



Traditions & Beliefs

A Quarterly Publication of the Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora (RASHAD)

Volume 8, Issue 1

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Special thanks to two of my former graduate assistants for their work on this publication:

*Erika Rhue, Associate Editor
Martha Archer, Contributing Writer*

- RNW

Photo: Dr. Regennia N. Williams during her October 2013 lecture on Duke Ellington, "Songs from the Jazzman's Journey," at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Blanchard Valley.



Another Cleveland Chautauqua Year

Dr. Regennia N. Williams
Founder and Editor

When the **Spiritual Gifts Gospel Chorus** was invited to sing for the 13th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Community Open House, I knew that this January 2013 Severance Hall performance would be a highlight of my personal calendar year. I did not realize, however, that it would be the first of many 2013 teachable / "Cleveland Chautauqua" moments in RASHAD's celebration of "*Great Ideas, Great Art, and a Great Lake!*" Over a year later, we are still celebrating!

An April 5, 2014 concert at Cleveland's New Joshua Missionary Baptist Church will mark the 30th anniversary of the founding of the CSU student choir that would come to be known as Spiritual Gifts. Needless to say, the current and former members are happy to know that thousands of people have benefited from their performances, workshops, and related activities over the years. RASHAD is pleased to join those singers in promoting their **free April 5, 2014 performance**. For more program details, please see the "**Concerts Around Cleveland**" announcement on page 12.

This issue of *Traditions & Beliefs* is at once an annual report and a plan for enhancing teaching and learning in the academy while working creatively and collaboratively with individuals, organizations, and institutions in communities across Ohio and the nation. Thank you for working with us.

Dr. Regennia N. Williams, Founder and Editor | Read more on the Internet!

Website: clevelandmemory.org/pray | Cleveland Chautauqua Blog: rwilliams.csuelearning.org

Performing Arts and Cultural Enrichment



The Duke on the Queen's Court: Come Sunday

Prester Pickett, M.F.A., Playwright/Director

World premiere of a play inspired by the friendship between Duke Ellington, legendary jazz composer, pianist and band leader, and Mahalia Jackson, the queen of gospel music

Monday, April 29, 2013
6:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Trinity Cathedral, Gallery
2230 Euclid Avenue



Bertha Lee Pickett and Drene Ivy preparing for their January 2013 Severance Hall performance of Ellington's "Come Sunday" with the Spiritual Gifts Gospel Choir.

Featured Artists

Robert Coleman, Jr., aka "Rob C.," is a native of Butler, Alabama, and he moved to Cleveland in 1968. Visually impaired since birth, Rob began playing piano at age 8, and he completed his secondary education at the Jane Addams Vocational High School. He currently serves as the Minister of Music at the Canaan Missionary Baptist Church, where the Reverend Richard Jordan, Jr. is pastor.

Jeannine Gaskin is a native of Cleveland and a Cleveland State University alumna. Her performance credits include the world premiere of *Introducing Minnie the Moocher* by Arline Burkes-Gant and fellowships at New Community Bible Fellowship. She also served as the Assistant Director for the NCBF production of *A Son is Given* at the Hanna Theater.

Drene Ivy is an accomplished pianist, and he has composed over 200 songs in a variety of genres, including inspirational, gospel, classical, easy listening, jazz and Latin jazz. His music is published under G Sharp Sonata.

Also Featuring

Prester Pickett, II, Sound Technician
Richard Lee Pickett, Recorder
Alice Hill Seifullah, Viola

Special Thanks to Mr. Todd Wilson, Trinity Cathedral, and Dr. Michael Williams, Cleveland State University, Black Studies Program



Playwright Prester Pickett and vocalist Bertha Lee Pickett joined the members of the Spiritual Gifts Gospel Chorus in a performance at the January 21, 2013 Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Community Open House at Severance Hall, home of the Cleveland Orchestra. The Picketts performed excerpts from a new play with music, "The Duke on the Queen's Court: Come Sunday."

With Prester cast as jazz legend Duke Ellington and Bertha as Mahalia Jackson, the "Queen of Gospel Music," the play would have its world premiere performance on Monday, April 29, 2013 (Duke Ellington's birthday) at Trinity Cathedral in downtown Cleveland. Also featured in the April production were Robert Coleman, Jr., Jeannine Gaskin, Drene Ivy, Prester Pickett, II, Richard Lee Pickett, and Alice Hill Seifullah.

