

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF ALBERT MCNEIL AND
THE ALBERT MCNEIL JUBILEE SINGERS

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Abstract

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF ALBERT MCNEIL AND
THE ALBERT MCNEIL JUBILEE SINGERS OF LOS ANGELES

Brenda Jean Mohr

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

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Since the beginning of the twentieth century no single American choral conductor and choir, other than Dr. Albert McNeil and the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, has dedicated more than fifty years to the preservation of the African American spiritual. His legacy exists as a result of a generation of singers who dedicated part of their lives to join him on his musical mission of world travel, presenting and preserving one of America's oldest collections of sacred folk songs—spirituals. In addition to the several hundred students he taught and mentored during his tenure at the University of California, Davis, his passion for this music left an indelible imprint on over one hundred fifty members of the Jubilee Singers as well as the millions of concertgoers worldwide who had the privilege of hearing them.

Throughout his teaching career in Los Angeles and at the University of California, Davis, McNeil had a tremendous impact on the people with whom he shared his knowledge of the spiritual. He guest lectured at colleges and universities both local and abroad, presented and performed at national and international choral conferences and toured nationally with his singers through seventy-seven countries and forty-four states. He has arguably earned his place as an equal alongside the founding West Coast spiritual preservationists, Hall Johnson and Jester Hairston.

The aim of this study is to document his life, teaching career, touring career with his Jubilee Singers, achievements and awards, and summarize his choral teaching methods and techniques, including performance practice guidelines of spirituals developed through his apprenticeships with Johnson and Hairston.

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and the impact he had on their lives, and the experience of touring around the world with the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. I cannot begin to express my gratitude for their willingness to share.

I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to my devoted husband, Craig Mohr, without whose support this doctoral journey would not have been possible. I am eternally grateful for the unselfish sacrifice he made by his willingness to uproot our lives and music teaching careers in Southern California and move to Seattle, Washington to help me achieve my dream of obtaining a doctoral degree in choral conducting. And finally to Jesus Christ, who gives me strength to do all things.

Dedication

To Albert McNeil and the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers past, present, and future

for their work preserving the a cappella spiritual tradition.

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PREFACE

In 2013, I mentioned the idea of writing my dissertation on Albert McNeil to a few of my Southern California choral colleagues. The response I received was overwhelmingly positive. Without even hesitation, everyone agreed that it was long overdue. A year later he received the California ACDA "Howard Swan Lifetime Achievement Award."

In my research I discovered there was no existing biographical publication dedicated solely to McNeil's life, and more alarming was the lack of research regarding the tradition of professional black choirs in the United States. The material available was limited to a couple of publications written about Hall Johnson and Jester Hairston, McNeil's mentors, and one dissertation about professional black choirs in the United States since 1960 that included a brief life sketch about McNeil and his Jubilee Singers.

The first time I met Albert McNeil was in May 1985, during the California Music Educator's Association (CMEA) choir festival held on the campus of the University of California, Davis (UC Davis). While I was completing my final year as a music education major at Pacific Union College, I held the position of assistant choir director and accompanist at Napa High School in Northern California. Since January of 1985, I had been under the mentorship of Travis Rogers, director of choirs at Napa HS, helping him prepare the choirs for music festival. The day arrived when we were to take the choirs to UC Davis. I met Rogers and the choir students early on the morning of the festival. He pulled me aside and asked me if I would be okay taking the choir students to the music festival without him as his wife was pregnant with their first child and she had gone into

labor earlier that morning. I reassured him the parent chaperones and I would be responsible for taking the students to the festival.

At the end of the morning festival session one of the adjudicators caught my attention and complimented me on the choir's performance. Showing some concern, he inquired about the group's director, Travis Rogers. I reassured him that Travis was fine and about to become a father. The adjudicator went on to tell me what a fine job I did conducting the choirs. As I was thanking him he told me his name was Albert McNeil, the director of choral activities at UC Davis and asked if I would like to join him for lunch. Lunch was hurried because the afternoon choir festival session was scheduled to begin in less than an hour, but in the flurry I recall him telling me that I have a bright future as a choral music educator. I was elated.

At the end of that school year I moved to Los Angeles, California to start my first job as an elementary and high school choir teacher. It was only a few years after 1985 that I saw Albert McNeil at the American Choral Directors Association annual conference. He was directing a group called the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers during one of the concert sessions. They sang African American spirituals, music from the African diaspora, and a medley of songs from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. I was enthralled and inspired by their performance. The audience gave them two standing ovations! I was so excited to see Dr. McNeil again. I realized at that time a deep connection to this man and his music and hoped there would be a time when I could work with him in the future. Later in 1997, he adjudicated my high school choir at the California State University, Northridge Invitational Choral Festival. After the festival I approached him to reintroduce myself and reminded him of our first meeting at UC Davis

in 1985. He immediately remembered me and was very pleased to see that I had become a choral director. I recall that he corrected me on my choir's performance of the spiritual, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. "Brenda," he said, "I need to tell you something about singing a spiritual. I noticed your choir was snapping when they sang *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. Has anyone ever told you it isn't appropriate to snap while singing a spiritual?" He said with a teacherly tone, "Snapping is for Saturday night and clapping is for Sunday morning." Those words made a profound impact on me. I had never been taught about how to understand and perform spirituals. At that time, I was barely beginning to know about the greatness of McNeil and his lineage with Jester Hairston and Hall Johnson.

