

2016

So “Fisk” ticated Ladies and Gentlemen: Highlights From 150 Years of Fisk University’s Musical Tradition, Impact, and Influence

Fletcher F. Moon

Tennessee State University, fmooon@tnstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalscholarship.tnstate.edu/lib>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moon, Fletcher F., "So “Fisk” ticated Ladies and Gentlemen: Highlights From 150 Years of Fisk University’s Musical Tradition, Impact, and Influence" (2016). *Library Faculty and Staff Publications and Presentations*. Paper 15.
<http://digitalscholarship.tnstate.edu/lib/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the TSU Libraries and Media Centers at Digital Scholarship @ Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Faculty and Staff Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship @ Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact XGE@Tnstate.edu.

So “Fisk” ticated Ladies and Gentlemen: Highlights From 150 Years of Fisk University’s
Musical Tradition, Impact, and Influence

Fletcher F. Moon

Tennessee State University

The year 2016 marks an important milestone in the history of Fisk University, an institution that has played a tremendous and outsized role in higher education, arts and sciences, and culture/society. This is due to the numerous achievements and accomplishments of its students, alumni, faculty, administration, and others who have influenced or been influenced by the university since its founding on January 9, 1866 in Nashville, Tennessee.

From the immediate aftermath of the Civil War to the third decade of the twenty-first century, Fisk University has survived and thrived despite numerous challenges that have threatened its existence, from financial hardship to questions regarding the relevance/continued need of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), particularly since the victories of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s led to the end of de jure segregation practices in education and other areas of American society and culture. For Fisk, music has been an essential weapon in “cultural warfare” to establish and maintain the humanity, dignity, capabilities, and creativity inherent in African American artistic, aesthetic, and cultural contributions from the local to the world stage. Music has also been key to the needs and interests of the University, in terms of drawing favorable attention/publicity and resources/support for its liberal arts mission.

The story of the Original Fisk Jubilee Singers figures prominently in every historical account of the university, due to the fact that their efforts literally saved the school from going out of existence less than ten years after its 1866 opening. Pike (1873), Marsh (1881),

Richardson (1980), Mitchell (1995) and other historians document Fisk's founders as being white clergymen affiliated with the Congregational Church and the American Missionary Association (John Ogden, Edward P. Smith, and Erastus Milo Cravath, who eventually became the first president of the school), while the school was named for Nashville-based Union army general Clinton B. Fisk, who supported their efforts and secured a former military hospital barracks as its first building (a portion of which still exists on the present campus).

However, the key figures to emerge during the first crisis for the school were a formerly enslaved Black woman, Ella Sheppard (later Moore), and another white minister on the Fisk staff, Rev. George L. White, who also served as the school's treasurer. Howse (1987) and Smith (1992) note that Sheppard, whose freedom was purchased by her father Simon for \$350, overcame childhood traumas including her mother Sarah being "sold South" to Mississippi and fleeing Nashville with her family to Cincinnati to avoid possible re-enslavement. Despite early health problems, she studied music in a local black school and showed such talent that her father bought her a piano before his sudden death in 1866.

Sheppard continued her piano training with secret instruction from a white Cincinnati teacher, played for local functions, began training a few students of her own, and also managed to earn money from domestic work before returning to Tennessee to teach school in Gallatin, less than fifty miles from Nashville. She saved a small amount, and enrolled at Fisk in the fall of 1868 to study and support herself by work in the campus dining room and giving music lessons to other students. During her first summer at Fisk she became an assistant music teacher and the school's first Black faculty member, but the school was already struggling to the point that closure was being considered.

White came up with the idea to organize a group of student singers to go out and attempt to raise funds for the school, and recruited Sheppard to serve as pianist and vocal trainer as well as sing soprano. Mitchell (1995) noted that the group's first performances were actually in Southern cities (with little success), which may be why the Fisk administration did not encourage White to continue his efforts with a Northern tour.

Nevertheless, the accounts indicate that White gathered and borrowed funds, and on October 6, 1871 set out "to sing the money out of the hearts and pockets of the people". The original company of nine singers included four other women besides Sheppard (Jennie Jackson, Maggie Porter, Minnie Tate, and Eliza Walker) and four men (Isaac Dickerson, Benjamin Holmes, Green Evans, and Thomas Rutling). America W. Robinson, another early Jubilee Singer, was one of four in the first Fisk graduating class of 1874-1875. Robinson was unable to attend the commencement ceremony because she was on tour with the singers in Europe, and became the only early Jubilee Singer to actually receive a Fisk degree, as the others had become full-time professional performing artists. Fisk principal/dean and music instructor Adam K. Spence insisted that another music teacher be hired in place of Sheppard, whose work with the Jubilee Singers made her unavailable to continue teaching on the campus. Howse (1987) cited that due to her many talents as pianist, soprano, and vocal trainer, Sheppard was indispensable to the ensemble and considered as the "backbone" of the group.

Southern (1983) and other sources indicate that the group's first concerts were not immediately successful until White asked the singers to begin featuring more of the "slave songs" in concerts as opposed to other popular music of the day, and audiences responded to the power, passion, and simplicity of the music that came to be known as Negro Spirituals. Serving as the group's manager/director, White was also credited with naming them the "Jubilee Singers"

based on the Biblical/Hebrew/Jewish “year of jubilee” (Leviticus 25), and the “jubilee” of slavery’s end due to the Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation.

Artistic and financial success followed, despite incidents and indignities directed at the group while traveling and seeking accommodations. Smith (1992) cites that even with the singers donating some of their early proceeds to victims of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, they continued on to the major cities in the Northeast, and met/sang before numerous dignitaries including President Ulysses S. Grant. They raised enough money to pay the school’s debts, purchase twenty-five acres of land for a new campus, and finance the construction of Jubilee Hall, considered the first facility ever built for the higher education of African Americans in the South. Collins (1989) cited that the building is also fondly referred to as “frozen music”, in tribute to the efforts which made its existence possible, and that it was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1975.

