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## The Life and Career of Edward Boatner and Inventory of the Boatner Papers at the Schomburg Center

“My grandmother, years ago      was a slave, my father, a boy-slave. When [Lincoln] signed the Emancipation Proclamation, he was nine years old, and my grandmother went to her boss, when she found out we were free, and said, ‘Massa Boatner, I’m gonna see that my son gets as good an education as anybody, as any white boy or any colored boy.’ He said, ‘That’s fine, Maggie, that’s good, go do that.’ And that’s what she did. She scrubbed floors, she did everything, and he was one of the first Negroes      to get his Ph.D.”<sup>1</sup>

The quotation above comes from a 1972 interview with African-American composer/arranger Edward Hammond Boatner, conducted by Benjamin Gray and Phyllis Bash. During this portion of the interview, Boatner recalled his grandmother’s efforts to provide his father, who became Dr. Daniel Webster Boatner, with the best education possible. As will be seen, the determination and discipline demonstrated by his elders were exhibited by Edward as well, contributing to his personal success.

This hour-long taped interview is one of the many sources that has been used to examine Edward Boatner’s life and achievements, in connection with my recent inventory of his papers, which were donated to the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division in 1981. Although Boatner was more prolific as an arranger than as a composer, he was also successful as a vocalist, conductor, teacher and historian. This article discusses what the Boatner papers and additional sources reveal about the man and his work and concludes with an inventory of the collection.

### Biography

Edward Hammond Boatner was born November 13, 1898 in New Orleans, Louisiana, and died June 16, 1981.<sup>2</sup> Along with Harry T. Burleigh and Hall



*Edward Hammond  
Boatner (1898–1981)*

*Courtesy of Photographs and  
Prints Division, Schomburg  
Center for Research in Black  
Culture, The New York Public  
Library, Astor, Lenox, and  
Tilden Foundations.*

Johnson, he is considered a leading authority in the genre of the Negro spiritual, having arranged and published nearly 300 of them, including several collections. In addition to composing, teaching, conducting, and singing, Boatner wrote many plays (including some with music), short stories, and music instruction materials, as well as essays concerning African-American history.

Boatner was a deeply religious man who carried out a number of missions in his life. First, he believed that the Negro spiritual deserved to be recognized as the root of many other musical styles, including ragtime, jazz, blues, swing, gospel and rock-and-roll. “Although there have been many Afro-American contributions to the forms, styles and trends of American music,” he once wrote, “the original and most beautiful remains the spiritual.”<sup>3</sup> His goal in collecting and arranging spirituals was “that they might have the same status in the world of music as folk-music of other races.”<sup>4</sup> Boatner addressed the history of the development of the Negro spiritual in his musical plays *The Life of Christ*, a work that received positive reviews upon its New York premiere in 1971, and *The Origin of the Afro-American Spiritual*.

Boatner’s second mission was to provide textbooks for music instruction, which covered various aspects of theory, pedagogy, and self-study. This mission seems to have been part of a response to his own difficulties in obtaining

music instruction during his youth. In “About Edward Boatner,” a preface that appears in his unpublished treatise, “The Damaging Results of Racism,” and in other works, Boatner stated that he had written “thirty self-study music textbooks, beginning with elementary music theory, and graduating to music composition. These books have been written,” he continued, “for all people who desire fundamental teaching in music, but are without necessary funds to attend music schools, conservatories, or to be taught by expensive music instructors.”<sup>5</sup> Most of these textbooks remain unpublished.

Finally, Boatner felt compelled to lift the self-esteem of his fellow African-Americans by reminding society of their achievements, within the context of his own works. The necessity for embracing self-worth is a recurrent theme in his book *Great Achievements Black and White*, in his manuscripts “The Damaging Results Of Racism” and “Great Afro-Americans,” and in his *Freedom Suite*, a classical composition for narrator, solo voices, chorus and orchestra.<sup>6</sup>

Boatner’s interest in spirituals stemmed from early childhood. His father, Dr. Daniel Webster Boatner, was an itinerant Methodist minister who took his family with him on his travels from church to church.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Boatner presided over a French settlement congregation in New Orleans until Edward was about twelve years old. Impressed by the singing he heard at various prayer meetings, Boatner learned and collected hundreds of spirituals at an early age. When the family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where Dr. Boatner secured a teaching position, Edward attended the public schools with his three brothers and two sisters.<sup>8</sup>

Young Edward’s requests for voice and piano lessons were initially denied, allegedly for lack of money. It seems clear that Dr. Boatner had more than economic reasons for denying his son lessons because arrangements were made instead for Edward’s younger sister to receive musical instruction.

Despite this disappointing lack of encouragement, Edward decided to teach himself music as best he could. Three times a week he walked for miles to practice on a piano with faulty keys. His mother supported his aspirations, and after a successful church solo vocal performance by Edward, Dr. Boatner himself had a change of heart and agreed to seek musical instruction for his son. Although the voice instructor at the University of Missouri predicted great promise for the young baritone following his audition, the teacher blamed his inability to admit Edward to that university on racial restrictions.

Edward attended secondary school in Kansas City, Kansas, where his family later moved. Upon graduation in 1916, Boatner took lessons in voice and piano at Western University in Quindaro, Kansas, for a short time.<sup>9</sup> That same year, the esteemed African-American tenor Roland Hayes heard Edward sing at a concert in Kansas City and advised him to seek further training in Boston. Edward’s family and friends opposed the idea. “They thought I should have been a teacher and a preacher, like my father,” he recalled in 1972. In a debate with his parents in the family kitchen, Edward resolved to go to Boston,

“if I have to walk.”<sup>10</sup> He worked for two summers at a packing company to earn his railway fare and planned a public recital at his church to secure the remainder.

Boatner arrived in Boston in 1917 with five dollars in his pocket.<sup>11</sup> At first he subsisted on earnings from odd jobs, waiting tables and performing domestic service. An acquaintance who heard him sing hired him as a regular choir member for a local synagogue. In Boston, Boatner renewed his friendship with Hayes, who again encouraged the young musician to concentrate on his vocal studies. During his first year, Boatner studied with instructors at the New England Conservatory of Music. In 1918, at the age of twenty, he published his first arrangement of a spiritual, entitled “Give Me Jesus,” and started giving private music lessons. Boatner had time to master his interpretations of German lieder, and of French and Italian art songs, having received a one-year scholarship from the Boston Conservatory of Music in 1921. And in 1922, he won a prize in the state’s National Federation of Music Clubs vocal contest.