As the years went by I followed the performance schedule of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers when they were in Los Angeles. I had several friends who were members of the Jubilee Singers through the years and liked to show my support by attending their concerts. McNeil invited my high school choir, along with seven other choirs, to sing in the annual choir festival he hosted annually in May at the Founder's Church of Religious Science. It was a privilege for me because we were the only high school choir that participated in that festival. In turn, my church would invite the Jubilee Singers to perform their concert of spirituals and sacred music annually. I never tired of listening to their performances of spirituals throughout the years. They inspired me to begin an annual tradition of presenting an afternoon concert of "Hymns and Spirituals" with my church choir which featured spiritual arrangements by McNeil, Jester Hairston, Hall Johnson, and Moses Hogan.

It is with deep admiration that I honor the life and legacy of Albert McNeil through the writing of this document.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to document the life of Albert McNeil, born on February 14, 1920, in Los Angeles, California, and reveal his musical legacy through his choir, the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. McNeil and his choir have dedicated themselves to upholding a choral tradition of excellence through the performance and preservation of the a cappella spiritual and later, music of the African diaspora.

Organized in 1968 for their first European tour as the Albert McNeil Los Angeles Jubilee Singers, they have played a very significant role in the development of African American sacred music traditions on the West Coast and throughout the world. McNeil has had the privilege of working side by side with some of America's most well-known African American composers, arrangers, and performers of the African American spiritual such as Hall Johnson, Jester Hairston, and others.

This study purports that, while McNeil's choral concept is unique to his personal preferences, his work with the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers is linked to a history of outstanding African American choral musicians in Southern California.

Need for the Study

There is no existing biographical publication dedicated solely to the life of Albert McNeil. There is only one dissertation in existence that includes a brief life sketch about him within a chapter about professional black choirs in the United States.¹ Considering the legacy that he created through his various capacities as director of the Albert McNeil

¹ McGee, Isaiah. The Origin and Historical Development of Prominent Professional Black Choirs in the United States, DMA diss., Florida State University, 2007.

Jubilee Singers, as a clinician and educator, it is fitting that a substantial record be created in order to document his teaching career, achievements and awards, and touring career with his Jubilee Singers. Chapter one includes the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, need for the study, and the scope and limitations of the study. Chapter two is devoted to highlighting important events in McNeil's life, including his childhood and family, early musical development, elementary and high school teaching career, collegiate teaching career, and performance career with the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. The origin, development, and history of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers is covered in chapter three, including the choir's first European tour in 1968 followed by highlights of subsequent tours, veteran members, conductors, and operational procedures. Chapter four is a summary of information gleaned from interviews regarding McNeil's teaching methods and techniques. Chapter five contains concluding statements about the collection of information gathered to record McNeil's life, teaching and Jubilee Singers career, and questions of inquiry.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

There is no significant body of published writings by McNeil whereby one could acquaint oneself with his life, teaching career and methods. That information is a part of those who knew him best and worked with him professionally. The primary sources of this study is the Irwin Parnes collection housed in the ethnomusicology archive at the University of California, Los Angeles, and transcriptions of recorded interviews with McNeil and former members of the Jubilee Singers. Each interview was conducted via email, phone, or in-person. Phone and in-person interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed to ensure accuracy. Interviewees were given a list of questions

to read through prior to the interview. The questions focused on gaining information about McNeil's professional life, leadership of his Jubilee Singers, insight into his teaching methods and techniques, and the impact he had on the lives of each interviewee. Throughout the interviews however, further questioning took place depending on the information given by the interviewee. Secondary sources include newspaper articles, professional journal articles, academic dissertations, a variety of books, and websites.

When requested to examine his personal choral scores, music conference presentation outlines, class lecture notes, and syllabi in order to glean more information about his teaching methods and techniques, McNeil stated that he donated such to the African Diaspora Sacred Music and Musicians of Southern California collection, housed in the Archives and Special Collections department in the library at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). In November 2016, the author travelled to Los Angeles to view the Albert J. McNeil collection. Because its contents had been donated less than a year prior, the collection was not yet catalogued. Therefore, the author was only allowed to see the collection but not handle or examine any items. In January 2017, the author contacted the archive librarian at California State University, Davis (CSUD), to request archived copies of Professor McNeil's class syllabi. Unfortunately, the syllabi was not archived. Due to these restrictions in regards to McNeil's personal music scores, lecture presentation outlines, lecture notes, and syllabi, information about his teaching methods and techniques were acquired exclusively from interviews.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY

Introduction

"America's foremost Negro choir," the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles, achieved international acclaim under the leadership of founder and director, Albert McNeil.² Because his mother worked for the motion picture industry in Hollywood, he had the opportunity to make connections with some of the movie producers. As music director of the largest African American church in Los Angeles, they called McNeil asking if he would provide singers from his church choir for their movies. As time went by McNeil grew weary of his rather informal system of hiring singers, which started him thinking, "If Hollywood has a demand for African American singers for movies, why not organize a group that would be ready to serve them?"³ In 1964, he assembled a double quartet of highly skilled men and women whom he called the Albert McNeil Singers. He additionally dreamed of a group that would do more than just sing background music for Hollywood movies.

When McNeil was a young boy he recalls learning the story of an all-black college choir founded in 1871, made up of four black men and seven black women, called the Fisk University Jubilee Singers from Nashville, Tennessee. They gained international fame traveling throughout the United States and Europe giving concerts

² Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 1, Folder 002.