The world premiere performance was produced by the Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora (RASHAD) in partnership with the Cleveland State University Black Studies Program and Pickett Line Productions.



The Spiritual Gifts Gospel Chorus rehearses in the Reinberger Chamber Hall before its January 21, 2013 Severance Hall performance. (Photo: Matthew Williams)

Prester and Bertha Lee Pickett as Duke Ellington and Mahalia Jackson in the April 29, 2013 world premiere performance of "The Duke on the Queen's Court: Come Sunday." (Photo: Jeff Ivey)

Dr. Regennia N. Williams

Last summer, I was honored to receive The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program's 2013 Julian Pleasants Travel Award. As information on the program's website suggests, "The Julian Pleasants Travel Award was created in honor of Dr. Julian Pleasants, Director Emeritus of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program and longtime Professor of History at the University of Florida." For more information on the SPOHP, please visit oral.history.ufl.edu/.

I was thrilled to be in residence at UF during the month of June. My research in the Smathers Library at UF supported my work on the special Zora Neale Hurston issue of *The Journal of Traditions and Beliefs*, which will be available via Cleveland State University's EngagedScholarship@CSU site by May of 2014. This publication is a follow-up activity for the September 2012 "Watching God and Reading Hurston" International Academic Conference, which commemorated the 75th anniversary of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 2012-

2013. For more information on the conference, please visit engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/hurston/.

The UF research also allowed me to learn more about Hurston's Depression-era work with Stetson Kennedy on the Florida Writers Project and her personal financial struggles, long after the nation's economic recovery during World War II.

While in Florida, I also visited Eatonville, Zora Neale Hurston's adopted hometown and one of the oldest historically black communities in the United States. My Sunday afternoon in tiny Eatonville was very quiet, and I really enjoyed walking along the main thoroughfare and taking pictures of everything with Zora's name on it!

Now that I have visited "Palmetto Country" -- and tasted fried gator -- I am thinking of going back during the annual Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and Humanities in January 2015!



Manuscript Collection Sheds New Light on Ellington's Work

Dr. Regennia N. Williams

During a very intense July 2013 research trip, I had an opportunity to examine some of the materials in the Smithsonian Institution's amazing Duke Ellington Collection, which contains, among other items, more than 200,000 pages of manuscript materials, audio recordings of music, and 39 oral histories of former band members.

While in Washington, D.C., I interviewed Deborra Richardson, Chair and Chief Archivist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, for an article that will appear in a special 2015 Duke Ellington issue of *The Journal of Traditions & Beliefs*. The Smithsonian acquired the collection in 1988, and, according to Richardson, interest remains high, and scholars from all over the world return year after year to use these materials. Americans Ken Burns and Wynton Marsalis have also spent time in the archives.

After telling Richardson about our plans for Cleveland's "Come Sunday @ 70" series on Ellington's sacred jazz, she

shared the following thoughts on the continuing popularity of the music, nearly 40 years after Ellington's death:

"I am always floored by the way that the younger generation reacts to Ellington concerts when they are done in an interactive way. It's one of those things that brings excitement, I think, to just being an American, and to arts and culture in general, and [Ellington's jazz] does bring a very different flavor to a liturgical service . . . One of the things that I have said during my career was that Ellington certainly was good to me, and it is really wonderful to see what people take from his music and that of his partner Billy Strayhorn. If you do nothing else, be inspired and get excited, because that is what the music can do for you. That is what it did for me."

