterest of soil.

DANNY SINOPOLI
The Bermuda Sun
January 24, 1996

Celebrating a rich cultural tradition

Review by Ron Lightbourne

A COMPOSER work, Sisters of Freedom, was the centerpiece of Monday night's Festival concert given at City Hall by The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble. Although it is subtitled "a cantata," "oratorio" would better describe the work's form.

It is a quite brilliant work with words by African-American poet Frances Harper, which includes some actual words of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, those legends of the American struggle against slavery — the sisters to whom the title refers.

Linda Twine's setting is everything a work on the subject should be. She uses a musical language not inaccessible to its likeliest audience, drawing on the vocal traditions and forms of African American music, mostly, including fairly contemporary influences such as Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye, jazz, gospel, and, of course, the spiritual itself.

Stephanie Beadle (listed as a "lyric soprano") was electrifying. So was La'Shele Allan, a mellifluous mezzo of considerable beauty and power. In fact, all the singers were of an exceedingly high standard. Richard Bellazzin's bass was an instant thrill to hear. Regrettably, we heard far too little of Raymond Frith's baritone.

The first half of the concert was given over to a set of spirituals, all familiar but presented in an inviting manner which included some down home talk and audience participation which — in addition to displaying the vocal wares on offer — set the stage for the weightier work that comprised the second half.

All great concerts seem too short; this one certainly did. The Ensemble sports six of the finest voices anywhere. They were expertly accompanied by pianist Jeffrey Marzlet, who brought his experience as a jazz player effectively to bear on this adjacent music, playing flawlessly in style. His fellow accompanist, percussionist Paul Valdez, somewhat superfluous in the first half, excelled in realizing Ms Twine's fine score.

It is no mean achievement to evoke a whole cultural tradition, history and politics in one concert; there must be a queue of contemporary composers lined up to write this sumptuous ensemble.

All kudos to maestro Francois Clemmons, the founder and director, for his faith, and vision.

Long may he endure.
Harlem Spiritual Ensemble

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Saturday, January 13, 1996

"Sisters" explodes with sounds of freedom

African-American cantata sings songs of slavery with tenacity

By Tom Strini
Journal Sentinel music critic

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Harlem Spiritual Ensemble: Ambassadors of Black culture

By RAOUl ABDUL
Special to the AmNews

With its concert of African-American religious folk songs on a recent Monday evening at Carnegie Hall, the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble took a giant step in the revival of interest in this important body of music. The large audience received its efforts with genuine enthusiasm.

This renaissance of interest in the Spiritual began with a concert featuring a solo voice and piano under the auspices of Today's Artists a few years ago. It continued with a gala featuring Kathleen Battle, Jessye Norman and a chorus and orchestra under the baton of James Levine of the Metropolitan Opera.

Co-founded by Francois Clemmons and Louis E. Smart, the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble is composed of six trained singers with Joy Harper (pianist) and Eli Fountain (percussionist). Besides the founders, the ensemble includes Janet Jordan, Barbara L. Young, Ruth Elmore and Raymond Frith.

Without exception, the voices were of excellent quality, fully capable of meeting the demands of the music. What gave the ensemble special distinction — in a program which was much too long — was an intense sense of pride in performing this repertoire and great joy in singing itself. It tugged at our heartstrings.

Stylistically speaking, there were still some stones left unturned. The ensemble has not yet mastered authentic use of dialect in the verbal contents of the material. The arrangements were not varied enough to engage the listener's interest. It might be good to group the songs around dramatic themes.

Spirituals' ambassadors

But, the most important thing is that the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble is disseminating African American religious folk songs to audiences around the world. It has spread the word throughout Central Europe, Asia and elsewhere. We could not ask for a more attractive, talented and enthusiastic set of ambassadors of Black culture.

Barbara Mahajan's Opera Amici, a showcase for young talent, offered Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" on a recent Friday and Sunday afternoon at Trinity School Auditorium in Manhattan. With an excellent orchestra conducted by Thomas Carlo Bo and minimal stage direction by Keith Austin Brown, the cast proved capable.

Above all, Donna Snyder met most of the demands of the role of Lucia, a formidable task. Others in the Friday evening cast included Keith Austin Brown (Edgardo), Mark Kessinger (Lord Ashton), Alan Smulen (Raimondo), Herman Gaddy (Lord Bucklaw), Marta Fields (Alisa) and Thomas Moore (Normanno).

Because this workshop is primarily a learning experience for the singers, I do not like to be too harsh in my criticism. But it might be better if all the cast committed the score to memory. This would make it possible for deeper dramatic involvement. This is a worthwhile project which deserves our support.

The Ujamaa Black Theater

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Saturday, February 2, 1991 at 4:00PM
Friday, February 8, 1991 at 8:00PM
Saturday, February 9, 1991 at 4:00PM
$5.00 at the door.

Tickets available at the door or white tickets office.

The Lincoln Center

Can a man truly disappear within himself...yet affect the lives and histories of his friends...his family...his race?

Richard Wright's

The Outsider

WBAI 99.5 FM

MON. JAN. 28th • 8:30 p.m. • 3:30 a.m.

Follow the tortured soul of an African American through the sociological and psychological landscape of America, circa 1950

Production made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.
Harlem Spiritual Ensemble: Ambassadors of Black culture

By RAOUl aBDuL
Special to the AmNews

With its concert of African-American religious folk songs on a recent Monday evening at Carnegie Hall, the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble took a giant step in the revival of interest in this important body of music. The large audience received its efforts with genuine enthusiasm.

This renaissance of interest in the Spiritual began with a concert featuring settings for solo voice and piano under the auspices of Today's Artists a few years ago. It continued with a gala featuring Kathleen Battle, Jessye Norman and a chorus and orchestra under the baton of James Levine of the Metropolitan Opera.

Co-founded by Francois Clemmons and Louis E. Smart, the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble is composed of six trained singers with Joy Harper (pianist) and Eli Fountain (percussionist). Besides the founders, the ensemble includes Janet Jordan, Barbara L. Young, Ruth Elmore and Raymond Frith.

Without exception, the voices were of excellent quality, fully capable of meeting the demands of the music. What gave the ensemble special distinction — in a program which was much too long — was an intense sense of pride in performing this repertoire and great joy in singing itself. It tugged at our heartstrings.

Stylistically speaking, there were still some stones left unturned. The ensemble has not yet mastered authentic use of dialect in the verbal contents of the material. The arrangements were not varied enough to engage the listener's interest. It might be good to group the songs around dramatic themes.

Spirituals' ambassadors

But, the most important thing is that the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble is disseminating African American religious folk songs to audiences around the world. It has spread the word throughout Central Europe, Asia and elsewhere. We could not ask for a more attractive, talented and enthusiastic set of ambassadors of Black culture.

Barbara Mahajan's Opera Amici, a showcase for young talent, offered Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" on a recent Friday and Sunday afternoon at Trinity School Auditorium in Manhattan. With an excellent orchestra conducted by Thomas Carlo Bo and minimal stage direction by Keith Austin Brown, the cast proved capable.

Above all, Donna Snyder met most of the demands of the role of Lucia, a formidable task. Others in the Friday evening cast included Keith Austin Brown (Edgardo), Mark Kessinger (Lord Ashton), Alan Smulen (Raimondo), Herman Gaddy (Lord Bucklaw), Marta Fields (Alisa) and Thomas Moore (Normanno).

Because this workshop is primarily a learning experience for the singers, I do not like to be too harsh in my criticism. But it might be better if all of the cast committed the score to memory. This would make it possible for deeper dramatic involvement. This is a worthwhile project which deserves our support.