³ Hendrix, Veronica. "Keeping the Music Alive." *Los Angeles Sentinel* (Los Angeles, Calif.), February 19, 2004.

singing four-part a cappella arrangements of sacred songs called spirituals.⁴ Deeply inspired by their story, he decided to make the preservation of the a cappella spiritual his life mission.⁵

Life Sketch

Albert John McNeil was born Alfredo Morales Sanchez on February 14, 1920, in Los Angeles, California, to an unmarried Puerto Rican girl from San Juan who gave him up for adoption shortly after his birth.⁶ He was adopted by a loving couple, the mother, a social worker in Los Angeles, and father, a turkey farmer in Watts.

His adopted mother, Rodia McNeil, of Louisiana French Creole descent, and his father, John McNeil, an American Negro, met while performing as vaudeville entertainers in New Orleans, Louisiana, and soon fell in love and married at a young age. Shortly thereafter they developed their own song and dance act known as "McNeil and McNeil" and subsequently joined the New Orleans-based Silas Green Minstrel Show, an African American owned and operated variety tent show.⁷

After several years traveling with the circus, Rodia McNeil tired of vaudeville life on the road and desired to settle down and start a family of her own. She and her husband chose to move to Los Angeles because she wanted to be near her mother.⁸ The vaudeville

⁴ Spirituals in Los Angeles, lecture by Professor Albert McNeil, March 1992, video, 1:41:17. UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive Library, Los Angeles, CA.

⁵ Ong, David. "The Jubilant Career of Albert J. McNeil." *Black Issues in Higher Education* 7, no. 13 (August 1990), 7.

⁶ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, February 2007, interview session 1, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 3, 4.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 5.

entertainers bought half an acre in the Watts-Willowbrook area of Los Angeles to raise chickens and turkeys. Soon, Rodia McNeil became a social caseworker for the Children's Home Society of California in Los Angeles, a local adoption agency. It was there that she met newborn Alfredo Morales Sanchez. Rodia soon fell in love with Alfredo and shortly thereafter the young couple adopted Alfredo Morales Sanchez and renamed him Albert John Joseph McNeil.⁹

McNeil's adopted parents maintained friendships with several entertainers in Los Angeles. He remembers his parents often inviting famous musicians such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Lionel Hampton to spend the evening in their home socializing and playing music together.¹⁰ His father was associated with many of the top musical artists who performed at the Paramount Theater in Los Angeles. He remembers one time when he was young that he saw his parents perform one of their vaudeville acts:

I remember going to the old Pantages Theater with my parents when I was about ten years old, and the movie projector malfunctioned. The theater manager asked if there was anyone in the audience who would be willing to entertain while they repaired the movie projector. To my embarrassment my former vaudeville parents volunteered and performed one of their [minstrel show] acts!¹¹

Even though he was embarrassed he admits they were excellent entertainers. He enjoyed spending time with both his parents but sadly those times were far and few between. He recalls the majority of his youth was spent with his mother, which allowed him to grow much closer to her. His father was always working and rarely made the effort to spend

⁹ Ibid., 3, 24, 25.

¹⁰ Ong, David. "The Jubilant Career of Albert J. McNeil." *Black Issues in Higher Education* 7, no. 13 (August 1990), 5.

¹¹ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, February 2007, interview session 1, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 5.

time with him like she did.¹² Quite often he wondered why he did not look like his father, "I was never close to my father. For some reason—I don't know. First of all, I didn't look like him, and I couldn't figure out why. My father was in another world. I respected him...but I never felt close to him."¹³ Perhaps it was his father's emotional distance that fueled his mother's care. She was a nurturing and doting mother, taking him with her wherever she went, be it errands, traveling, or going to church. She worked to ensure he would receive the best education possible. He recalled his mother taught him he had to work hard because he was African American. She never said that specifically, but she would tell him: "You are with us. And so you have to be the best. You're going to go to a university."¹⁴ His mother pushed him consistently because she had a vision for his success. Having been raised in the twenties and thirties in Los Angeles as an African American, he identified as such and experienced the pain of racism. He recalled his first experience while visiting New Orleans, Louisiana, as a young boy:

When I got off the train the first thing I did was jump on the streetcar and I ran right down in front. I wanted to be behind the motorman. I'll never forget, my mom came and she stood in the aisle and said, "Al, come here." "Why, Mom? I want to be here. I want to see the man drive the streetcar." She said, "You can't sit there. You see this sign here?" And I said, "What sign?" She said, "There is a sign that says 'For Colored Only.' We have to sit behind that sign." I asked, "Why?" And she said, "Well, you're in New Orleans and you're in the South." I was destroyed. I just couldn't understand it.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 16.

¹³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14.

As soon as McNeil was old enough to go to school his parents enrolled him in Catholic school in Los Angeles.¹⁶ He fondly recalls singing as a young boy with Paul Salamunovich, renowned former conductor of the Los Angeles Master Chorale, in Roger Wagner's men and boys' choir at St. Joseph's Catholic Church.¹⁷ When he was eight years old his parents started him on piano lessons. It is clear that he was a precocious child musician; by the time he was fourteen years old he was hired as a pianist at the Church of the Foursquare Gospel in Los Angeles earning two dollars every Sunday.¹⁸ Additionally, he enjoyed playing piano and organ at various other black churches throughout Los Angeles when the opportunity arose.