Continuing his studies at the Longy School of Music the following year, Boatner met composer and pianist Robert Nathaniel Dett, who became a mentor, coach and collaborator. The two musicians performed a successful series of concerts together throughout the New England states. Boatner also directed a sixty-member Baptist church choir during his time in the city.<sup>12</sup>

Although Boatner left Boston in 1925, he maintained connections with that city until the end of the decade. During the years 1928-29, he counted among his pupils a number of professional chorus girls, including the young Josephine Baker, from the musical production *Shuffle Along*, which was touring Boston at that time. Eubie Blake, the show’s composer, introduced Boatner to Hall Johnson, a violist in the show’s orchestra. Johnson, who went on to achieve international acclaim for his choral conducting and arrangements of Negro spirituals, befriended Boatner and came to admire his work.

In 1925, Boatner moved to Chicago to complete his formal education, earning his bachelor’s degree in music from the Chicago College of Music in 1932. During this period, he also served as choir director at Olivet Baptist Church and later at Pilgrim Baptist Church. In a *Chicago Defender* article from 30 August 1930, a reporter enthusiastically described the *Chicago Tribune*’s Chicagoland Music Festival, in which Boatner participated. The festival preceded the opening meeting of the National Association of Negro Musicians, featuring vocalists from Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa and Indiana. A 1,000-voice chorus performed at Soldiers Field before 150,000 spectators on a Saturday evening under the baton of J. Wesley Jones, president of the Association at the time, James A. Mundy of the Mundy Choristers, and Boatner. Immediately before Boatner’s appearance, Jones led the choir’s performance of the rousing spiritual, “I Couldn’t Hear Nobody Pray.” “Intercepting the continued applause,” a reporter wrote, “the announcer gave out that ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot’ would be the next number. The applause held up the singing for two minutes. Then Prof. Edward A. [sic] Boatner of Pilgrim Baptist Church led the mass choir in that melodious and most popular spiritual. Miss Zelma Watson

was soloist.” After the performance, the audience became “silent and restless with the spirit of the music,” perhaps in its desire for a more exciting number. This was provided by the performance that followed of the “stirring and swinging” spiritual “The Ole Ark’s a Movin’,” as conducted by Mundy.<sup>13</sup>

During his student years in Chicago, Boatner performed widely as a singer, and he gave private music lessons. One of his more notable Chicago pupils was singer and actor Clifton Webb. Boatner’s reputation also grew during these years for his work as director of music for the annual National Baptist Convention.<sup>14</sup> In the 1972 interview, Boatner described his routine for a 1927 Convention held in Detroit. “I’d go into town,” he said, “and I’d rehearse them every night . . . [for] 30 days before the convention.” The choir, which also numbered 1,000 voices, sounded to him “like a great organ.”<sup>15</sup>

Throughout his career Boatner arranged spirituals for solo voice and keyboard, duets, trios and full chorus. In later years, he credited his choral conducting as having had a direct influence on many of his arrangements. In 1927 Boatner published a collection entitled *Spirituals Triumphant Old and New*, which he edited and arranged with assistance from Willa A. Townsend. The editors’ intentions, in terms of artistic expression and historical representation, are clearly expressed in the foreword:

[Since the spirituals have] come from tradition, we lay no claim upon their standardization, but we believe that the words and arrangements found in *Spirituals Triumphant* will fully meet popular demand.

. . . Song was to the Negro the sole means of expressing his emotions and feelings, and from these songs may be formed the truest judgment of his character and disposition. [From] . . . even the most despairing of his ‘Sorrow songs’ . . . there floats out a triumphant note expressive of his faith and hope in a better day.

With a large number of arrangements of the Spirituals in circulation, there is a tendency to get away from the harmony and characteristic way in which the songs were originally sung, and therefore much of their real import is lost. To the end that the ‘old-time’ way of singing these songs may be preserved, is this edition brought forth. . .

These selections were arranged and edited by [Boatner and Townsend], both of whom were born among these people, and whose labors have been with them, and are therefore prepared to reproduce these songs of the ‘fathers’ as sung by them.<sup>16</sup>

In 1933 Boatner was appointed director of music at Samuel Huston College, now Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas, where he taught until 1935.<sup>17</sup> A 30 December 1933 article from the *Chicago Defender* conveys the popularity of Boatner and the choir he conducted:

Austin, Texas—Sought on every hand because of a fame that is rapidly spreading all over Texas and the Southwest, the Samuel Huston college choir, the only a cappella Race group in the Southwest, under the direction of Prof.

Edward H. Boatner, continued to win enthusiastic public approval during the convention of the Texas State Teachers Association during the Thanksgiving holidays.

Starting out with a heavy schedule with three engagements on Thanksgiving Day, the choir was called upon to fill other engagements Friday night and Saturday afternoon. On each occasion it became the featured number of the program.

The first engagement came Thursday morning at 9:30, at the opening of the convention, at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. At 1:30 p.m. on the same day, Professor Boatner fulfilled a request to have the choir featured over a local radio station. At 3 p.m., the chorus appeared in a musical concert at Wesley M.E. chapel before a packed house of local and visiting music lovers.

Friday night found the chorus filling an 8 o'clock engagement in the senate chamber at the capitol as part of a special program for the visiting teachers, both white and Colored. Again on Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock the singers were called upon to fill a special request engagement at the Gregory gymnasium [of the] University of Texas, for the benefit of the white teachers, whose sessions were being held there.

Since Professor Boatner made his first public appearance with his chorus here last September, the group has made a rapid rise to fame, and is coming to be generally recognized as the leading college choral group in the state. Their programs, besides spirituals, include special arrangements by Professor Boatner. Solo parts are handled by Miss Deltessa Holliman, soprano; Edward Stallings, tenor; Grandvel Jackson, baritone; and Jackson B. Smith, bass.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1930s Boatner also taught at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, where he was appointed Dean of Music.<sup>19</sup> In the late 1930s, he settled permanently in New York and opened the Edward Boatner Studio, first in Brooklyn, and later in midtown Manhattan. Through the studio he organized and trained choral groups and gave private instruction in piano and voice to young musicians and actors. His New York students included Metropolitan opera tenor George Shirley and singer Libby Holman. During this time, Boatner also assumed the directorship of music at the Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York.

