

BLACK MUSIC AND ENTERTAINERS

By Lois Yvonne Whaley

Music has been an integral part of the human experience since before recorded time. It is the language of sound which expresses all levels of the conditions under and into that which man was and is; and, as such, becomes a form of communication which fits the needs of the people who created it.

Most early peoples attributed music to their gods, and the anonymous poets and singers can be said to have been music's first historians.

In Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, Jubal, a relative of Cain, is said to be "...the father of all such as handle the harps and organ." Moses affirms this. The Greeks, through their legends and mythology, had a God and Goddess who "invented" music. Behind that ancient civilization came the Romans with their carbon copies.

In the Sudan, the Dogans have eight kinds of drums, each a different size, which correspond to their interpretation of the creation of the world, from the birth of the great Monitor (God), symbolized by the Kunga drum; to the age when the human race began to increase and multiply-symbolized by the Barba drum. One might find an analogy in the Judeo-Christian interpretation of the Creation.

Music and religion, then, have been intimately interwoven since the Dawn of Man.

AFRICA

According to some eighteenth and nineteenth century Americans, culture in Africa was said to be non-existent; however, reports belie this. Before the African was brought to the New World as a slave, his musicality was well-developed and documented. The earliest published account was written by Richard Jobson, Esq. during a visit to Gambia in 1620 - 21. He observed the importance of music in the African's life, and stated that all "...principall persons (that is, the Kings and Chiefs) do hold as an ornament of their state, so as when wee come to see them, their musicks will seldome be wanting." The important rulers employed their own bands and the bandmaster, master drummer and royal hornblower had the highest status. The better band members and singers were also held in high esteem, often receiving some form of gratuity from the dancers and visitors.

An important member of every village was the bard. After having been identified as possessing possibilities for such a career, he served an apprenticeship for many years. His responsibilities were manifold. As chief historian, he related all information in song. Before a battle, he whipped the warriors into a frenzy with music, continuing on into the battle; constantly en-

couraging the troops with songs of the glorious deeds of their ancestors. He acted also as court jester, and often became the conscience of the ruler. Some became wanderers of itinerant minstrels and performed in religious ceremonies in addition to being the musical focus at social occasions. In the late eighteenth century, Olaudah (Ibo) Equiano, one of the first Africans to write in English wrote:

We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians and poets. Thus every great event...is celebrated in public dances which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion.

Various European writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries corroborated this.

Music, therefore, was a functional part of each person's life from birth to death. The Ashanti, according to Bowdich, thought it "...absurd to worship God in any other way than with chanting or singing." Music was used socially, recreationally, politically and, as stated earlier, as an act of communication. All chores, community involvements, human conditions, contracts, and expressions were manifested in this form. Each song had a specific motive for being instrumentalized, danced or sung.

--AFRICAN INSTRUMENTS--

One of the earliest instruments on record, other than

Harriet

Tubman

Harriet Tubman began her career as an army nurse in 1862, nursing the sick and wounded in South Carolina.

**Oregon Health Sciences Center
School of Nursing
Salutes Black History Month**

The purpose of the project, "Recruitment of Minority Students for Careers in Nursing" is to:

1. Increase the number of potentially qualified ethnic minority or educationally disadvantaged students committed to pursuing a professional career in nursing;
2. Increase the number of ethnic minority students seeking and gaining admittance to prenursing programs and to the program at the UOHSC School of Nursing;
3. Reduce the attrition of ethnic minority and educationally disadvantaged students enrolled in the School of Nursing.



Harriet Tubman, shown here in her later years in Auburn, New York. Photo: the Schomburg Collection.

WHO DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?

For more information on the UOHSC School of Nursing and its minority recruitment project, contact:

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