McNeil's mother managed the family finances carefully so they could afford to enroll him at Francis Polytechnic High School because it was the only secondary school in Los Angeles that offered classical organ lessons. Learning to play the organ had always been a dream of his since his youth.¹⁹ During his junior year of high school he became the director of the youth choir at the People's Independent Church of Christ, Los Angeles, one of the largest black churches at that time. As he participated in the musical leadership of these churches, he learned to appreciate all genres of music such as

¹⁶ McGee, Isaiah. *The Origin and Historical Development of Prominent Professional Black Choirs in the United States*, 2007, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

¹⁷ McNeil, Albert. Interview by author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017. It is interesting to note that Roger Wagner founded the acclaimed Roger Wagner Chorale and the Los Angeles Master Chorale.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, March 2007, interview session 2, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 7.

orchestral and keyboard, but the one he appreciated most was the oratorio which calls for choir, soloists and orchestra.²⁰

In order to keep McNeil enrolled in private school his mother earned extra income working for Hollywood Central Casting Company. He remembers many times coming home from school, and the front yard would be full of African Americans she was interviewing as extras for background and crowd scenes.²¹ It was also during this same time that McNeil met Jester Hairston, actor, choral conductor and arranger, as well as a leading authority on black choral music. Hall Johnson, African American composer and arranger, invited Hairston to go to Hollywood in 1936 as the assistant conductor for the Hall Johnson Choir who had been hired to sing spirituals in the Warner Brothers film *The Green Pastures*. He and McNeil became fast friends and colleagues. While working with Hairston during his high school and college years, McNeil learned much from his time with him:

I learned a lot of his arrangements and exactly what he wanted as far as diction, dynamics, tempo, text stress, etc. Jester was upset that there were so many black people who couldn't read notes. They had an excellent ear but couldn't read. The way Jester ran a rehearsal was a lot of fun! "Don't do as I do, do as I say. Follow the rules of English!" He didn't waste time during rehearsals. He had an excellent ear and knew the music inside and out.²²

After he graduated from college, McNeil spoke of the wide range of skills and knowledge he gleaned while working as an apprentice to Hairston:

I was one of Jester's assistants for about ten or twelve years. I read his

²⁰ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, February 2007, interview session 1, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 19.

²¹ Ong, David. "The Jubilant Career of Albert J. McNeil." *Black Issues in Higher Education* 7, no. 13 (August 1990), 5.

²² McNeil, Albert. Interview by author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

manuscripts, accompanied him, and helped train union choirs. In the meantime, I learned a great deal about African American music and spirituals in particular. It was Jester who encouraged me to continue with a little group we called the Albert McNeil Singers.²³

In 1938, McNeil enrolled at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) as a pre-medical student. Because he was a member of the California Scholarship Federation he received automatic admission to any University of California school. He was thrilled to attend such a prestigious university. However, by the end of his sophomore year he realized that getting a degree in medicine might be a monetary burden to his family because there was no such thing as financial aid and grants, so he changed his major to music education. As a result he became involved in the choral department. He accompanied and assisted in conducting the UCLA A Cappella Choir and directed the Men's Glee Club. Raymond Moreman, UCLA choral director and mentor, positively influenced the impressionable student. McNeil fondly remembers, "There was something spiritual about Ray. He approached the music with tenderness. I admired him tremendously."²⁴ It was during this time spent with Moreman and the UCLA choirs that influenced his decision to become a public school music teacher and direct his own choirs.²⁵

While McNeil was a student at UCLA he directed the church choirs at the First Baptist Church and the People's Independent Church of Christ. As soon as he learned music from Moreman at UCLA he was inspired to teach the same music to his church

²³ Glenn, Carole. *In Quest of Answers: Interviews with American Choral Conductors*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Hinshaw Music, 1991, 123.

²⁴ McNeil, Albert. Interview by author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

²⁵ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, March 2007, interview session 2, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 33-35.

choirs. He recalls, "I was at UCLA learning all of this [choral] music, and as fast as I learned something at UCLA, I would teach it to the choir at People's Independent Church of Christ. I did Handel's *Messiah*. It would fill that church, a thousand seats, and it became a social thing to do."²⁶ McNeil had tremendous support from the pastoral staff at the People's Independent Church of Christ to perform any of the sacred classical choral works. Having opportunities to perform Handel's *Messiah*, Brahms' *Requiem*, and Mendelssohn's *Elijah* gave him the experience he needed in his early years to develop into an experienced choral conductor.²⁷

The People's Independent Church of Christ was a center of musical activity for affluent African Americans in Los Angeles, boasting a church membership of almost five thousand congregants and five choirs.²⁸ McNeil recalls a particular moment one Sunday morning while he was walking down the aisle with the minister, and he looked across the aisle and asked, "Is that Ella Fitzgerald?" The minister replied, "That sure is."²⁹ The Chancel Choir had an impressive membership of approximately one hundred singers, which was significantly larger than the majority of leading church choirs at the time. They exemplified the highest in choral performance, which was exciting for the young aspiring choral conductor.³⁰ Central Casting of Hollywood called him to be the on-set

²⁶ Ibid., 39.

²⁷ Ibid., 42.

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Ong, David. "The Jubilant Career of Albert J. McNeil." *Black Issues in Higher Education* 7, no. 13 (August 1990), 7.

³⁰ Most large church choirs in Los Angeles during this time maintained a membership of sixty or seventy singers on any given Sunday such as the Hollywood Presbyterian Church in Hollywood directed by Charles Hirt who founded the choral department at the University of Southern California.

choral assistant whenever they needed black singers or background actors, or both for musical movies such as *Porgy and Bess*, *Carmen Jones*, and *The Land of the Pharaohs*. It would be from this choir that the Albert McNeil Los Angeles Jubilee Singers would be formed for their first European tour.³¹

McNeil graduated from UCLA in 1942 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in music education. He also obtained elementary and secondary teaching credentials. Soon after obtaining his bachelor's degree, he was awarded his master's degree in choral conducting from UCLA.³² McNeil began his classroom and choral music teaching career at the predominantly African American Hooper Avenue Elementary School in Los Angeles.³³ After his initial experience at Hooper Avenue he went on to Hammel Street School, a mostly Hispanic school on the east side of Los Angeles where he began to hone his Spanish speaking skills.