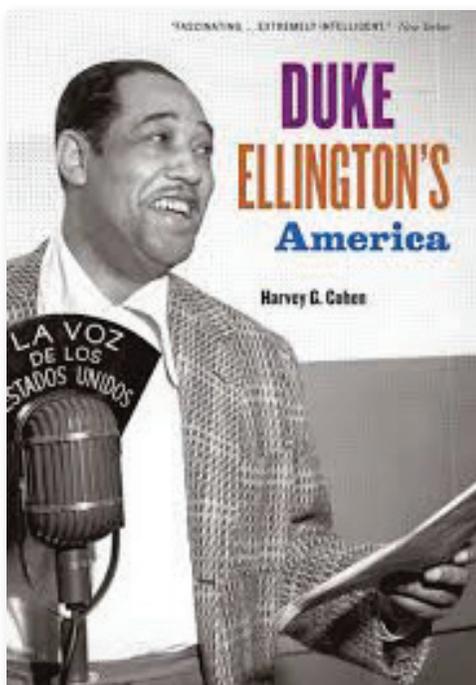
For more information on the Duke Ellington Collection, please visit amhistory.si.edu/archives/d5301.htm.



Deborra Richardson, Chair and Chief Archivist, Smithsonian National Museum of American History

Book Review: *Duke Ellington's America*

Erika Rhue, Associate Editor



Duke Ellington's America by Harvey Cohen is an inclusive biography of Duke Ellington, examining his achievements and contributions to society over a half-century long career, while also acknowledging the harsh realities that he faced on his journey. As most biographers do, Cohen sensationalizes Ellington, highlighting his attributes and downplaying any negative aspects of Ellington's life. What makes Cohen's account unique from other Ellington biographies is his use of primary source archival material from the Smithsonian Institution, which includes an entire collection of Ellington Scrapbooks that quote Duke and those closest to him. The resulting biography gives the reader a clear picture of Ellington by allowing them to hear the voice of Duke and gain a sense of his personality and style of rhetoric.

Cohen not only credits Ellington with laying the foundation for international musical performers, but also his business partner, Irving Mills, with creating a new standard for managing artists in the music industry. As Cohen illustrates, their slightly corrupt relationship allowed both parties to benefit, and it allowed Ellington to emerge with a reputation as a serious composer and musical genius. Aside from his musical talents, Ellington was exceptionally devoted to his race and was determined to document its achievements. He believed that the most effective way to protest racial boundaries was not through violence, but by successfully living and creating while undermining racial barriers and stereotypes. Ellington ignored racial slurs and avoided any potential confrontations, so much so that he once told Mills, "I won't go south, I don't care what they offer me."

Cohen chronicles Ellington's life and achievements from his film appearance in "Black and Tan," to his religious Sacred Concerts later in his career. Through it all, unlike other popular jazz artists of his time, Ellington continued to adapt to society and challenge himself to create new music, refining his legacy rather than becoming a victim of nostalgia. Ellington always had time to compose, because as he put it, "Music was my first love, actually."

Cohen depicts Ellington as generous with his money, devoted to his family, a talented musician, an ambassador of American jazz, and a combatant for civil rights. In this regard, Cohen is successful in presenting Ellington's contributions to American society and evoking a sense of admiration towards Duke. In the end, as the trombone player for Ellington's band stated, "His life was beautiful... He lived his life."



Come Sunday @ 70:

The Place of Duke Ellington's Sacred Jazz in World History and Culture, c. 1943-2013

The fall 2013 Ellington events were part of RASHAD's most recent Cleveland Chautauqua series. The images included on pages six and seven of this publication document the cultural arts activities for "From Grace Cathedral to Trinity Cathedral and Beyond: Concert Settings of Jazz, Gospel, and Other Styles of Sacred Music." The title reminded participants that the Duke Ellington Orchestra performed the first Sacred Concert in the nave of San Francisco's Grace Cathedral in September of 1965, and the nave of Cleveland's Trinity Cathedral was the site for RASHAD's first September 2013 concert.

The September 28th performance at Trinity Cathedral included music by The Spiritual Gifts Workshop Choir and The Spiritual Gifts Jazz Quintet. Special guests were Mariama Whyte and students from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, who joined Spiritual Gifts in singing the South African National Anthem, "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" ("God Bless Africa"). The UFS students were visiting CSU as part of the "Leadership for Change" exchange program.

The First Unitarian Church in Shaker Heights, Ohio hosted the second concert, "Everything Ellington," on Sunday, September 29th. The featured artists were Minister Drene Ivy and Dr. Sharon Brown Cheston (The Ivy-Cheston Piano Duo).