The first international tour of 1873-74 took the singers to Great Britain where they enjoyed great success, including a performance for Queen Victoria, who was so moved that she was noted as saying the singers must be from the “Music City of the United States” and commissioned her court painter, Edmund Havel, to paint a portrait of the eleven singers, and gifted it to Fisk. The portrait was displayed for a number of years inside the Fisk Memorial Chapel (completed in 1893) until moved to the Appleton Room of Jubilee Hall, where it remains in a place of prominence on the campus.

The success of the Original Fisk Jubilee Singers laid the foundation for all subsequent musical activities and organizations associated with the University in future years, with Sheppard setting the standard for all future Fisk student and faculty music artists through her talent and

versatility as an artist/teacher of voice, piano/keyboard, and choral ensembles. At one point White resigned and left Sheppard with full responsibility for the group, as they continued to perform for diverse audiences in America and abroad. Sheppard's great-granddaughter Howse (1987) also noted that the original group finally disbanded in 1878, in large part due to fatigue and/or illness brought on by years of constant travel and performing, with some returning home and some staying in Europe to seek further opportunities, yet in seven years the group raised \$150,000 (the equivalent of millions in today's economy) for their university.

In 1879, Spence founded the Mozart Society (which evolved into the Fisk University Choir), which now claims the distinction of being the oldest college choir in the state of Tennessee. During the same year White attempted to reorganize the Jubilee Singers as an independent group with help from Sheppard until 1882, when she married minister George Washington Moore and moved with her husband to Washington, D.C. Smith (1992) indicated that they returned to Nashville in 1890, and Sheppard Moore developed a new set of touring Jubilee Singers from students in the Mozart Society. The group was not as successful, so she organized the Jubilee Club for local performances and settled into her home on the Fisk campus with family in her remaining years. Her diaries and other personal writings provide first-person insights into her amazing life story, and are stored in the Special Collections/Archives area of the John Hope and Aurelia Franklin Library at Fisk. Another tribute to Sheppard in recent years is the Ella Sheppard School of Music for children in Chicago, founded in 2010 by pianist/1980 Fisk graduate George Cooper.

Thomas W. Talley (Class of 1890, M.S. 1892), who later became a distinguished Fisk chemistry professor and Tennessee's first African-American collector of folk songs and stories, was also a Fisk music student who sang bass and toured with the New Fisk Jubilee Singers in

1890 under the direction of Ella Sheppard Moore. He also sang with one of the early quartets, conducted as well as sang with the Mozart Society/University Choir, offered reflections on Sheppard Moore at a memorial service after her death in 1914, and published his first collection of folklore materials in 1922.

Richardson (1980) and Mitchell (1985) document the formal organization of the Fisk music department in 1885 by Cravath, who subsequently utilized his alumni connections to hire Jennie A. Robinson, a graduate of Oberlin College/Conservatory, in 1887 as the first department head. Robinson continued in this role until 1919, during a period in which Fisk influenced the musical development of young Black artists as diverse as composer and choral conductor John W. Work Jr. (Class of 1895), concert pianist R. Augustus Lawson (Class of 1896), and most significantly, tenor Roland Hayes.

The Work family's Fisk connections began with John Work Sr., who was a Nashville church musician and choral conductor. Some original Jubilee Singers were in choirs he directed, making him the first of three generations in his family to influence the Fisk music tradition. John Jr., his wife Agnes (Class of 1897), and brother Frederick Jerome Work became musicologists as well as music educators with their work in transcribing and publishing written versions and arrangements of Negro spirituals and folksongs. John Jr. may be best remembered as composer of the religious/Christmas song, "Go Tell It On the Mountain", but Fiskites also know him for writing the Fisk alma mater, "The Gold and Blue", teaching Latin, and even coaching one of the first Fisk football teams. Ironically, Work Jr. resigned from Fisk in 1923 due to negative attitudes expressed by some colleagues toward spirituals and folk music, and became president of another Black school, Nashville's Roger Williams University, until his death in 1925.

Lovett (2013) cited Fisk alumna Martha Brown (Class of 1900), who continued musical studies at the American Conservatory in Chicago and was later an original music faculty member, matron, and first librarian at Tennessee State University (TSU) along with another Fisk graduate, former Jubilee Singer Noah W. Ryder (the first TSU music director) when the school opened in 1912 as Tennessee's first and only public/state-supported college for African Americans. Prior to joining TSU, Ryder had continued his musical studies after Fisk at Oberlin College/Conservatory, and was also documented as having performed alongside Roland Hayes, the most notable product of the Fisk music department during this era. Richardson (1980) also mentioned Roy Tibbs (Class of 1907), who was one of only two black members of the Organists Guild and achieved recognition for his musical expertise as longtime director of the Howard University Glee Club.

Mitchell (1985), Brooks and Sims (2015), and other sources note that Hayes was allowed to enter Fisk in 1906 based on his raw talent, despite his poverty and extremely limited (fifth or sixth-grade) previous education. He sought academic help and worked a variety of on and off-campus jobs, but was dismissed from Fisk in 1910 after forming a quartet, taking paid engagements, and using the school name without permission. After moving to Louisville for work and other musical opportunities, Hayes was asked to rejoin the Fisk Jubilee Singers for a performance at a special exhibition in Boston. He remained in the city after the concert with the group, found work, continued study with a local teacher, and launched his career as a soloist after successful local concerts, most notably one in Symphony Hall on November 5, 1917.