During his early years of teaching elementary school he was accepted into the Doctor of Musical Arts choral conducting degree program at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles where he studied with Charles Hirt, the esteemed choral pedagogue for whom he had great respect and admiration.³⁴

³¹ Ibid., 6, 7.

³² McGee, Isaiah. *The Origin and Historical Development of Prominent Professional Black Choirs in the United States*, 2007, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

³³ Ong, David. "The Jubilant Career of Albert J. McNeil." *Black Issues in Higher Education* 7, no. 13 (August 1990), 6.

³⁴ He completed the required course work but was unable to devote enough time to write a dissertation thesis due to the heavy time constraints of full time music teaching during the week, directing church music on the weekends, and touring with the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers.

A few years later the educational superintendent convinced him to transfer to George Washington Carver Junior High School in central Los Angeles.³⁵ While McNeil was at Carver he won a scholarship to study choral music in Switzerland with John Finley Williamson, through the Westminster Choir College of Princeton, New Jersey.³⁶ He knew he could not pass up the opportunity, so he made the difficult decision to leave his position at Carver Junior High School.

In order to start the application process to study abroad he needed to present his birth certificate to obtain a passport. By this time both of his parents had passed away. He looked through all of his own documents as well as that of his mother's but was unable to find any record of his birth. Naturally, he was alarmed but soon discovered he should be able to go to the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Los Angeles to request a copy of his birth certificate. He made an appointment and visited the bureau only to be told there was no record of a birth under the name of Albert John McNeil in February of 1920. Shocked but not daunted by this discovery, McNeil searched his memory:

I remember we had a safety deposit box in the bank, and I knew there was nothing in there but memorabilia and papers. There was no jewelry or anything like that. It was all memorabilia. At least, I thought so. So I went to the bank and opened it up, and on the top there was a paper that said Superior Court [*inaudible*] and then my name, Albert John Joseph McNeil, herein after to be known as John Joseph McNeil, and I opened it up and I knew...I was adopted. It said my name, my real name, is Alfred—Alfredo Morales...my adopted mother worked for the California Children's Home Society as a social case worker, and that's when I found out that she adopted me and my sister.³⁷

³⁵ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, March 2007, interview session 2, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 46-48.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

No one in his family had ever said anything to him about the fact that he had been adopted. Because his adoptive mother was fair-skinned just like him, he never questioned his roots. He discovered that he was not African American but, in fact, Puerto Rican. This news was yet another shock, but even more emotionally traumatizing for him as he had lived his entire life believing he was African American.³⁸ He recalled, "I had always thought that I was a Creole. I knew what my adopted mother was...I know I didn't look like my father...my mother, possibly...we all looked very much alike. Nobody in my family ever said anything about my adoption."³⁹

Feeling confused and conflicted about his identity McNeil depended on his closest friends during this time to sustain him as he processed his discovery. His mind was filled with many questions about his upbringing:

My identity has always been strongly African-American, because I was brought up in that environment completely and utterly. And so the only thing that I often question in my mind is, what would have happened if I had been brought up by my birth parents? But thank God, I had my mother—the only mother I knew—to guide me and to help create a life for me. One always has a feeling of rejection when they think about—did their mother just give them away? Stuff like that. Why were the circumstances so horrible that [my birth mother] couldn't keep me? Then again, I look at divine providence. If I have any kind of sense of religious belief, then it was in the plan that this was the way it's going to be. Hopefully I brought joy to my mother even though she didn't tell me that I was adopted. And I had to go through the traumatizing event of trying to discover, who am I? What am I? What do I identify with? Do I reject her side of my identity? What do I do? My argument is that I accept both sides.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., 27.

³⁹ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, March 2007, interview session 2, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 34.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 46.

After presenting a concert in Germany he was reminded about the painful memory of discovering he was not African American after having a rude encounter with one of the audience members:

I remember I was directing my choir the Jubilee Singers, in Germany while on tour, and this man who was taking autographs after our performance walked up to me and said, "I don't want your autograph. You're not black." And I thought, hey, you don't know what you're talking about. I've been so thoroughly involved in African-American things...because I went through the period of colored and black and Negro and all those combinations of descriptions, you know, that it makes you feel like you're without an identity. And still I'm very proud of my background. I'm very proud that when I go to Spain and learned to speak Spanish, I do very well. But yet, I don't deny my upbringing and my parents who nurtured me and gave me the richness of the African American culture that is also mine. I feel that very strongly.⁴¹

It took him several years to come to terms with the fact that he was biologically Puerto Rican. As the years went by he became more intentional about reconnecting with his Hispanic roots, and he spent time learning as much as he could about Puerto Rican music culture. He remembers a former Puerto Rican student from a summer school class he taught who later became a close friend. When being reacquainted with him while on tour with the Jubilee Singers in San Juan, McNeil recalls:

One day I asked Luis where he was from. He said, "Puerto Rico." I said, "Really? I want to get to know you better. I'm Puerto Rican, I think!" [*laughs*] And we got very close. So when I performed there I was able to tell the audience of about 2,000, I said, "You know, I'm directing the Jubilee Singers, but I think I'm Puerto Rican." And they applauded! I suddenly felt a relationship to the people there.⁴²

McNeil was able to obtain his passport in time to start his year of study in Switzerland. His studies were a welcome distraction as he continued to come to terms

⁴¹ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, February 2007, interview session 1, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 27.