The Schomburg Center's general music programs file contains a recital program from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, dated 18 February 1938, featuring the Concord Baptist Church Choir and numerous soloists under Boatner's direction. No fewer than twenty-eight selections were offered, including spirituals arranged by Boatner, as well as songs and arias by Mozart, Franck, Smetana and Verdi. The printed program concludes with the following advertisement: "All the vocal soloists on [this] program are products of the Boatner Studios .

[which] offer the following subjects in Music: voice, theory, piano, solfege, rhythmical articulation, [and] coaching in German lieder, Italian and French art songs."<sup>20</sup>

In 1971, as part of his article for the *New York Times* on the renewed interest in the Negro spiritual, reporter Thomas A. Johnson observed Boatner in rehearsal with the Boatner Choir in his Manhattan studio:

Square-jawed and baldish at 73, Edward Boatner was alert to every sound coming from the 30 black men, women and children crowded into his second-floor Manhattan studio. Softly, slowly, the Boatner choir sang: 'Let us break bread together on our knees. . . ' His face was wet with perspiration. His horn-rimmed glasses, perched at the end of his nose, looked as if they would fall off. But his large, black hands, moving with certainty, seemed to pull the mournful strains from his choir, singing: 'When I fall on my knees, with my face to the rising sun, oh Lord, have mercy if you please' . . .

The members of the choir, sitting erect in wooden chairs, watched every move their director made. They seemed unmindful of the heat and of the many hours of rehearsals. The fact that their varied daytime pursuits had little or nothing to do with keeping the Negro spiritual alive did not appear to concern them at all. It is in choirs like Mr. Boatner's, and in churches, schools, theatrical performances and family gatherings that the Negro spiritual is enjoying a renaissance.

Mr. Boatner, who has taught music for close to 50 years, explains that the Negro spiritual is that body of work produced by unknown black authors during slavery. [The more profitable] gospel music is the religiously oriented music that has been created since.

Mr. Boatner . . . is a leading exponent of the spiritual as a part of personal religious experience and an evangelizing tool.<sup>21</sup>

Publishers of Boatner's arrangements of spirituals include Franco Colombo, Theodore Presser, Galaxy and Schirmer, as well as Hammond Music (his own publishing company).<sup>22</sup> During the same year the *New York Times* article appeared, Boatner published another collection, *Thirty Afro-American Choral Spirituals*. The introduction to a third anthology, his *The Story of the Spirituals*, a collection of thirty-five spirituals published in 1973, is important in that it encapsulates the main historical points he wanted his contemporaries to understand and remember. These same points are emphasized in Boatner's musical plays and literary works.

Spirituals are Bible stories set to music. They originated in the cotton and corn fields on the plantations in the south, and are the basis of the first true native American music.

When the blacks were brought to this country as slaves, they were forced to abandon their African culture. Two things weren't forgotten, however: their great sense of oral tradition, and their highly developed understanding of complex rhythms. Both of these factors were incorporated when the slave adopted a new religion—Christianity—and began composing their own religious songs.

Not being schooled in the Bible, nor even allowed to read, they learned their Bible stories second-hand, from house servants who overheard it being read [or] from itinerant preachers. Then, in their own words, the Bible stories set to music became a new creation—the spiritual."

Often they were used to transmit secret messages. The slaves weren't allowed to converse freely so they incorporated euphemisms into their songs that enabled them to communicate without 'ole massa' being the wiser. "Steal

away,” for instance, was passed on from person to person to indicate a secret religious meeting.”

For many years after emancipation, blacks turned their backs on the slave-created spirituals. Perhaps it was too bitter a reminder of the past. Today there is more ready acceptance of this part of our musical heritage. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Some of Boatner’s best-known arrangements of spirituals include “Oh! What A Beautiful City,” “On Ma Journey,” “Plenty Good Room,” “Soon-a Will Be Done,” and “Tramping” (see Appendix A). His arrangements have been performed and recorded by such artists as Marian Anderson, Roland Hayes, Leontyne Price, Nelson Eddy, Ellabelle Davis, Camilla Williams, Paul Robeson, the McKinley Choralaires, George Shirley and Abbie Mitchell. Boatner also made a recording in 1918, singing three spirituals arranged by H. T. Burleigh. The session, for Broome Records, took place in New York with Burleigh present.<sup>24</sup>

Regrettably, the Boatner papers at the Schomburg Center do not contain manuscripts for any of the spirituals that Boatner arranged. The manuscripts were, at the time of Boatner’s death, located in his private library. It is hoped that readers of this article may have further information regarding Boatner’s manuscripts, correspondence and other published writings not contained in the Schomburg collection.

Among Boatner’s private teachers in composition were Louis Victor Saar, Felix Deijo, and Rudolf Schramm. Schramm, with whom Boatner studied for several years, wrote the narration to Boatner’s *Freedom Suite*, first published in 1964.<sup>25</sup> A full orchestral score, published in 1966, as well as a vocal solo/chorus score, are included in the Boatner papers, although there is no evidence that the work was ever recorded. The *Freedom Suite* is, in Boatner’s own words, “a musical portrayal of the life of the Afro-American, from their oppressed slavery days, and their struggle after their emancipation to the present time of his fight for civil rights.” Furthermore, it is “not only a capsule history of Negro life in America, but also a documentation, and a reminder of the great men and women among the Negroes, so that future generations may feel pride in their achievements.”<sup>26</sup>

The suite consists of two parts. Part I, an introduction for chorus and orchestra, represents “the beginning of slavery and all that the slave endured before the Emancipation.” Part II contains three movements, labeled “Oppression,” “Struggle” and “Achievement.” In “Oppression” the narration tells the story of clandestine religious worship among the slaves and of their hope for deliverance from misery, if not in this world then in the next. The spirituals “Steal Away,” “When I Get Home” and “Bye and Bye” are incorporated into this movement. In “Struggle” the narration conveys how the joy over newly found freedom was quickly replaced by the sobering difficulties the former slaves suffered in finding a place in American society. This movement includes the spirituals “Oh, Freedom,” “I’m a Soldier,” “No More Auction Block” and “Ain’t Got Weary Yet.” The third and final movement, “Achievement,” concludes the work

by reflecting upon the accomplishments made by African-Americans in such a short period of time. The music supports a “verbal recital” of African-Americans who have made notable contributions in the areas of politics, education, science and the arts.