First Unitarian Church

Related RASHAD-supported activities for fall 2013 included:

Sunday, October 20, 2013, "Songs from the Jazzman's Journey," an Ohio Humanities Council lecture on Duke Ellington by Dr. Regennia N. Williams, Unitarian Universalist Church, Findlay, Ohio

Tuesday, October 22, 2013, Octavofest Book Talk and Signing with Dr. Charles Hersch, CSU's Michael Schwartz Library

Tuesday, October 22, 2013, Dr. Regennia N. Williams and Rev. Geoffrey Black Discussed the "Jazz for the Journey" Symposium on Dee Perry's "The Sound of Applause" Radio Program, 90.3 FM

Friday, October 25, 2013, Ellington Lunch Hour Presentation and Afternoon Roundtable
Discussion by Dr. Regennia N. Williams for the "Jazz for the Journey" Symposium presented by the United Church of Christ at Trinity Cathedral

Grateful acknowledgment is hereby given to the following organizations for their support:

- Cleveland State University
- The Ohio Humanities Council
- The Ohio Arts Council
- Trinity Cathedral
- The Multicultural Action Committee of First Unitarian Church and East View United Church of Christ
- Classic Pianos – Cleveland

Page 6 Photos: (top left) The Spiritual Gifts Workshop Choir, pianist Drene Ivy, Lisa Williams, bassist Glenn Holmes, Monica Carter and Matthew Horwich, Mariama Whyte (front row, far left) and students from the University of the Free State; pianist Sharon Brown Cheston, and Drene Ivy and Sharon Brown Cheston.

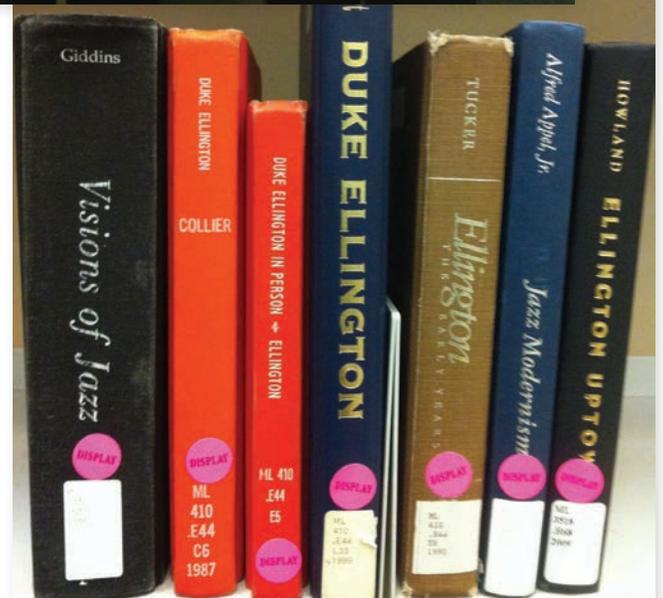


Library Events Celebrate Octavofest

Dr. Charles Hersch of Cleveland State University's Political Science Department gave a presentation on his book, *Subversive Sounds: Race and the Birth of Jazz in New Orleans*. The Tuesday, October 22, 2013 program was part of the Michael Schwartz Library's annual observance of Octavofest, which celebrates the book and paper arts. The lecture and discussion were presented by RASHAD with support from the Ohio Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. RASHAD also assembled a related first-floor library exhibit on Duke Ellington's jazz.



Librarian Kathy Dobda and Dr. Charles Hersch.



Book Review: *Subversive Sounds*

Erika Rhue, Associate Editor

Charles Hersch's *Subversive Sounds* is an eye-opening account of the history of jazz in New Orleans, emphasizing the impact of race on the development of "ratty" music. Throughout his work, Hersch argues that jazz arose out of an environment in which musicians and listeners alike were forced to cross racial boundaries and alter their racial identities each time they listened to or performed jazz music. Hersch asserts the bold claim that jazz further aided racial segregation in New Orleans and subsequently throughout America. Unlike his fellow scholars on the subject, Hersch finds that jazz did not grow out of a melting pot of cultures coming together, instead it grew out of racial struggles forcing musicians to become "musical chameleons" each time they took the stage.