Despite the ups and downs of his "Fisk experience", Hayes never forgot the school, and twenty-five years later he returned to the university and performed a fundraising concert; in appreciation, Fisk awarded Hayes its first honorary doctorate in 1932. Brooks and Sims (2015)

provide further documentation of Hayes' long career as an international concert artist as well as his complicated personal life, adding to Hayes' stature as one of the most important vocal artists of the twentieth century.

The tradition of the Jubilee Singers continued in several formats, including all-male jubilee quartets and sextets (an early Fisk Jubilee Quartet was organized by John Work Jr. in 1916, but most of the subsequent groups were directed by a woman, Mrs. James A. Meyers), along with mixed-voice groups such as the Mozart Society/University Choir. Mitchell (1985) documents a men's glee club from as early as 1899-1900, along with the Fisk Octet and a larger glee club led by John W. Work III in later years.

Fisk Musical Connections to the Jazz Age/Harlem Renaissance

Another notable musician associated with Fisk during the same period was Lillian "Lil" Hardin (later Armstrong), who went on to become a major figure in early jazz as its first prominent female instrumentalist. Southern (1983), Thieme (1992), Barnhart (2005), and other sources indicate that Hardin, a native of Memphis, Tennessee, exhibited talent and received instruction/training on the piano and organ at an early age. She played these instruments for her church and at school, but was reprimanded and even punished for her interest in (and early attempts to play) popular music such as W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues".

Hardin's mother and grandmother sent her to Fisk in hopes that more classical piano training would "get the blues out of her system". While she did continue to study the instrument at Fisk, she left for Chicago in 1917 when her family relocated to the area and started her professional career as a "song-plugger" (musical demonstrator) at Jones's Music Store. Her reputation grew quickly, and at one point she was challenged by jazz piano legend "Jelly Roll"

Morton. At least one account of the encounter indicated that Hardin actually “cut” (outplayed) Morton, justifying her billing by the store as “The Jazz Wonder Child”.

This led to Hardin’s first major band experience with Joe “King” Oliver’s Original New Orleans Creole Jazz Band, which at different points included clarinetist/soprano saxophonist Sidney Bechet; trumpeter Freddie Keppard; bassist Wellman Braud; clarinetist Johnny Dodds and his brother, drummer Warren “Baby” Dodds; and trombonist Honore’ Dudley. In 1922, Hardin’s life changed forever when Louis Armstrong joined Oliver’s band as second cornetist. She is credited as the person responsible for promoting his talent well before becoming his second wife, encouraging Armstrong to start his own band after brief periods with the Fletcher Henderson and Erskine Tate orchestras. Hardin/Armstrong performed on the classic “Hot Five” recordings in 1925, and contributed arrangements and compositions such as the Armstrong classic “Struttin’ With Some Barbecue” (the couple later fought over composer credit, but otherwise maintained a friendly relationship).

After their divorce in 1938 Lillian continued to be known as “Lil” Armstrong, and became a featured performer in her own right as a soloist and/or leader of groups, ranging in size from small ensembles to big bands, including all-women orchestras as well as traditional groups comprised primarily of male musicians. She never completely retired from performing and died on stage during an August 27, 1971 memorial concert for Louis (who died on July 6 of the same year).

Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles were childhood friends who formed a comedy act during their student years at Fisk and also produced amateur shows that raised funds toward construction of a science building on the campus. They became the professional vaudeville

entertainment team of Miller and Lyles in 1905, yet their greatest contribution to performing arts was their role as script writers for the landmark 1921 Broadway musical/show, “Shuffle Along” in collaboration with singer Noble Sissle and pianist/composer James Hubert “Eubie” Blake.

In historical accounts of the Harlem Renaissance era, this show is considered a key event which ended Black exclusion from Broadway productions, brought attention to African American artistic/aesthetic talent and creativity, and opened doors of opportunity, recognition, and success for a number of Black artists in areas beyond music, such as literature and visual/graphic art. Lewis (1981) noted that was “the first postwar musical with music, lyrics, choreography, cast, and production entirely in Afro-American hands” and included such upcoming future stars as Josephine Baker, Florence Mills, and Paul Robeson, and an orchestra conducted by John Rosamund Johnson (most noted for his musical setting to brother James Weldon Johnson’s words/lyrics for “Lift Every Voice and Sing” in 1901), which included budding African American composer William Grant Still in the string section.

Notable Fisk music students/graduates during the 1920s included composer/choral conductor/musicologist John W. Work III and composer/choral conductor Harold J. Brown (both in the class of 1923). Work III became arguably the greatest contributor since Sheppard Moore to the Fisk musical tradition due to his excellence in teaching, composing, performing, arranging, conducting, and ground-breaking research/scholarship in Black folk music traditions. In recognition of his outstanding career Fisk awarded Work III an honorary doctorate in 1963, four years before his death in 1967. Richardson (1980) noted that Brown won awards for his compositions in five consecutive years (1927 and 1928 from the Wanamaker Musical Composition contest; 1929 from the Harmon Foundation; and from Wanamaker again in 1930 and 1931).

Bandleader/multi-instrumentalist Jimmie “Piggie” Lunceford (Class of 1925) and several members of his orchestra, including alto saxophonist/clarinetist/singer Willie Smith, pianist Edwin “Eddie” Wilcox, baritone saxophonist Jock “Earl” Carruthers, trumpeter Paul Webster, trombonist/featured singer Henry Wells, and Lunceford’s brother Connie (who later became the band’s road manager) all attended and/or graduated from Fisk before the band achieved major musical success in the 1930s and 1940s.

Determeyer (2006) described Lunceford during his Fisk years as a sociology major who idolized W.E.B. DuBois, dated DuBois’ daughter Yolande, minored in music and Spanish, and was “a very versatile varsity man” who was a star athlete in football, basketball, baseball, track, and even boxing, president of his senior class and the university Athletic Association. His musical activities beyond the classroom ranged from singing with the Mozart Society and Glee Club to directing local church choirs, playing piano at the Andrew Jackson Hotel, and leading/conducting the Fisk student orchestra (which included future members of his band) for various campus and social events.