Musically the *Freedom Suite* consists of a series of SATB choral settings of spirituals, many of them presented in their entirety, with orchestral accompaniment. Interspersed between the spirituals are the narrative text and occasional orchestral interludes. For his setting of the quiet, pensive “Steal Away,” Boatner employs sustained harmonies in the strings and uses other instruments for dramatic effect. The trumpets, for instance, are featured as the choir sings the line, “the trumpet sounds within my soul,” and percussion is later added for the word “thunder.” In the settings of more energetic spirituals, such as “When I Get Home,” dry, staccato eighth-note patterns appear in the strings, winds, and brass.

The soloists’ appearances in the *Freedom Suite* are limited in length and virtuosity. Above the choral setting of “When I Get Home,” the soprano soloist provides a textless descant. In other portions of the work, a soloist is assigned a single verse of a spiritual, while the choir hums underneath, as in the case of the bass solo for “Bye and Bye.”

Throughout the *Freedom Suite*, Boatner creates variety and drama in his choral settings with the use of long measured pauses between words, the repetition of phrases, and sudden changes in dynamics. A portion of “When I Get Home” is sung in canon. During the singing of “I’m A Soldier,” the sopranos sing “ta ta ta,” in imitation of trumpets.

Toward the end of the work, the soloists appear as an SATB quartet for a rendition of “Rise and Shine.” The *Freedom Suite* concludes with the choir singing the spiritual, “I Knew the Lord, He Laid His Hands on Me,” above a full, majestic orchestration.

Boatner devoted three years to the composition of and research required for the *Freedom Suite*. It was premiered on 3 April 1967 at Washington D.C.’s Constitution Hall, before an audience of about three hundred. The occasion was a benefit for Hospitality House, a volunteer agency in northeast part of the district. The concert also included a solo performance by William Warfield, as well as a set of dances performed by the La Rocque Bey Ballet Company of New York. Dr. Karl Rucht conducted the Arlington Symphony.<sup>27</sup> The one hundred voices of the Freedom Suite Choir were conducted by William Hines. Frederick O’Neal, president of Actors Equity of New York at the time, narrated the work. Among the distinguished guests in attendance were Boatner, Eubie Blake, Roland Hayes, composer and choral conductor Eva Jessye, and Mrs. Rudolf Schramm.

In a brief review for the *Evening Star*, assistant music critic John Vinton stated that the *Freedom Suite* “quoted many Negro spirituals, and contained passages using syncopated rhythms, short phrases, minor keys and other characteristic features of the spiritual.”<sup>28</sup> An unidentified writer for the *New York*

*Times* observed that the music in *Freedom Suite* “is built almost exclusively on Negro folk and hymn motifs.”<sup>29</sup> Critics Fred Mason and Gladys Graham gave the premiere of the work enthusiastic reviews.<sup>30</sup> Hall Johnson was quoted as observing that *Freedom Suite* “is really a musical journey from slavery, through many difficult stepping-stones to freedom, and on toward the full realization of that glorious freedom, which is surely coming.”<sup>31</sup> In an interview with *Washington Post* staff writer Mary Wieggers, Roland Hayes observed how the messages of *Freedom Suite* so clearly reflect the obstacles he had had to overcome in his own life and career.<sup>32</sup>

A second performance of *Freedom Suite* took place on 16 April 1967 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in the Rutgers University gymnasium, before an audience of 1500. In the performance, sponsored by the Rutgers chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Schramm conducted the choir, and Boatner received a standing ovation at the conclusion.<sup>33</sup>

Another Boatner work that includes a number of spirituals, and for which the Boatner papers provide documentation and reviews, is *The Life of Christ*. This musical play interprets Christ’s thirty-three years on earth through dramatic readings, dance, and twenty-five spirituals arranged by Boatner. In the 1971 interview with Johnson, Boatner explained, “I’m hoping that the work will do much to persuade thousands that have drifted away from the church and from Christianity to come back.”<sup>34</sup>

The play includes lesser known spirituals, such as “Create Me A Body and I’ll Go Down,” and “Little Boy, How Old Are You?,” as well as the more familiar “Let Us Break Bread Together” and “Wade In the Water.” It received its premiere at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, in New York City, on 28 October 1971. In a review for *Applause* magazine, Louis Sepersky wrote, “If *Jesus Christ Superstar* is where it’s at, then *The Life Of Christ* is where it ought to be. . . . The long neglected music of the slave in America, through the research done by Boatner, comes glowingly alive. . . . The style and emotion of the spiritual is still found in black church services, but these particular spirituals revived by Boatner are relatively unknown, even among black church goers.” Sepersky concludes, “At 73, Mr. Boatner has more to say than most of the more contemporary interpreters of religion through music.”<sup>35</sup>

Sepersky’s comments suggest that, at the time *The Life of Christ* was premiered, divergent perspectives may have existed between Boatner and the new generation of audiences who were more in tune with the urgent, militant undercurrents of the Civil Rights era. As regional civil rights struggles in the deep South gained national attention during the 1950s and 1960s, more rebellious types of music, such as rock ‘n’ roll and rhythm and blues, gained widespread popularity. New, more percussive Gospel music influenced the composition of traditional religious songs.<sup>36</sup> And yet during these decades, Boatner adhered rather steadfastly to his use and promotion of the spiritual as representative of

African-American history and the religious upbringing of his childhood. In doing so, he seemed to be advocating that the African-American community look continuously to the past, both musically and spiritually, for solutions to contemporary problems. As a result, despite his critical success, Boatner's approach may have been deemed old-fashioned by younger audiences. It is possible that his creative output suffered in competition with the proliferation of more popular musical styles. Eventually it was overshadowed by them, as well as by gradual societal acceptance of more aggressive political tactics.