One of the most interesting examinations in the book was related to the public opposition to jazz and the classes and races who opposed it. Hersch explained that jazz was oftentimes played in seedy and disreputable nightclubs, making the music attractive and easily accessible to lower-class people. The music also encouraged listeners to engage in impure bodily movements, causing black churches and "respectable" citizens of the white, Creole and even black races to combat the music initially. Jazz's threat to the racial purity that the community was striving to maintain eventually forced musicians to take their music to the streets. As musician Rae Braeburn stated, "you can't segregate the streets." These early actions resulted in the street music that is commonplace in New Orleans to this day.

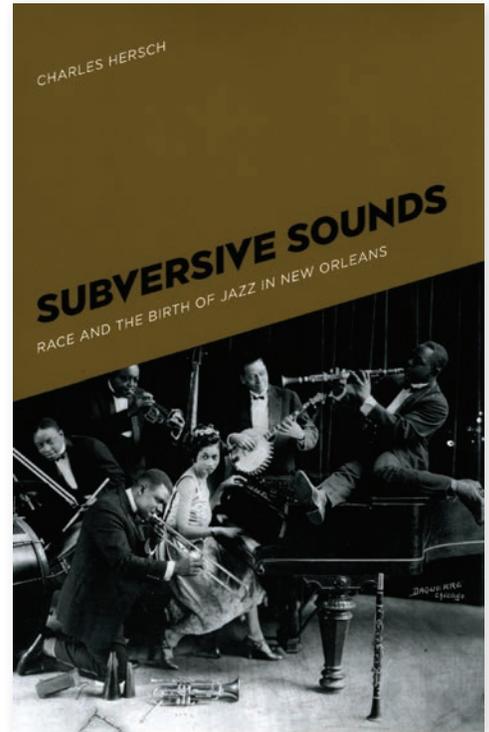
One effective tool that Hersch used frequently in his work involved connecting historical events to current affairs, allowing the reader to relate to the context of some of the issues he presents. For example, negative critiques of unruly jazz music frequent came from people of all races and classes, but primarily from older individuals. Hersch compared this to the opposition to hip-hop music that we are currently

experiencing, allowing the reader to relate the issues present in early twentieth-century music and society to issues that music makers and listeners face today.

Since the book's primary content concerns jazz music, readers should not be surprised to find discussions of numerous musical techniques and related aspects of cultural history behind each. Only on a few occasions does the author get too technical in terms of music terminology. Overall, however, he does a good job of explaining the musical roots and techniques incorporated into the development of jazz music, for readers who lack a musical background.

Hersch packs a large amount of information on source material into the detailed notes for this 210-page book. Combining pertinent primary sources such as newspaper articles and interviews with secondary source books and articles, Hersch seemingly covers all the bases in his research of early New Orleans jazz. Through it all, he remains remarkably unbiased, equally evaluating the lives of famous black, Creole and white jazz artists. Hersch's work ultimately fulfills its purpose of offering a new way of thinking about the politics of race relations in music.

Jazz legend Louis Armstrong believed that his music was a force for interracial harmony, and after reading Hersch's account, I believe that jazz music did in fact play a role in beginning to bridge racial differences. Music is a strong force, and jazz combines elements of many different cultures, classes, and other influences. No wonder it affected society in such a profound manner.



Commentary: A Summer of Teaching and Learning in Kenya

Martha Archer, Contributing Writer

The education of school children in Kibera, Kenya leaves much to be desired. Despite their best efforts to achieve and perform well on their exams, students face constant difficulties that need to be addressed by their nation and the international community. In the summer of 2013, I spent two months in a school in Kibera (arguably the second largest slum in the world) teaching a Standard Three class. The students ranged in age from 10 to 13, and there were 68 students in my dirt floor classroom. Many students arrived hungry in the mornings and eagerly awaited lunch, but they understood food shortages were the norm, and the lack of nutrition made it difficult for students to focus and retain information. It was also clear that many families found it difficult to fund their children's education. Although law in Kenya forbids the physical punishment of children in school, I personally saw students receiving lashings for giving incorrect answers or speaking out of turn.