with his ethnic and cultural identity. He looks back on his year in Switzerland as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, a dream come true. He was amazed at the rich opportunities available to study in great depth: vocal pedagogy, diction, choral repertoire, and conducting, taught by one of the most influential choral conductors of the twentieth century:

It was awesome I tell you! We would go down to the university where the courses were taught in Italian, German, and French. The Westminster Choir College of Princeton, New Jersey, and Dr. John Finley Williamson himself, who was the president at the time and came over to teach some of the classes, sponsored it. We had German conductors, Italian musicologists—it was comprehensive. We learned literature, conducting techniques, and the great works of Handel, Mozart, and Bach. And then we learned about vocal technique. It was like a dream. I couldn't believe it happened.⁴³

This remarkable educational opportunity confirmed his desire to be a choral conductor:

Toward the end of my time in Switzerland I asked myself, "What am I going to do as a choral conductor? Am I going to be like the rest of them? Am I going to do Bach and Handel and Mozart?" I wanted to do all of that because I felt it was very important, but I also wanted to do something with the spiritual. Jester Hairston and I were very close friends. He was like a father to me. He taught me more about spirituals than I could have gotten out of a book. He was a product of his family who were slaves...a white woman gave him a scholarship to Tufts University in Boston, and he became the assistant conductor of the Hall Johnson Choir. That exposure was a big influence on me.⁴⁴

Similar to his reaction as a young boy to the story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, he was again reminded of how much he loved the spirituals.

When McNeil returned from Switzerland he was invited to teach at Sun Valley High School, near Burbank, a suburb of Los Angeles. The ethnic makeup of Sun Valley was unlike any he had experienced, "All white, maybe a sprinkling of Hispanic, but mostly all white. It became a teacher training school for what is now California State

⁴³ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

University at Northridge. Student teachers would come to Sun Valley and teach under me and learn the ropes."⁴⁵

While teaching at Sun Valley, McNeil received a call from the same educational superintendent asking him to teach at Audubon Junior High School, an all-white school in south Los Angeles. This was one of the top junior high schools in Los Angeles with high academic achieving students and a mostly white teaching faculty. Accepting the position, he moved to south Los Angeles and taught for seven years at Audubon and consequently developed a distinguished choral music program.⁴⁶ At the end of his seven years at Audubon he moved to Dorsey High School and developed an outstanding choral program there as well as teaching classes in music theory. His top choir at Dorsey sang highly advanced level choral music including Haydn and Palestrina masses. He felt responsible to teach them the choral masterworks from all periods of music history. One of his proudest moments occurred when the choir participated in a local music festival:

I took the Dorsey High School Choir to Huntington Beach to a choral festival of ten high school choirs. There were 125 kids in my choir. I knew we were going to be very good. The guy hosting the festival called me and said, "McNeil, when you come [to the festival] with your choir I don't want you to sing any spirituals. Just sing serious literature." It made me so mad. But I was able to tell my kids, "You know what? I had not planned to do a spiritual; I was going to do the classical [selections] that we want to be evaluated for. But we're going to do a spiritual anyway."⁴⁷

McNeil's teaching duties at Dorsey, including musical responsibilities at church on the weekends, kept him extremely busy. However, he never forgot his close circle of supportive friends and always made time to enjoy life with them. In the early fifties he

⁴⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 49, 50.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52.

met a beautiful young woman one Easter morning at the People's Independent Church. He remembered without hesitation the first time he saw Helen Rambo: "She was getting out of a white Cadillac wearing her Easter dress and I teased her that she wouldn't make it to the eleven o'clock morning service on time." A couple of weeks later, he asked her out. They dated for a few years before he asked her to marry him. Eventually they married, and a few years later their son, Richard "Ricky" John McNeil, was born. Ricky was their only child for whom they did everything to ensure a happy childhood, quality education, and financial security. As a young boy Ricky enjoyed traveling with his parents and the Jubilee Singers. It was no wonder he knew their entire repertoire and could sing along. When he entered high school he joined the track team and sang in the choir. He had a special interest in school politics, which led him to serve as a class senator. During his senior year of high school he was accepted into a diversified program at Yale University where he specialized in physical science. After receiving his bachelor's degree he continued on at Yale to receive his law degree. He eventually moved back to his Los Angeles roots, married, and joined a law firm practicing environmental law.⁴⁸

Ricky's parents loved spending time together as a family, as much as their hectic work schedules would allow. Mrs. McNeil worked full-time as a statistician for the Department of Family Medicine at UCLA. In spite of having her own career, she and Ricky traveled with McNeil and the Jubilee Singers as often as their work and school schedules would allow. She always supported her husband's career and encouraged him

⁴⁸ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

to consider every promising job offer and any opportunity to travel the world with his choirs.⁴⁹

In 1968, McNeil received a personal invitation to teach courses in music education and direct the choral ensembles at the University of California at Davis (UC Davis). Although he was sad to say goodbye to his students at Dorsey High School, he knew this opportunity to teach at the college level would be the best thing for his career.⁵⁰ At this time, the civil rights movement was in full swing and he suspected the invitation to teach at the university was influenced by his ethnic background and upbringing:

To be perfectly candid, my going to UC Davis was part of the minority-hiring craze of the late 1960's. But I think it was a good thing. At the time, I was concerned that my being hired not be merely token, and also, after seventeen years of experience in music education, that I should not be low man on the totem pole.⁵¹

He even recollects telling the hiring committee:

"If you want to hire me, this is what's gonna happen. I know why [you want to hire me]. You have something called affirmative action, right? Have the black people burned down the administration building? No." They thought it was funny. I said, "No, I'm making a point. I don't have an afro and I don't look black. I look like whatever you want me to be."⁵²

As a high school teacher, McNeil never dreamed he would have the chance to become a university professor due to the fact that while he was a student at UCLA he never *saw* a minority professor. He started his teaching career at UC Davis in 1969 as an

⁴⁹ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, February 2007, interview session 1, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 27.