After its premiere, *The Life of Christ* toured college campuses and was also produced at Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall in February 1972. The Boatner papers at the Schomburg Center contain typescripts, announcements and programs for a 1979 production of the play under its later title, *The Man from Nazareth*.

Two other major works by Boatner, a musical comedy, *Julius Sees Her in Rome, Georgia*, and an opera, *Troubled in Mind*, are unpublished. Telling the story of Julius Caesar with humor and music, *Julius Sees Her* is made in two acts and requires non-singing actors, chorus, soloists and orchestra. Boatner based the musical on his own book in 1935 and revised it in 1975. The work received ten performances during November 1978, at the Harlem Performance Center.<sup>37</sup>

*Troubled in Mind*, an opera in three acts, was begun as early as 1968, funded partly by the National Endowment for the Arts. It concerns a pre-civil war relationship between a black woman and a slave owner. Plans were made for the opera to be performed during the years 1979 and 1980, but no reviews for performances of *Troubled in Mind* have been located.

Throughout the opera spirituals such as "Troubled in Mind," "Motherless Child," "Nobody Knows" and "Bye and Bye" are sung by a choir and serve as background or incidental music. Boatner's original music in the opera consists of recitative-like settings of conversation between characters, in vernacular English. From a compositional perspective, *Troubled in Mind* is more adventurous than *Freedom Suite*. Although the writing is diatonic, many chromatic passages, matched with rhythmic syncopation, occur during scenes of emotional intensity. This procedure is evident, for example, in "Ben's Aria" during a fervid proclamation of love for the character Emma. Other portions of the opera, however, are more influenced by the spiritual idiom. The aria, "Please Don't Take My Baby," sung by a slave woman about to lose her child at auction, exhibits scalar, lyrical passages and is filled with a hymn-like quality. The duet "You're the Only One for Me," sung by characters Danny and Lulu, with its pleasant romantic text, would be well suited for concert performance apart from the full opera.

Throughout his career Boatner won a variety of awards, including those from the Brooklyn Lyceum, the Detroit Association of Musicians, and the New York Uptown Musicians, among others. In 1979, at the age of 81, he was hon-

ored by the Chicago branch of the National Association of Negro Musicians. Boatner spoke with Earl Calloway of the *Chicago Defender* a few days before the ceremony about his teaching activities. "You know, I'm 81, but don't feel that old," he said. "I give more than 85 lessons a week, to interested children, youth and adults." The students Boatner particularly aimed to teach were those between the ages of eight and eighteen, who could not afford lessons. "Because of the lack of financial support, many gifted young people and children must suffer defeat and are not able to continue a career."<sup>38</sup> Beginning in 1973 Boatner served as director of the Art of Black Music Foundation, dedicated to raising scholarship funds for talented youngsters and to the preservation of African-American music.<sup>39</sup> At the time of the Chicago event, Boatner was also director of the Art of Black Music Master Singers, which had performed many of his works.<sup>40</sup>

Boatner was married three times and fathered four children, three of whom were active as musicians.<sup>41</sup> Best known was the jazz saxophonist Edward "Sonny" Stitt, who died in 1982.<sup>42</sup> Stitt's mother, Claudine Wicks, was a singer in the National Baptist Convention Choir, who first met Boatner during his tenure as its director. Another son, the late Clifford Boatner, was a concert pianist who earned his B.A in music from Brooklyn College and a master's degree in education from Boston University. A 1956 edition of *The Crisis* includes a photo of Clifford Boatner with an announcement of a concert he was scheduled to give with his sister, contralto Adelaide Boatner, at the Staten Island Museum, sponsored by the Staten Island Branch of the NAACP.<sup>43</sup> Their mother Adelaide was also an amateur vocalist. She later remarried and settled in Chicago as Adelaide Byrd. Boatner's third wife, Julia, enjoyed singing popular music. She provided the lyrics to several original songs composed by her husband, which are filed among the Boatner papers. Their daughter Sarah assisted her father in the copy work for the manuscript of *Troubled in Mind* and some of his other works.<sup>44</sup>

In 1981, Sarah donated his papers to the Schomburg Center. Three years later, on 19 February 1984, a memorial service honoring Boatner's life and achievements was held at Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago.

Librarians, musicologists and performers are encouraged to visit the Schomburg Center, explore the musical, theoretical and historical issues associated with the Boatner papers, and consider the possible ways in which his works can be made known to a wider audience. It is also hoped that those with personal or professional recollections of having worked with Boatner, or who possess additional resources not covered in this article, will share them with the research community.

## The Scope and Content of the Boatner Papers

The Edward Boatner papers of 1941-1980 reflect his activities as composer/arranger, choral conductor, music professor, scholar, playwright and novelist. The collection consists of six boxes, which are divided into three series: 1) Music,

2) Typescripts, and 3) Articles, Programs, etc. It includes copies of music manuscripts, as well as published music scores, original typescripts and photocopies of music theory books, musical plays, short stories and treatises. The Articles and Programs series includes newspaper reviews of Boatner's productions and the *New York Times* profile of Boatner by Johnson, dated 30 September 1971.

"The Music, 1941-1966" (also containing miscellaneous undated material) includes a published score and solo/chorus score for Boatner's *Freedom Suite*. The scores for four Gospel songs reveal Boatner's brief venture into this more popular area of religious music. All but one of the songs contain lyrics by his wife Julia. Another folder contains voice parts for selections to be performed by the fictional Heaven's Gate Choir, in the musical play, *He Will Answer*. A piano/vocal score for Boatner's musical comedy, *Julius Sees Her in Rome, Georgia*, and for his opera, *Troubled in Mind (Forbidden Love)*, are also included. String quartet accompaniments for selections from *Troubled in Mind* can be found here as well, together with a handwritten draft entitled "Hints to Orchestration," in which Boatner expresses his concerns regarding instrumental accompaniment for spirituals. "Slaves had no orchestras, nor elaborate instrumental accompaniment. A cappella singing was predominant. A subdued role is . . . presently desired for any scoring, to prevent overshadowing the voices."<sup>45</sup>