At its peak, the Lunceford Orchestra was considered the equal of jazz groups led by Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, and other top bandleaders. Baszak (2003) quotes legendary jazz vocalist Jon Hendricks as saying that at one point, even Ellington wanted his band to be like Lunceford’s, which was considered to be the best-educated (with so many Fisk/college men), best-dressed, best-sounding, and most versatile big band, known for their showmanship and singing as well as instrumental excellence. After Lunceford’s death in 1947 and the demise of the band, Willie Smith went on to become a featured soloist with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, while others such as arrangers Sy Oliver and Gerald Wilson became major jazz figures with their own and other orchestras.

Another Fisk jazz connection from this period involves Gladys Riddle (later Hampton); Richardson (1980) and other sources indicate that she attended and graduated from Fisk in the early 1920s, joined her mother in California, and became a successful seamstress/costumier (dress designer) for Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) studios before meeting jazz vibraphonist Lionel Hampton in 1932. They married in 1936, and she utilized her previous experience to also become his business manager and booking agent with great success until her death in 1971.

Undine Smith (later Moore), valedictorian of the Fisk class of 1926 with two music degrees in piano and theory/composition, became the first Fisk graduate to study at the prestigious Juilliard School of Music in New York City. She completed her first major composition during her Fisk years, “Sir Olaf and the Erl King’s Daughter”, a choral piece based on Norwegian folklore, and went on to a long and distinguished tenure as a music professor at Virginia State University (VSU) from 1927-1972 as pianist, arranger, choral conductor, co-founder of the university’s Black Music Center in 1968, and prolific composer who became known as the “Dean of Black Women Composers”. Two of her most famous former students were opera singer Camilla Williams (who in 1946 became the first African American woman to sing a leading role with a major American opera company, and sang the national anthem at the 1963 March on Washington) and jazz pianist/composer/author/broadcaster/educator Dr. Billy Taylor.

Moore composed a piece titled “Lord We Give Thanks to Thee” for the Fisk Jubilee Singers Centennial in 1971, and upon her retirement from VSU in 1972, she was honored by many of her students at Town Hall in New York City. Moore received honorary doctorates from VSU and Indiana University, and in 1973 she received the Humanitarian Award from Fisk. In following years Moore devoted additional time to visiting professorships as well as composition,

and was designated Music Laureate by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1977. Her 16-part oratorio for chorus, solo voices, orchestra, and narrator, “Scenes From the Life of a Martyr” (1980), a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., premiered at Carnegie Hall and was nominated for the 1982 Pulitzer Prize in Music. Moore’s last major composition, “Soweto” (1987) was inspired by the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

Fisk Music In the Mid-Twentieth Century

The first Fisk “Festival of Negro Music and Fine Arts” was sponsored by the Music Department in the spring of 1929, featured concerts by the Jubilee Singers (then directed by Mrs. James A. Myers), the Men’s Glee Club, and the Mozart Society/University Choir (both directed by John W. Work III), and closed with an event honoring original Jubilee Singer Maggie Porter Cole; former Jubilee Singer Mabel Lewis Imes, and Mary Fisk Park (daughter of University founder/namesake General Clinton B. Fisk).

The 1932 Festival was the setting for Roland Hayes’ return to the campus, and in later years a diverse range of musical artists have been participants and/or honorees, including W.C. Handy, Marian Anderson, Phillipa Duke Schuyler, the Nashville Symphony, Harry Belafonte, Miriam Makeba, Quincy Jones, “Cannonball” and Nat Adderley, and Milt Jackson, as well as Fisk student recitals and ensembles such as the Modern Black Mass gospel choir and the “Orchestrated Crowd” Jazz Ensemble. The 87th Annual Spring Arts Festival will continue this tradition in April 2016 as part of the University’s sesquicentennial celebration.

Even with the university’s strong reputation in voice, piano/organ/keyboard, and choral ensembles, some Fisk musicians (particularly those interested in jazz) continued to follow the examples of Hardin and Lunceford and develop their abilities in other settings as well as at the

campus/university. Another member of the Work family, Julian Cassander Work, performed as a jazz pianist with local groups as a teenager, but began at Fisk as a sociology major until he changed majors to music and studied composition with older brother John III. Julian went on to New York, where he became a composer and arranger for musical productions spanning vaudeville, records, radio, and even television over his long professional career, and lived in Massachusetts during his later years.

Jordan “Chick” Chavis (Class of 1931) became a highly influential bandleader and music educator in Nashville and at Tennessee State; his 1949 “Jazz Collegians” won national recognition from the Pittsburgh Courier as the best black college jazz band, and performed at Carnegie Hall with top jazz stars such as Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker. Edward Perry Crump (Class of 1934) used his abilities as a jazz saxophonist/clarinetist to finance not only his Fisk education, but medical studies at Meharry Medical College, and at one point performed with the Count Basie Orchestra before a long and successful medical career as a pediatrician and founder/chair of the pediatrics department at Meharry. After retirement, Perry resumed musical study and performance at Belmont College (now University) in Nashville, where he was a featured clarinet soloist with the Belmont Jazz Ensemble.

The enduring legacy of Matthew and Anne Gamble Kennedy, pianists and longtime Fisk music faculty members, began in their respective hometowns of Americus, Georgia and Charleston, West Virginia. Matthew was a piano prodigy who had his own local radio program as a youngster, but was further inspired after attending a (segregated) concert by the Russian pianist/composer Sergei Rachmaninoff in Macon, Georgia. His mother then decided to move to New York for opportunities to advance Matthew’s potential. There he performed at the Apollo

Theater and was heard by Duke Ellington, who advised his mother to keep him in school despite his talent.