Despite these hindrances to the education system, children understand the benefits that they can receive from excelling in their educational endeavors. They know that through education they can create a more secure life for themselves and their families. One of my students, Chrispine, is positive for sickle cell anemia but managed to receive the highest marks in his class on his exams in August. On numerous occasions, Chrispine asked me to review concepts and ideas with him after class, if he and some of his friends did not fully understand the lesson. After meeting with Chrispine's sister and speaking with her

about his education, it became clear that she was a very influential person in her brother's life. She wanted a better life for her brother and constantly explained to him that he would be able to leave Kibera and be successful within their society, if he made the most of his educational opportunities.

In Kibera, students are being taught to memorize information that will most likely appear on their standardized exams. They are not being encouraged to think critically, solve problems, or expand their creativity. Victor, for example, was an extremely bright student, who also happened to be a talented artist. When he had time to release his creativity, Victor would use dull pencils to draw the most amazing pictures in the corners of small notebooks. When he was presented with colored pencils and a proper drawing notebook, not only did his attitude soar, but his participation in class also skyrocketed. His gained confidence when someone noticed his hidden talent and encouraged him to expand upon it.

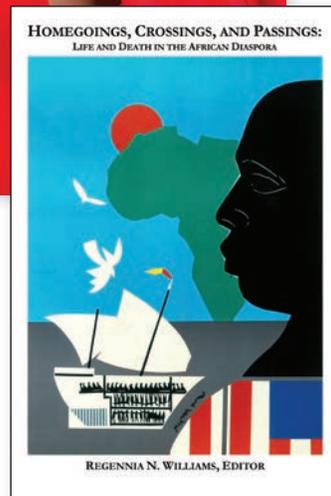
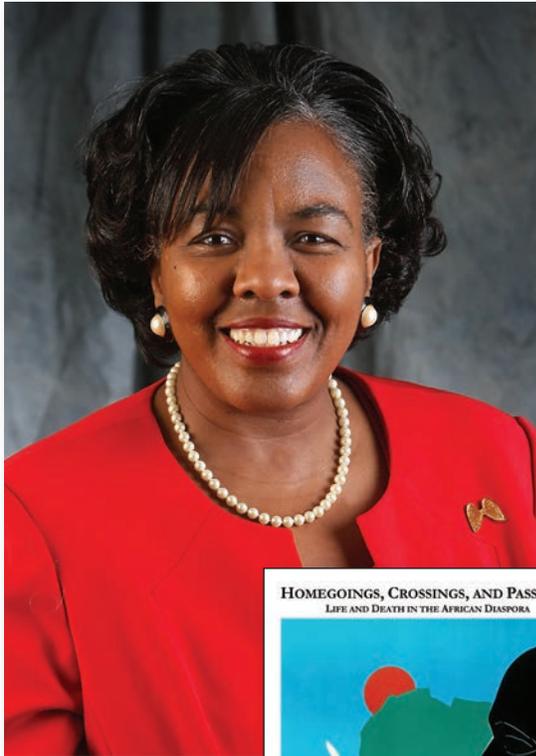
Despite numerous obstacles and setbacks, children in Kibera make the most of the opportunities they are provided with. Policy makers in Kenya and throughout the world must strive to provide these children with the best possible education, as it is the way to secure their future and improve upon the general livelihood for the future of Kenya.



Presenting

Here's to Life!

A Series of Book Talks and Book Signings by Dr. Regennia N. Williams



The next presentation is scheduled for:

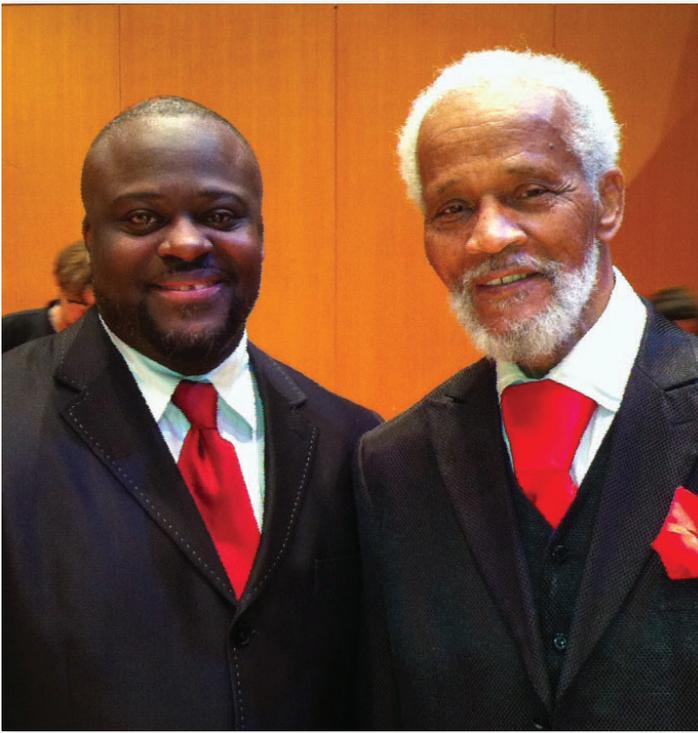
Monday, April 7, 2014
at 12:15 pm

Cleveland State University
African American Cultural Center
Main Classroom Building, Room 137
Euclid Avenue at East 22nd Street

This volume, carefully edited and expertly introduced by Dr. Williams, is a model of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the African Diaspora. The unique focus on the diverse life experiences of Africans in Diaspora through the lens of death complicates and enriches our understanding of what it means to come, to go, and to be “at home.”

*Theodore Louis Trost, University of Alabama
Associate Professor, Religious Studies and New College*

Proceeds from the sale of this book benefit the RASHAD Endowment Fund at Cleveland State University.
For more information, contact Dr. Williams at (216) 523-7182 or r.williams@csuohio.edu.



Pastor W. Marlon Humphrey (left) of the Greater Faith Missionary Baptist Church is pictured here with his father, Pastor Walter Humphrey of the New Joshua Missionary Baptist Church, after a May 2013 RASHAD-sponsored gospel concert in CSU's Drinko Recital Hall. Both father and son sang with the Voices of New Joshua as part of the concert program.



On Sunday, February 9, 2014, violinist Mark Dumm of the Cleveland Orchestra and pianist Sharon Brown Cheston, an educator and Cleveland State University alumna, presented a Black History Month concert at Trinity Cathedral. Their free performance was the first installment in RASHAD's 2014 "Concerts Around Cleveland" series.

Please join us for "Concerts Around Cleveland, Part II" featuring

**The Spiritual Gifts Gospel Chorus in their
30th Anniversary and Reunion Concert**

Saturday, April 5, 2014 at 4:00 pm

The New Joshua Missionary Baptist Church, 11200 Miles Avenue Cleveland, Ohio 44105
Rev. Walter Humphrey, Pastor

Free Admission – Freewill Offering – Light Refreshments After Concert!

Spiritual Gifts performs and teaches others about the music of the historic African American church. Each member brings a wealth of talent, training, and performance experience to their work. Among the singers are several individuals who trace their public performances in a Cleveland State University-related ensemble to a Black Aspirations Week Gospel Choir that presented its debut concert in 1984. CSU alumnus Nathaniel Williams, Jr. served as pianist/director for that choir, Messengers of Joy (a subsequent student-community ensemble), the first Spiritual Gifts Gospel Choir (founded in 1994), and An Evening of Gospel Music at Severance Hall in 2003. Kevin Gibaldi, another CSU alumnus, served as Associate Director for the Messengers of Joy. In 2009, David Manning Thomas, also a CSU alumnus, directed the Spiritual Gifts Ensemble in its Community Open House performance

at Severance Hall, and in December 2011, CSU alumna Beverly Brown served as Choir Master for the group's "Colors of Christmas" performance with the Cleveland Orchestra. Spiritual Gifts was also part of the September 2012 "Harvest Time" Concert at the Mount Zion Church of Oakwood Village, Ohio. On January 21, 2013, the choir returned to Severance Hall for a second Community Open House performance, with Pastor Nathaniel Williams, Jr. serving as Music Director. In September 2013, Spiritual Gifts also performed on the "Come Sunday @ 70" Duke Ellington concert at Trinity Cathedral. CSU alumna Lana Miller serves as the president of Spiritual Gifts. Spiritual Gifts works in collaboration with CSU's Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora (RASHAD). For more information, call 216-523-7182.