Nearly one-third of the series containing "Typescripts, 1960-1980 and undated materials" are of unpublished instructional materials by Boatner that cover the areas of music harmony, rhythm and piano technique. In some of these textbooks, Boatner makes rather curious distinctions between "commercial" and "classical" harmonies, and between "pure," "additive" and "fractional" voicings. These and other terms invite further investigation and comparison with current theoretical nomenclature. The textbook *Self Study Piano* contains a chart that aligns a drawing of the piano keyboard with the treble and bass clefs, as well as with various time and key signatures. Other items in this series include libretti for productions of *Julius Sees Her in Rome, Georgia*, *He Will Answer*, *The Man from Nazareth*, *One Drop of Blood*, *The Origin of the Spirituals*, and *Troubled in Mind*. There are also drafts for nearly twenty short stories. The original typescript of Boatner's textbook manuscript, "Great Afro-Americans," and a social commentary entitled "The Damaging Results of Racism" are also located here.

The "Articles, Programs, etc.," series dated from 1967-1979 consists of several reviews of the premiere of Boatner's *Freedom Suite* and of his production of *The Man from Nazareth*, also known as *The Life of Christ*. Announcements and programs appear here for two productions of this musical play. A *Washington Post* interview with Boatner's mentor, tenor Roland Hayes, is included here as is an article from the *New York Times* that focuses on Boatner's career and his role in the spirituals revival.

Four additional items from these papers have been moved to the Schomburg

Center's Photographs and Prints Division: a negative of a publicity photo of Boatner; a photograph of Boatner's colleague Jimmy Amistad, a cast member of a production of *Julius Sees Her in Rome*; a photo of the Boatner choir; and a set of color slides which illustrate various scenes depicted in the musical play, *The Man from Nazareth*.

## Notes

1. Edward Boatner, interview with Benjamin Gray and Phyllis Bash, 25 April 1972, tape recording, Hatch-Billops Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, N.Y. My thanks go to James Vernon Hatch and Camille Billops for permission to quote from this interview.
2. A majority of published sources state that 1898 was Boatner's year of birth. During the 1972 interview, however, Boatner says that he was born in 1897.
3. Edward Boatner, *The Story of the Spirituals: 30 Spirituals and Their Origins* (New York: McAfee Music, 1973), ii.
4. Edward Boatner, *Freedom Suite* (New York: Hammond Music, 1966), iii.
5. Edward Boatner, "The Damaging Results of Racism," typescript, i, Hatch-Billops Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, N.Y.
6. Of these, *Great Achievements Black and White* (n.d.) and *Freedom Suite* have been published.
7. Rev. Boatner spoke seven languages, and received his doctorate from the Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Ga. Although he served on several college faculties, the only one documented is that of the Philander Smith College (a Methodist school) in Little Rock, Ark. See Boatner, "The Damaging Results," 306.
8. During the 1972 interview, Boatner mentioned that his father did some teaching at a Missouri high school. Pritchard, however, states that Dr. Boatner "obtained a professorship at a small college" in Missouri. The name of that college is not provided. See Robert S. Pritchard, "The Music Master," foreword to *30 Afro-American Choral Spirituals SATB*, by Edward Boatner (New York: Hammond Music, 1964), 5.
9. This college is now closed.
10. Boatner, interview, 25 April 1972.
11. A majority of sources cite 1917 as Boatner's year of arrival in Boston, including Eileen Southern, "Boatner, Edward," *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), 39; and Robert S. Pritchard, "The Music Master." During the 1972 interview, Boatner recollected he arrived in Boston in 1916.
12. Boatner, interview, 25 April 1972.
13. "Defender's Massed Chorus Takes Music Festival Honor," *Chicago Defender*, 30 August 1930, 1.
14. The range of years during which Boatner worked as director for the Convention varies among published sources. In summary, he may have begun as early as 1925, and ended as late as 1933.
15. Boatner, interview, 25 April 1972.
16. Edward Boatner and Willa A. Townsend, eds., *Spirituals Triumphant Old and New* (Nashville, Tenn.: Sunday School Publishing Board, National Baptist Convention U.S.A., 1927), i. Extensive collection and preservation of spirituals as a folk song tradition began after the Civil War, with the collection *Slave Songs in the United States*, published in 1867 by W.F. Allen, Charles Ware, and Lucy M. Garrison. Interest in the spirituals as concert repertory, however was inspired by performances of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who toured internationally from 1870-1890. A collection published by Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949) in 1916, entitled *Jubilee Songs of the United States* made spirituals available to solo concert singers as art songs for the first time. Boatner maintained the importance of authenticity regarding the collection and transcription of spirituals, but also clearly identified with the new, stylized and polished ways in which they were being arranged and performed.

Other contributors to the concert spiritual repertory at this time included J. Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954), who with his brother James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938), published *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* in 1925 (New York: Viking Press). Robert Nathaniel Dett's collections include *Religious Folk Songs of the Negro* (Hampton, Va.: Hampton Institute Press, 1927), and *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals* (Chicago: Hall & McCreary, 1936).

Another good friend of Boatner's, Hall Johnson (1888-1970), arranged and published spirituals throughout his career, and was renowned for his choral conducting. The Hall Johnson Choir made its debut in 1928, and enjoyed thirty years of acclaim worldwide. Boatner was in contact with many of the above artists professionally and socially, and shared their goals of establishing the spiritual as an artistic medium. For further details about the history of the spiritual medium, see Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997) and Arthur Lee Evans, "The Development of the Negro Spiritual as Choral Art Music by Afro-American Composers with an Annotated Guide to the Performance of Selected Spirituals" (Ph.D. diss., University of Miami, 1972).

17. This information was obtained via telephone with the Huston-Tillotson College Registrar's Office. Boatner's name is listed among the faculty in the course catalogs for academic years 1933-34 and 1934-35.

18. "Boatner Song Group Heard By Teachers," *Chicago Defender*, 30 December 1933, 5.

19. Boatner's name is listed among the faculty in a Wiley College course catalog for the 1936-37 academic year. This information was provided via telephone by the Wiley College Personnel Office.