After graduating from New York's DeWitt Clinton High School, Matthew attended Juilliard and received an artist diploma in 1940, then headed south to Fisk where he met Anne Gamble, who was also a music/piano major at the university after her graduation from Garnet High School in Charleston, West Virginia. Matthew toured internationally as accompanist for a quartet of Jubilee Singers directed by Mrs. James A. Myers before his musical studies were interrupted by military service during World War II, delaying his graduation from Fisk until 1947. Matthew then joined the Fisk music faculty, earned an M.S., and pursued doctoral studies at George Peabody College.

During the same period Anne won a scholarship to Oberlin Conservatory after her graduation from Fisk in 1941, earned another music degree, continued on to Juilliard for additional studies, and performed internationally as piano soloist and accompanist before joining the Fisk faculty in 1950. After their marriage the Kennedys continued their performing careers as solo and duo pianists while teaching generations of Fisk music and piano students before their retirements from the university (Anne in 1981 and Matthew in 1986). Their tenures included Anne's fifteen years as accompanist and Matthew's twenty-four years as director for the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Matthew was also awarded a Fisk honorary doctorate in 2008.

However, the Kennedys' greatest accomplishment is their daughter, Nina Gamble Kennedy, who debuted at age 14 with the Nashville Symphony playing George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue", and went on to a successful international career as a concert pianist. Nina also became a critically acclaimed and award-winning filmmaker after she produced and released

“Matthew Kennedy: One Man’s Journey”, a 2007 documentary based on her father’s life and career.

Sonoma and Thomasina W. Talley reflect another Fisk family legacy, growing up on the campus as musically-inclined daughters of Fisk chemistry professor, singer, and folklorist Thomas Talley. Both sisters went on to have successful careers as musical artists and educators, with Sonoma becoming the first Black woman to receive an artist’s diploma in piano from the Damrosch Institute of Musical Art in 1923, and Thomasina enjoying a long tenure as a music/piano professor at North Carolina Central College (now University) in Durham.

Consuela Lee entered Fisk in 1944 to pursue studies in classical piano. Like Hardin/Armstrong and Kennedy, she had been a child prodigy on the instrument, with the added advantage that both her parents were skilled musicians (her father played cornet/trumpet and was band director at Florida A&M, and her mother was a classical pianist and teacher). According to Moorehead (2010), one of the first jazz songs that Lee heard was Hardin/Armstrong’s “Strutting With Some Barbecue”, leading to her lifelong passion and pursuit of the jazz art form.

During her freshman year she discovered that jazz music was not encouraged in the music department, but studied jazz informally with Alphonso Saville, a Meharry medical student until graduating from Fisk in 1948. Lee then moved to Florida to teach, where she met and married basketball coach Issac Moorehead in 1950, then continued her teaching career at several HBCUs including Alabama State, Hampton, Talladega, and Norfolk State. Lee/Moorehead also received a master’s degree in theory and composition from Northwestern University in 1959 with further studies at Peabody and Eastman music schools.

She continued her involvement with jazz by working with major artists including singer Sarah Vaughan, drummer/percussionist Max Roach, vibraphonist Milt Jackson, and bassist Richard Davis. Her family group “The Descendants of Mike and Phoebe” (including her brother, bassist Bill Lee, father of acclaimed filmmaker Spike Lee) toured and recorded for Strata-East Records, an African-American owned record label. She retired from college teaching in 1979 to focus her energies on reviving Snow Hill Institute in Alabama (founded in 1893 by her grandfather), and turned it into a cultural/creative arts center, introduced young children to jazz, and recruited many of her family and musical colleagues to support its activities (including her famous nephew, who was present for the Snow Hill centennial in 1993). As a result, she received honors and recognition for her activism and talent before succumbing to Alzheimer’s disease at the age of 83 in 2009.

Lois Towles joined the Fisk music faculty during the 1950s after piano studies in Fontainebleau, France with the noted classical pianist Robert Casadesus. During her Fisk tenure she also performed with the TSU String Quartet. Richard M. Turner III (Class of 1956) was a founding member and officer of Fisk’s Zeta Rho Chapter of Phi Mu Alpha Music Fraternity in 1954 with faculty members John Work III, Arna Bontemps, and President Charles S. Johnson. Current Fisk music chair and piano professor Dr. Philip Autry revived the chapter from inactive status to continue another Fisk music tradition. Turner eventually earned a music doctorate from Indiana University, returned to chair the Music Department and direct the Jubilee Singers from 1968 to 1971, moved into administration and became president of several community colleges around the country, and received an honorary doctorate from Fisk in 1980.

Another distinguished classical pianist/music educator produced by Fisk during this period was Carol Stone (later Gafford). Stone was a protégé of Matthew Kennedy who also

studied organ with Arthur Crowley. After graduating from Fisk in 1959 she pursued graduate studies at Indiana University and collaborated with jazz/classical composer David Baker in performances of his works and traditional classical repertoire. She then returned to Nashville where she enjoyed a long tenure as a piano/music professor at Tennessee State University until her retirement in 2008.

Arthur Cunningham was another Fisk graduate from the 1950s who exhibited talent as a pianist and composer in classical and jazz settings. He led his own jazz band as a teenager in New York and studied with the great jazz pianist Teddy Wilson while in high school. At Fisk he was mentored by John Work III and other music faculty, then returned to New York to study at Juilliard. Cunningham's compositions were critically acclaimed for their blending of classical, jazz, and rock elements in the late 1960s and 1970s. During the 1980s he returned to jazz piano performance until 1986 when he resumed composing, and in his final years he combined these areas and also accompanied his wife Kate, a jazz and cabaret singer.