⁵⁰ Caldwell, Hansionia L. "African-American Voices of Traditional Sacred Music in Twentieth-Century and Twenty-first Century Los Angeles." *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (2011), 169.

⁵¹ Cariaga, Daniel. "McNeil: Limited Recognition at Home: Spirituals Are His Specialty." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), January 10, 1980.

⁵² McNeil, Albert. Interview by author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

associate professor and eventually became a full professor, quickly establishing himself with a respectable reputation that validated, for him, his hiring as a minority.

During McNeil's time there he worked three full days a week, commuting four hundred miles one-way from Los Angeles early Monday mornings and returning late Thursday evenings. This rigorous schedule included concertizing locally and touring nationally and internationally with the Jubilee Singers. The university administration agreed to give him a sabbatical every sixth quarter to accommodate his international travel schedule with the Jubilee Singers. While at UC Davis he directed the University Choir and Chamber Singers and toured internationally with them every other year to countries such as England, France, Russia, China, Tahiti, and Australia. With teaching responsibilities so diverse to be unimaginable today, he also headed the music education program as well as the African American Studies program. He is credited with having developed the latter's curriculum for training music teachers and creating courses in African, African-American, Caribbean, and South American music. He also served for a time as Director of Black Studies. Concurrently, he conducted the Sacramento Masterworks Chorale, which was the in-house choral ensemble for the Sacramento Symphony located fifteen miles east of the UC Davis campus.⁵³

McNeil was thrilled to collaborate with the UC Davis orchestra and Sacramento Symphony Orchestra because he had a passion for performing large works with choir and orchestra:

I remember working with D. Kern Holoman. Kern was a musicologist at UC Davis and a fantastic Berlioz scholar. The first thing I did when I was at Davis was "L'Enfance du Christ." Kern was the orchestral conductor. He said, "Al,

⁵³ Caldwell, Hansionia L. "African-American Voices of Traditional Sacred Music in Twentieth-Century and Twenty-first Century Los Angeles." *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (2011), 169.

I'm so glad you're here because I want to do these big [choral-orchestral] works." I said, "I want to do the big works, too." So anyway, long story short, we did as much as we could. You name it we did it.⁵⁴

In an anniversary memory book documenting the forty-year history of the UC Davis Music Department, Theodore Karp, music history professor when McNeil was hired, wrote:

I had the pleasure of being instrumental in persuading Albert McNeil to join the [music] department. McNeil had already built up a considerable reputation as a music educator in the Los Angeles area and as an influential author in the field. He was known most widely as the conductor of the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers. McNeil took over the direction of the University Chorus and gave the department a presence and authority in the field of music education that had been previously lacking.⁵⁵

Karp also had been instrumental in the hiring of Holoman, who McNeil considered to be one of his dearest friends and colleagues. Long after their tenure together at UC Davis Holoman wrote, "We worked together closely...and we continue to keep in touch." He also reminisced about the choral-orchestral works on which they collaborated:

Together we presented the major orchestra-chorus repertoire, including the Requiems of Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, and Brahms; the B-Minor Mass, Haydn and Schubert masses, Beethoven's Ninth, *Elijah*, *Symphony of Psalms*, scene from *Les Troyens* and *Boris Godunov*, and multiple performances of Berlioz's third symphony, *Roméo et Juliette*, with a chorus of 300. Our daring tour of Tahiti and Australia included a Berlioz "concert monster" at the National Tennis Centre in Melbourne, with massed military bands and choruses—the biggest concert, we believe, that had ever been heard in that country.⁵⁶

Former student, Donna Di Grazia, had the privilege of studying with Holoman and McNeil at UC Davis. She is thankful for the musical opportunities that both professors provided for her and her fellow students:

⁵⁴ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

⁵⁵ University of California Digital Archives. Accessed February 20, 2017.

⁵⁶ Holoman, D. Kern. Interview by the author. Email correspondence. February 19, 2017.

[McNeil] did not shy away from projects with our university orchestra. I learned a tremendous amount of choral-orchestral music from those collaborations. In my two full-time teaching positions at Davidson College and Pomona College, performances of some of the great masterworks of choral-orchestral music became a regular part of the choral-orchestral student experience. This is directly because of what I was able to do under Albert and UCD's orchestra director at the time, D. Kern Holoman. Collaborations like those don't happen if the two principal conductors involved can't agree on repertoire and the importance of working together.⁵⁷

According to McNeil there were many highlights of teaching at the university level, but the opportunity to influence students to choose a career in teaching music was the greatest. When he retired from UC Davis in June 1990, he was given the title Professor Emeritus of Music.⁵⁸ The music faculty and students celebrated this milestone by giving a farewell concert in his honor. Holoman directed the UC Davis choirs and orchestra, Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, and soloists in a performance of Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* along with selections from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*.⁵⁹

All throughout McNeil's illustrious career as a conductor and teacher he was in high demand as an adjudicator and clinician. He was often invited to conduct children, youth, and adult honor choirs and present interest sessions on the spirituals.⁶⁰ Not only was he a conductor, teacher, and noted arranger of spirituals, he also co-authored and edited music education textbooks for the Silver-Burdett-Ginn Publishing Company.⁶¹ He

⁵⁷ Di Grazia, Donna M. Interview by the author. Email correspondence. February 5, 2017.