20. This recital program is included in the Schomburg Center's Programs and Playbills collection, located in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division. See also, Diane C. Sullivan, ed. *The Kaiser Index to Black Resources, 1948-1986, from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library*, 5 vols. (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1992).

21. Thomas A. Johnson, "Spirituals, Reflecting New Attitude, Regain Popularity," *New York Times*, 30 September 1971, 49. The Edward Boatner Studio is no longer in operation; its most recent location is now a private residence.

22. See the first appendix for a list of Boatner's published spiritual arrangements held by the Schomburg Center.

23. Boatner, *The Story of the Spirituals*, ii. Since the 1950s, of course, some composers have treated spirituals far more adventurously than Boatner does in his arrangements, rendering works that are far less straightforward in nature than those of Boatner, and which incorporate a wide variety of musical styles and techniques. Michael Tippett, for whom the spiritual has served as a starting point for new creative explorations, utilized expanded choral voicings and textural layering, as well as more daring contemporary harmonies and rhythms (see his "5 Negro Spirituals" from the oratorio *Child of Our Time* [London: Schott & Co., 1958]). The arrangements of John Carter contain influences of gospel, popular music and ragtime (see his *Ticket to the Promised Land* [Columbus, Ohio: Beckenhorst Press, 1982]; *Jacob's Ladder* [Columbus, Ohio: Beckenhorst Press, 1992]; and *Old Time Religion* [N.p.: GlorySound, 1984]). See also John Gray, *Blacks in Classical Music* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1988); Frank Perry, *Afro-American Vocal Music: A Guide to Fifteen Composers* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Vande Vere, 1991); Alice Tischler and Carol Tomasic, *Fifteen Black American Composers: A Bibliography of Their Works*, (Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1992); or Evelyn White, *A Selected Bibliography of Published Choral Music by Black Composers*, (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1975).

24. Pritchard, "The Music Master," 5, and Patricia Turner, *Dictionary of Afro-American Performers, 78 RPM and Cylinder Recordings of Opera, Choral Music and Song, c. 1900-1949* (New York: Garland, 1990), 47. An extensive discography of Boatner recordings, compiled by Dominique-Rene de Lerma, will appear in *The Black Composer: A Discography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, forthcoming).

25. Rudolf Schramm was a faculty member of New York University for thirty years, where he taught composition and songwriting in the school's Division of General Education. He also served as Music Director for the U.S. Office of Education under Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He was staff music conductor for the National Broadcasting Company in Washington, D.C., and conductor for Eleanor Roosevelt's radio programs.

26. Boatner's statements of artistic intention, and my following summary of the Suite's narration, are from Boatner, *Freedom Suite*, iii-iv.

27. John Vinton, "Freedom Suite Premiered Here," *Washington D. C. Evening Star*, 4 April 1967, section B, 13. See also, "Freedom Suite Gets Premiere In Capital," *New York Times*, 4 April 1967, 38, which states that the Washington Symphony Orchestra premiered the work.

28. Vinton, "Freedom Suite," 13.

29. "Freedom Suite," *New York Times*, 38.

30. Among the Boatner papers are photocopies of several reviews of *Freedom Suite*, which unfortunately do not contain the names of the newspapers in which they originally appeared. These include "Go Tell It On Mountain [sic] is the Message of *Freedom Suite*," by Fred Mason; as well as "Boatner's *Freedom Suite* Thrills Big D.C. Audience," and "*Freedom Suite* Premier [sic]," both by Dr. Gladys Graham. Another article, "Boatner's *Freedom Suite* Heard by 1,500 at Rutgers," includes a publicity photo of Boatner but lacks any further bibliographical information.

31. Boatner, *Freedom Suite*, 2.

32. Mary Wieggers, "Roland Hayes: Suite was His Song," *Washington Post*, 4 April 1967, section B2, 8.

33. Reviews and accounts of performances of the *Freedom Suite* are located in the Boatner papers.

34. Thomas A. Johnson, "Spirituals, Reflecting New Attitude, Regain Popularity," *New York Times*, 30 September 1971, 49.

35. Louis Sepersky, "The Life of Christ," *Applause* 1, no. 6 (17 November 1971): 1.

36. Reebee Garofalo, "The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement on Popular Music," *Radical America* 21, no. 6 (1987): 16.

37. An advertisement for these performances is located in the vertical file in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the Lincoln Center Performing Arts Library.

38. Earl Calloway, "CMA Honors Noted Black Composer," *Chicago Defender*, "Accent" section, 27 January 1979, 1.

39. Boatner, *The Story of the Spirituals*, i.

40. Calloway, "CMA Honors."

41. Southern, "Boatner, Edward H.," *Biographical Dictionary*, 39. See also Charles Eugene Claghorn, *Biographical Dictionary of American Music*, (West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker, 1973), and Boatner's obituary in *The Black Perspective in Music* 9 no. 2 (Fall 1981): 239.

42. Stitt enjoyed a forty-year career as an alto and tenor saxophonist. A *New York Times* obituary states that he "was born Feb. 2, 1924 in Boston," that "his father was a college music professor," and that "Mr. Stitt grew up in Saginaw, Mich., where his father was teaching." John S. Wilson, "Sonny Stitt, Saxophonist, Is Dead; Style Likened to Charlie Parker's," *New York Times*, 24 July 1982, 29.

43. "What the Branches Are Doing," *The Crisis* (April 1956): 236. Clifford Boatner was born in Chicago, and died in 1983 at the age of forty-five. He studied piano performance with Jorge Bolet and Leon Tumarkin, and concertized throughout the United States, including New York City's Carnegie Hall and Steinway Hall. He also taught mathematics at the Quincy High School and the Quincy Junior College, in Quincy, Mass. for eighteen years, and wrote several textbooks on math. Both Clifford and his sister Adelaide were raised by Earle and Adelaide Byrd in Chicago. "Pianist Boatner Dies," *Chicago Defender*, 27 September 1983, 14.

44. My thanks go to the Boatner family for assisting with details regarding Boatner's personal life.

45. This draft is located in Box 1, Folder 7 of the Boatner papers.

## Appendix A

### Boatner's Published Spiritual Arrangements Located in the Schomburg Center

The following is a list of published spirituals arranged by Boatner that are located in the Schomburg Center's sheet music collection. The songs are arranged for SATB chorus with keyboard accompaniment provided, unless otherwise indicated:

*The Angel Rolled the Stone Away*. New York: G. Ricordi & Co., 1954.