Fisk Music From the 1960s to the 21st Century

Southern (1983), Floyd (1995), Reagon (1975) and other music scholars have documented the direct connection of the "freedom songs" of the civil rights movement back to the Negro spirituals sung by the Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and preserved in the works of later composers, soloists, and ensembles from Fisk as well as from other HBCUs, churches and denominations, which were combined with gospel music and secular forms/influences such as work songs, blues, and jazz. Fisk students such as Diane Nash, John Lewis, Marion Barry, and others, while not music majors, joined other young activists from Tennessee State, American Baptist College, Meharry, and the Nashville community at-large in refashioning songs and music

to inspire themselves and others as they directly protested against segregation, beginning in 1960 with the Nashville Student Movement.

Even as Fisk continued to champion the development of young artists in classical music and preserve the heritage of Negro spirituals through the Jubilee Singers, the “tenor of the times” dictated that other music forms be considered, even if not totally embraced by the music department and university. Collins (1989) and Mitchell (1995) indicate that Fisk presidents during the 1960s and 1970s, Stephen Wright, James Lawson, and Walter Leonard, as well as music department heads Richard Turner, Oscar Henry, and others had varying degrees of success in the delicate balancing act of maintaining Fisk’s traditions while remaining relevant in the changing cultural and educational landscape.

Ted Jarrett intermittently attended Fisk in the 1940s and 1950s, studying with John Work III, the Kennedys, and other music faculty. In his autobiography (Jarrett, 2005), he recounts how he enjoyed success as a country as well as rhythm and blues songwriter, publisher, and small record company owner, and frequently collaborated with future Fisk Composer-in-Residence Robert L. “Bob” Holmes Jr. Despite his many achievements in commercial music, Jarrett still had the unfulfilled dream of finishing his coursework to earn a music degree from Fisk, which he ultimately completed in 1974. His compositions and productions were included in “Night Train to Nashville”, a collection of Nashville R&B music which won the 2005 Grammy Award for Best Historical Recording.

Tom Wilson began his academic and musical career at Fisk, but found success after he moved to Boston and became part of the Harvard Jazz Society and WHRB radio. He eventually owned a record company, Transition Records, but gained his greatest achievements as a producer

of groundbreaking recording artists including jazz pianist/bandleaders Cecil Taylor and Sun Ra, and rock legends Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Eric Burdon/The Animals, and Frank Zappa/Mothers of Invention.

DeLerma (1970) credits Turner with the hiring of Fisk's first academically- trained ethnomusicologist, Dr. Darius Thieme, while the Composer-in-Residence position was created during the Lawson era and filled by Holmes, whose musical expertise and works included classical, jazz, spirituals/gospel, rhythm & blues, and film/media scores. Student activism led to the founding of the Modern Black Mass Choir in 1969-1970 by music major Ronald Coleman, who was quoted by Collins (1989) as envisioning the ensemble as one that dealt with modern approaches to vocal music beyond as well as including contemporary gospel (although that became the choir's focus in later years, producing recording artists such as singer, pianist, and songwriter Lanier Ferguson and Derrick Lee, musical director for Dr. Bobby Jones). Thieme was also a classically-trained bassist who performed with the Nashville Symphony, while Holmes created the "Orchestrated Crowd" jazz ensemble in 1970 which combined symphonic instrumentation (full string section and harp, woodwinds, and brass) with extended African percussion section, keyboards, and guitars to perform his original works as well as a wide variety of music by other composers/arrangers in a wide variety of styles. During its peak years the ensemble appeared in concert with music legends Quincy Jones, Clark Terry, Billy Taylor, Duke Ellington, Cannonball and Nat Adderley, and Milt Jackson; toured nationally and internationally; and participated in recording sessions produced by Holmes. After Holmes' departure from Fisk in 1976, several others continued the Fisk Jazz Ensemble, including Dr. Roby George, Jr. (1977-1979); William T. Dargan (1980-1984); William S. Moon (1985-1989); and others leading to the current director, composer/woodwind specialist Dr. Gary Neal (2003 – present).

Holmes' Fisk protégés' included acclaimed international jazz percussionist John Betsch; violinist/conductor Kay George Roberts; pianist/composer Johnny "JonNichi" W. Taylor; cellist/arranger/composer Michael Brady; and harpist Alfrae Johnson-Ragins. Betsch, Holmes, Fisk English professor/African percussionist Phil Royster and others formed the John Betsch Society jazz group and recorded the album "Earth Blossom" for Strata-East Records in 1974, which received a "five-star" review from leading jazz magazine "Down Beat". Betsch went on to spend many years based in Europe/France with leading jazz soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy's group, and pursued other musical projects after Lacy's death in 2004.

Roberts, who began violin study with Holmes as a child, went on to become the first woman to receive a doctor of musical arts degree in conducting from Yale, conducted many major American and several European orchestras, and taught many years at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell (UML), where she created the UML String Project to develop young string players in efforts to increase diversity in classical music. Roberts received numerous honors and awards and maintained an active conducting schedule after her retirement from UML in 2013, including work as founder/conductor of the New England Symphony Orchestra.

Both Coleman and Taylor spent time studying with the legendary artist/teacher Nadia Boulanger in France during the 1970s. Taylor remained in Europe for several decades as a pianist and composer before relocating to California, while Coleman, a native of Oakland, was based in the Los Angeles area, where he enjoyed great success as musical director for Aretha Franklin, Barry White, and other major artists as well as producing recording sessions and writing for various on and off-Broadway stage/theatrical productions.

