Undine Smith Moore's "A Recorded Supplement to Studies in Traditional Harmony": Diverse Music Theory Instruction from a Mid-20th-Century Black Master Teacher

October 22, 2022, SEMLA Annual Meeting, Tallahassee, Florida
Anti-racism in Music Theory

Music theorist Dr. Philip Ewell
Source: philipewell.com/contact/
2019 analysis of 7 American music theory textbooks, representing 96% of market:

96 (1.67%) of 2930 musical examples were from nonwhite composers

– Philip Ewell, “Music Theory and the White Racial Frame,” Society of Music Theory Annual Meeting, November 2019; and Music Theory Online 26, 2 (September 2020); 3.4)
2,930 musical examples in the 7 most-used undergraduate music theory textbooks in the U.S.

1.67% are by BIPOC composers
2.15% are by women

OPEN MUSIC THEORY

Version 2

Mark Gathams; Kyle Guilting; Chelsey Ham; Bryn Hughes; Brian Jarvis; Megan Lavengood; and John Peterson

Open Music Theory is a natively online open educational resource intended to serve as the primary text and workbook for undergraduate music theory curricula. OMT2 provides not only the material for a complete traditional core undergraduate music theory sequence (fundamentals, diatonic harmony, chromatic harmony, form, 20th-century techniques), but also several other units for instructors who have diversified their curriculum, such as jazz, popular music, counterpoint, and orchestration. This version also introduces a complete workbook of assignments.

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Colorasure:
Process by which Whiteness has consistently erased non-Whiteness from existence as unimportant

-Philip Ewell, “Philip Ewell: Erasing colorasure in American music theory, and confronting demons from our past,” Bibliolore: The RILM Blog (March 25, 2021)
Undine Smith Moore, 1904–1989, highlights

- 1924–1926, attended Fisk with a scholarship from the Juilliard Graduate School, majoring in piano performance; also began composing
- 1926–1927, supervisor of music in Goldsboro, North Carolina
- 1927, began teaching music at Virginia State College in Petersburg—piano, choir, theory, etc.
- 1929–1931, attended Columbia University’s Teachers College for an M.A. in music and professional diploma
- 1938, married Dr. James Arthur Moore
- 1950, began composing again in earnest
- 1968, cofounded the Black Music Research Center at Virginia State College
- 1969, Designed and taught the first “The Black Man in American Music” course at Virginia State
- 1972, retired from Virginia State, began series of visiting professorships and continued composing
- 1981, nominated for Pulitzer Prize for oratorio Scenes from the Life of a Martyr
Manuscript of Undine Smith Moore, “Be Strong, I Will Fill this House with Glory” (1979), Undine Smith Moore papers, Rose Library
“A Recorded Supplement to Studies in Traditional Harmony”

“D. Antoinette Handy, who occasionally substituted for Moore, recalled her strict and thorough instruction and her formidable theory workbook “A Recorded Supplement to Studies in Traditional Harmony,” which used examples from both mainstream European composers and black composers, which was highly praised by her former teacher at Columbia, Dr. [Howard] Murphy, and was used in her courses for many years.”

Howard Murphy
Source:
www.msmnyc.edu/about/history/virtual-yearbooks-1940s
October 24, 1951

Mrs. Undine Smith Moore
Virginia State College
Petersburg, Va.

My dear Mrs. Moore:

I note from your letter of September 29 that you are enrolled in T C Music 203X for two points and that you ask what the next step is. I would suggest that you send me a short outline of your project before making a trip to New York. After I have evaluated your outline I think that you should come to New York to discuss the project with me. If this is agreeable to you I shall look forward to receiving the outline in the near future.

Sincerely yours

Howard A. Murphy
Professor of Music Education

HAN/es
Manuscript


1966 - *Walk Through the Street of the City*
     Spatial arr. SATB
     Narr. 3 1st 0 rev.
     arr. SATBA

O Spirit, Who Dost Prie Before
    Hee Temple [from Paradisi Lost]
Unison chorus, optional

Lord, Make Me a Little holy
    arr. 4 part canon a minim cho.
    piano acc.

1969 - *Introduction and Allegro*
     Clarinet and Piano
Afro-American Suite
Flute, Cello, Piano

Moderato: "Peace, Be Still"
Allegro: "I Know the Prince of the Whole World"
Allegro: "Who is That Youth?"
Allegro Molto: "Shout Praises to the King!"
Examples in “A Recorded Supplement” by select composers (total: 147)

- Brahms – 19 (12.9%)
- Beethoven – 16 (10.9%)
- Chopin – 10 (6.8%)
- Mendelssohn – 6 (4.1%)
- Tchaikovsky – 6 (4.1%)
- **All Black composers** – 5 (3.3%)
- Bach – 5 (3.3%)
- Mozart – 4 (2.7%)
- Schubert – 4 (2.7%)
INTRODUCING COMPOSITIONAL DEVICES
THROUGH EXAMPLES BY
BLACK COMPOSERS

The practice of studying the structure and organization of musical compositions through listening and analysis of Music literature has been firmly established as a valuable type of pedagogical procedure.

Both technical classes in music theory and humanities courses in music need to make listeners aware of the manner in which the tonal elements in a musical composition have been organized.

Awareness of the basic principles of unity, variety, balance, etc. is especially helpful in listening to music which in so fleeting an art often loss insight from being able to verbalize with regard to what they hear.

Few anthologies or collections of scores make any reference to works by Black composers. It is the purpose of this booklet to show through a very few examples of Black composers that these pieces lend themselves well to study. Including such examples should broaden the students knowledge of literature in general. It is hoped that the teacher feeling these few examples will be motivated frequently to use examples from what is a really voluminous source of material.
Non Harmonic Tones

The Pedal Point

She vanished.
In the sounding town, will she remember too?

G maj. V\(^6\) \(\frac{7}{9}\) over D\(\sharp\)\(G\) pedal point

Passing chord — ap

The recurrence of this figure is a pedal point in the upper voice.

She rested by the Broken Branch
-S. Coleridge, Taylor

- John Work
- R. Nathaniel Dett
- Samuel Coleridge-Taylor
- William Grant Still
- George Walker
- Howard Swanson
- Cecil Cohen
- Thomas Kerr
- Florence Price
- Olly Wilson
- John Carter
- Altona Johns
- Traditional spirituals
“A Black student who hears a beautiful passage written by a Black man has an appeal to his intuitive sense to support his intellect.”

Program on Indiana University Instructional Television about and featuring Undine Smith Moore, 1980. Interview by Lillian Dunlap. The program also features performances of her music.
“[Do not] desert Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mozart. But the music of Blacks…is made of the same elements: rhythm, melody, harmony, tone color, texture. The basic elements of organization—repetition, contrast, variation, unity, balance, dominance—are observable in all art works.”

What next?

1. Unanswered questions
2. Acknowledge diversity work done by predecessors
3. More music examples by nonwhites
4. Explore and promote other music theories
5. Be proactively antiracist, and be willing to give up something to help elevate the marginalized
Questions?

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