*The Crucifixion*. Brooklyn, N. Y.: Hammond Music, 1953.

*Done Made My Vow*. New York: McAfee Music, 1979.

- Don't Feel No Ways Tired*. Brooklyn, New York: Hammond Music, 1952.
- Go Tell It on the Mountain*. New York: McAfee Music, 1979.
- He's Got The Whole World in His Hands*. New York: Emanuel A. Middleton, 1968.
- I Been in the Storm: For Soprano solo and SATBB Chorus*. New York: Nephal Music, 1942.
- I Want Jesus to Walk with Me*. New York: Galaxy Music, 1949. (Arrangement for high/low voice also available; also arranged for soprano solo with SATBB chorus)
- Let Us Break Bread Together*. New York: Hammond Music, 1952.
- Lord, I Can't Stay Away*. New York: Hammond Music, 1952.
- Oh Lord, I Done Done: For Solo Voice and Piano*. Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1925.
- Oh, What a Beautiful City*. New York: McAfee Music, 1979.
- On Ma Journey*. New York: Franco Colombo, 1956. (Arrangements for high/low voice also available)
- Ride on King Jesus*. New York: Hammond Music, 1953.
- Rise up, Shepherds, and Follow*. New York: McAfee Music, 1979.
- Soon I Will Be Done*. New York: G. Ricordi & Co., 1954.
- 30 Afro-American Choral Spirituals, SATB*. New York: Hammond Music, 1964.
- Trampin: For Low Voice and Piano*. New York: W. Maxwell, 1931.
- Wade in the Water: For Medium Voice and Piano*. Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1925. (Arrangement for low voice and piano also available)
- Were You There?* New York: Hammond Music, 1952.
- What A Shame!* New York: Hammond Music, 1953.
- When I Get Here*. New York: G. Ricordi & Co., 1954.
- You Hear the Lambs A-Crying*. New York: Hammond Music, 1952.
- You Are My Hearts Desire*. Brooklyn, N. Y.: Hedley Dacon, 1946. (Popular ballad, with words by Hedley Dacon)

## Appendix B

### Boatner Papers Inventory

#### BOX FOLDER

#### MUSIC

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | <i>Freedom Suite</i> —Full score, 1966  |
|   | 2 | <i>Freedom Suite</i> —Solo/chorus score   |
|   | 3 | Gospel songs, 1941:<br><i>Happy in Jesus</i><br><i>I Am Satisfied</i><br><i>I Will Answer When He Calls Me</i><br><i>My Lord Offers Peace</i>   |
|   | 4 | <i>He Will Answer</i> —music for the production, 1960:<br><i>Comes a Day</i><br><i>I've Waited So Long</i><br><i>Mercy, Lord</i><br><i>The Poison Letter</i><br>[Untitled Selection]<br><i>Who Does She Think She Is?</i> |
|   | 5 | <i>Julius Sees Her in Rome, Georgia</i> —Piano/vocal score  |
|   | 6 | <i>Troubled in Mind (Forbidden Love)</i> —Piano/vocal score, Parts I & II   |
|   | 7 | <i>Troubled in Mind (Forbidden Love)</i> —String Quartet/orchestral accompaniments  |

BOX FOLDER

TYPESCRIPTS

2	1	<i>Canebrake—A Play In Three Acts</i>
	2	<i>Chord construction</i>
	3	<i>Chord Progression</i>
	4	<i>Chord Progression—Commentary for Teachers</i>
	5	<i>Chord Progression—Teacher’s Extended Commentary</i>
	6	<i>Commercial Chord Construction</i>
	7	<i>The Damaging Results of Racism</i>
	8	<i>Elementary Theory Book, 1975</i>
3	1	<i>Great Afro-Americans</i>
	2	<i>Great Afro-Americans (incomplete)</i>
	3	<i>Harmonization of Melody</i>
	4	<i>He Will Answer—A Musical Play</i>
4	1	<i>How to Count Rhythm</i>
	2	<i>How to Read and Play Chord Symbols</i>
	3	<i>Humorous Short Stories</i>
	4	<i>Humorous Short Story Illustrations (by Leah A. Holland)</i>
	5	<i>Introduction to Chord Progression</i>
	6	<i>Julius Sees Her in Rome, Georgia, 1967</i>
	7	<i>Julius Sees Her in Rome, Georgia, 1967</i>
	8	<i>The Man from Nazareth—A Religious Musical Production</i>
	9	<i>The Man from Nazareth</i>
	10	<i>The Man from Nazareth (different version)</i>
	11	<i>Modulation</i>
	12	<i>Music Embellishments</i>
5	1	<i>One Drop of Blood—A Drama For T.V. or Movies, 1974</i>
	2	<i>One Drop of Blood, 1979</i>
	3	<i>The Origin of the Spirituals, 1979</i>
	4	<i>Origin of the Afro-American Spirituals, or Origin of the Spirituals, 1980</i>
	5	<i>Part-Leading</i>
	6	<i>Self-Study Piano</i>
	7	<i>Self-Study Piano Course and Comprehensive Chart, 1970</i>
	8	<i>Three Short Stories</i>
6	1	<i>Troubled in Mind (Forbidden Love)—An Afro-American Slave Opera in Three Acts, 1968</i>
	2	<i>Troubled in Mind</i>
	3	<i>Troubled in Mind, 1974</i>
	4	<i>The Wiggers—A Role-Reversal Historical Inter-Racial Play, 1974.</i>

ARTICLES, PROGRAMS, ETC.

5	<i>Freedom Suite—Reviews, 1967</i>
6	<i>Great Achievements, White and Black—Advertisement</i>
7	<i>Julius Sees Her in Rome, Georgia—Scene Illustrations</i>
8	Letter from Speed Copy Center; postcards to Chorale members
9	<i>The Man from Nazareth—Announcements, Programs, Reviews, 1971, 1979</i>
10	<i>New York Times article, 1971</i>
11	Recital program (Evelyn M. Sharp and Oscar Brown, vocalists), 1981