Brady, whose first string teacher was also Holmes, continued to collaborate with his mentor as music copyist, arranger, and/or performer in various ensembles while working as a music educator in the public school system. After Holmes' death in 2000, Brady joined other former Holmes string students to create the Cremona Strings Too Ensemble, which continues to honor Holmes' legacy by performing his compositions and arrangements and providing music/string training to children. French horn player Vando Rogers and oboist Dewayne Pigg organized the Fisk Woodwind Quintet in the 1970s, which performed locally and internationally; Pigg went on to become a longtime member of the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, while Rogers joined the Fisk Art Department faculty specializing in photography and graphic design.

Johnson-Ragins, a native of New York City, returned to her hometown after completing musical studies at Fisk and continued to perform on her instrument. Due to the small number of professional African-American harpists, Johnson-Ragins has been part of any number of special events over her career, including weddings for celebrities such as Eddie Murphy; national, regional, and local meetings/conventions; and private occasions, which have provided opportunities for entrepreneurship and creative marketing of her unique talents via her personal/professional website and social media.

Bobby Hebb, the singer, multi-instrumentalist, and songwriter best known for the 1966 pop standard, "Sunny", briefly attended Fisk during the 1972-73 school year, as did Hazel Payne, who distinguished herself for her talent on electric guitar, an instrument not usually associated with women (and especially not with African American women) during that time. A native of Los Angeles, Payne returned home and eventually joined an up-and-coming group called "Taste of Honey" that featured Payne alongside another female musician, lead vocalist/bass guitarist Janice Marie Johnson. Their group would go on to score two "Number One" records, the

disco/dance standard “Boogie Oogie Oogie” (featuring a guitar solo by Payne), and the Asian-influenced “Sukiyaki” (where Payne played the Japanese koto), while their ultimate career highlight was winning the 1979 Grammy Award for Best New Artist.

Another influential figure to join the Fisk music faculty during this period was mezzo soprano and voice professor Valija Mellins-Bumbulis, whose long tenure at the university began in 1974 and only recently ended with her retirement in 2015. Bumbulis brought extensive professional training and international performance experience to her role, and developed hundreds of Jubilee Singers and other voice students over her years at Fisk, including tenor Tyrone Jolivet, who had a successful career in Europe and the U.S. performing in operas and musicals; soprano Kim Fleming, whose talent ranged from classical music to recording/touring as background vocalist with a number of major music artists; soprano/vocal arranger/recording artist/music educator Donna McElroy, whose versatility ranged from work with major recording artists Garth Brooks, BeBe and CeCe Winans, and Mervyn Warren/Take 6 to her current role as professor of voice at Berklee College of Music; and Mandisa (Hundley), who won national fame as a finalist on “American Idol” in 2006 and went on to become a Grammy and Dove Award nominee in contemporary Christian music.

Another area of instrumental music at Fisk that sometimes “flies under the radar” is its succession of University organists. Some pictures of Ella Sheppard Moore show her seated at an organ instead of a piano, so she may also merit consideration as Fisk’s first organist. Roy Tibbs (Class of 1907), mentioned earlier as an African American member of the Organists Guild during his era, may have been trained by Sheppard as well as others while at Fisk.

In Mitchell (1985), a photograph of the Fisk music faculty from the 1930s includes Alice Grass, who is listed as university organist as well as assistant professor in piano. Professor Arthur Crowley was university organist in 1960 when the Holtkamp organ was dedicated in Fisk Memorial Chapel. In the 1970s Bernard F. Hunter taught organ students and served as university organist, while in the 1980s Fisk alumnus McCoy Ransom held the position. Dr. Christopher Duke (M.A. 1991) has also functioned in this capacity, and the current University Organist is Dr. Anthony Williams.

Jazz organist/keyboardist Kossie Gardner Jr. attended Fisk, then performed/recorded with artists such as David “Fathead” Newman (sax), Roy Ayers (vibes), and his own jazz and R&B groups in the 1960s and 1970s, then moved to Los Angeles and became a songwriter, arranger, producer, and performer for Solar Records, a company owned by African-American (and fellow Nashville native) Richard “Dick” Griffey.

Music scholars of note who worked at Fisk in the 1970s and 1980s include Dr. Samuel A. Floyd, who founded the Fisk University Institute of Research in Black American Music (FURIBAM) during his tenure from 1978 to 1983, and Dr. Horace A. Boyer, who served as Distinguished Scholar at Large and Visiting Director of the Jubilee Singers between 1988-1989. Dr. John L. Smith Jr., a classical musician/music educator specializing in tuba/brass instruments before going into higher education administration, was the first (and to date, only) musician to lead the university, serving as the 12th president of Fisk from 1999-2001.

Entertainment icon Beyonce’ (Knowles Carter) is the daughter of Fisk alumnus Mathew Knowles (Class of 1975), who was not a music major or known as a musician during his years on campus but a business major and basketball player who was interested in the music industry.

After his graduation from Fisk, Knowles worked for Xerox in Houston and married beautician Tina Beyonce'. Beyonce' was born in 1981, followed by second daughter Solange in 1986.

Knowles trained Beyonce' and other girls including Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams, forming Destiny's Child in 1990, while his wife designed and created stage costumes and assisted with other aspects of the group's presentation. In 1992 Knowles left Xerox to found his Music World Entertainment company, with Destiny's Child as its primary act, and the group became one of the largest-selling female groups in music industry history. He continued to manage the group and their solo projects until Beyonce's superstar status led to the group finally disbanding in 2005. After her 2008 marriage to rap superstar Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter and continued solo success, Beyonce eventually ended her father's management of her career in 2010. Knowles continued to manage Solange and other artists, expanded his entertainment interests into film production, reality TV, and luxury transportation, authored "The DNA of Achievers: 10 Traits of Highly Successful Professionals" in 2015, and conducts seminars on entrepreneurship and the entertainment industry.

The Fisk Jubilee Singers continue the tradition and legacy of beautiful sound artistry in preserving and presenting the African American spiritual. Since the retirement of Dr. Kennedy, Dr. Paul Kwami has guided the singers to additional accomplishments, including Gospel Music Hall of Fame induction in 2000; receiving the National Medal of Arts in 2008 from President George W. Bush; their 2009 trip to Ghana, West Africa to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the country's independence; and a return to England for the first time since 1874 in 2015. A celebration of the Jubilee Singers and the Fisk Sesquicentennial is scheduled for February 21, 2016 at Boston's Symphony Hall, hosted by the Berklee College of Music and Berklee professor/former Fisk Jubilee Singer Donna McElroy.

In conclusion, Fisk-related music, musicians, and music advocates have influenced nearly every type and genre of this art form in the 150 years of the university's existence. There are hundreds, if not thousands more individual and collective stories that could be told, as well as possibly the same number (or more) that may yet be told as the university continues in this new century and millennium.

References

- Arthur Cunningham (1928-1997): African American composer and pianist: A lifetime of classical music and jazz. (n.d.). Retrieved from AfriClassical.com-African Heritage in Classical Music Web Site
(<http://chevalierdesaintgeorges.homestead.com/Cunningham.html>)
- Barnhart, S. (2005). *The world of jazz trumpet: A comprehensive history and practical philosophy*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation.
- Baszak, M., ed. (2003). *Such sweet thunder: Views on Black American music*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Fine Arts Center.
- Brooks, C. & Sims, R. (2015). *Roland Hayes: The legacy of an American tenor*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Broome, P. , & Tucker, C. (1990). *The other music city: The dance bands and jazz musicians of Nashville, 1920 to 1970*. Nashville, TN: Broome and Tucker.
- Cohen, R.T. (2001). *Fisk University: The college history series*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing.
- Collins, L.M. (1989). *One hundred years of Fisk University presidents: 1875-1975*. Nashville, TN:
- DeLerma, D.R. (1970). *Black music in our culture: Curricular ideas, subjects, materials, and problems*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.

_____. (1973). *Reflections on Afro-American music*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.

Determeyer, E. (2006). *Rhythm is our business: Jimmie Lunceford and the Harlem Express*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Ella Sheppard School of Music Web Site (<http://www.essom.org>).

Fisk University Web Site (<http://www.fisk.edu>).

Fisk University's Jubilee Singers inducted into Gospel Hall of Fame. (2000). *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 17(20), 12.

Flournoy Miller Collection. (2016). Helen Armstead Johnson Theatre Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Retrieved from <http://archives.nypl.org/scm/20858>.

Floyd, S.A. (1995). *The power of black music*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Floyd, S.A. (Ed.). (1999). *International dictionary of Black composers*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.

Handy, D.A. (1996). Kay George Roberts (1950 -): Conductor, violinist, educator. In J.C. Smith (Ed.). *Notable Black American women, book II*. (pp. 559-562). Detroit: Gale Research.

Hendricks, J. (2003). The vocal jazz group: A history. In M. Baszak (Ed.), *Such Sweet Thunder: Views on Black American Music*. (pp. 65-66). Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Fine Arts Center.

Horne, A. (1991). *String music of Black composers: A bibliography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Howse, B.M. Annual spring arts festival: History of the arts festival (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.fisk.edu/campus-life/spring-arts-festival> .

_____. Ella Sheppard Moore (1851-1914). Retrieved from <http://library3.tnstate.edu/library/DIGITAL/sheppard.htm> .

Jarrett, T. & White, R. (2005). *You can make it if you try: The Ted Jarrett story of r&b in Nashville*. Franklin, TN: Hillsboro Press/Country Music Foundation Press.

Johnson, C.D. (1985). *Black musicians in Music City, U.S.A* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.

Kennedy, N. (Producer and Director). (2007). *Matthew Kennedy: One man's journey*. [Motion picture]. United States. Matthew Kennedy Enterprises.

Lewis, D.L. (1981). *When Harlem was in vogue*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Lovett, B.L. (2013). *A touch of greatness: A history of Tennessee State University*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Marsh, J.B.T. (1881). *The story of the Jubilee Singers with their songs*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Mitchell, R. (1995). *Thy loyal children make their way: Fisk University since 1866*. Nashville, TN: Fisk University Press.

Moorehead, M. (2010). Consuela Lee (1926-2009) was a liberator through education. Retrieved from <http://consuelalee.com/doc/consuelalee.htm>.

Music World Entertainment Web Site (<http://www.musicworldent.com>).

Pike, G.D. (1873). *The Jubilee Singers, and their campaign for twenty thousand dollars*. Boston: Lee and Shepard.

Reagon, B. J. (1975). *Songs of the civil rights movement, 1955-1965: A study in culture history*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Howard University, Washington, DC.

Richardson, J.M. (1980). *A history of Fisk University, 1865-1946*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

Smith, J.C. (Ed.). (1992). *Notable Black American women, book I*. Detroit: Gale Research.

Smith, W.O. (1991). *Sideman: the long gig of W.O. Smith*. Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press.

Southern, E. (1982). *Biographical dictionary of Afro-American and African musicians*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

_____. (1983) *The music of Black Americans*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Stephens, R.W. (1992). Undine Smith Moore. In J.C. Smith (Ed.), *Notable Black American women* (pp 767-769). Detroit: Gale Research.

Tennessee State University Library Web Site (<http://www.tnstate.edu/library>).

Thieme, D.L. (1992). Lillian "Lil" Hardin Armstrong. In J.C. Smith, (Ed.), *Notable Black American women* (pp. 27-28). Detroit: Gale Research.

Undine Smith Moore biography (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.musiciansguide.com/biographies/1608003512/Undine-Smith-Moore.html>