⁵⁸ "Albert McNeil '42." UCLA Alumni. Accessed January 10, 2016.

⁵⁹ University of California Digital Archives. Accessed February 20, 2017.

⁶⁰ Caldwell, Hansonia L. "African-American Voices of Traditional Sacred Music in Twentieth-Century and Twenty-first Century Los Angeles." *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (2011): 170-71.

⁶¹ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

takes great pride in the honor of being the featured guest conductor on The Mormon Tabernacle Choir's 1997 CD recording, *An American Heritage of Spirituals*.⁶²

Because of the high quality work he accomplished worldwide as conductor of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, he is the recipient of numerous lifetime achievement awards and a member of several honor societies. He proudly holds the title "Sterling Patron" in the national music honor society Mu Phi Epsilon. He has served as a valued member on the board of directors for Chorus America, the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and National Endowment for the Arts.⁶³

In 2003, McNeil was inducted as a "Living Legend" into the California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) Georgia and Nolan Payton Archive of African Diaspora Sacred Music and Musicians (ADSMM). He joins an elite group of African American musicians including Brazeal Dennard, Anton Armstrong, André Thomas, Rosephanye Powell, Robert Ray, and Don Lee White.⁶⁴ "Living Legends" are described as those "who are nationally celebrated artists and have given sacred choral music, including the spiritual and gospel music, a West Coast voice for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries."⁶⁵ Later that same year and in 2010, he was given honorary Doctor of Music degrees from California State University at Northridge and the prestigious Westminster Choir College of Rider University, New Jersey. Interestingly, this is the

⁶² "Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers." The Official Site of The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles. Accessed April 12, 2016.

⁶³ Caldwell, Hanson L. "African-American Voices of Traditional Sacred Music in Twentieth-Century and Twenty-first Century Los Angeles." *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (2011): 171.

⁶⁴ "African Diaspora of Sacred Music and Musicians of Southern California." The Official Site of the California State University, Dominguez Hills, Georgia & Nolan Payton Archive and Living Legend Collections. Accessed April 12, 2016.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

college that his mentor, John Finley Williamson, co-founded after which he established the now famous Westminster Choir in 1926.⁶⁶

Retirement

In the early 2000s after almost fifty years of marriage McNeil's devoted wife passed away. She was the love of his life without whom he never could have accomplished all he did: "Without Helen none of this would ever have happened."⁶⁷ Even so, after her passing he still maintained a busy rehearsal and concert schedule with the Jubilee Singers. Beginning in 2015, he began enjoying a much slower-paced rehearsal and performing schedule with his group, while regularly attending board meetings of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. He enjoys independent living by exercising every day, driving his own car, eating out with friends and spending time with his family, especially his son and two grandchildren. He makes every effort to support them in their various school and athletic events.⁶⁸

Like his mother, McNeil is a deeply spiritual man and a devout Catholic attending church every Sunday, as he is physically able. He truly believes that God has held his life in His hands for the last ninety-seven years. He attributes the success of his Jubilee Singers, UC Davis teaching career, worldwide guest conducting appearances, and so much more, "as divine opportunities from God, his Heavenly Father." It is fitting to include a quote from McNeil when he learned of this dissertation: "Of course I am

⁶⁶ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, February 2007, interview session 1, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 40.

⁶⁷ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

overwhelmed by your endeavor. I am not one to boast, all I can say is God has been so good to me."⁶⁹



Figure 1. Albert J. McNeil ("Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers." The Official Site of The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles.)

⁶⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3
THE MUSICAL LEGACY OF

THE ALBERT MCNEIL JUBILEE SINGERS

*"Every group has a heritage that is passed down.
There is no product as great in the country as spirituals.
It is our music and we must preserve it." -Albert McNeil*

Introduction

In 1871, a group of eleven singers—seven black women and four black men—representing the newly-established Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, traveled to Europe for the first time and appeared at the Court of St. James in London, England, to sing for Queen Victoria. The queen's immediate acceptance of the Fisk University Jubilee Singers and their songs helped the ensemble of students become known worldwide for singing a type of religious music that evoked a deep sense of personal spiritual fervor.⁷⁰ The arranged concert spiritual as we now know it was born.

The spirituals as they were originally sung were not harmonized but the Fisk University Jubilee Singers created simple, four-part hymn-like harmonizations of these now generations old songs. The spiritual arrangements of the Fisk University Jubilee Singers started a trend of a cappella singing that was soon followed by the historical black universities such as, Hampton Institute, Tuskegee Institute, and others.⁷¹

The arranged concert spiritual went through many generations of evolution, from Fisk University Jubilee Singers arrangements to one of the earliest arrangers of spirituals,

⁷⁰ Anderson, Toni Passmore. "The Fisk Jubilee Singers: Performing Ambassadors for the Survival of an American Treasure, 1871-1878." 81.

⁷¹ Whalum, Wendell Phillips. "James Weldon Johnson's Theories and Performance Practices of Afro-American Folksong." *Phylon* (1960-) 32, no. 4 (1971): 387.

Harry T. Burleigh. His arrangements are described as straightforward without being challenging rhythmically. Another early arranger is R. Nathaniel Dett whose arrangements can be described as simple and authentic, honoring the sacredness of the melody of the spiritual. Hall Johnson experimented with polyphonic writing, progressing away from the four-part hymn-like arrangements, sometimes featuring a soloist, more expansive vocal lines, and dramatic contrasts in dynamics. In 1930, William Dawson began his golden era as the director of the Tuskegee Institute Choir. His most popular spiritual arrangements were written for this choir. They are described as "romantic, using tonal centers, and various overlapping and syncopated and irregularly accented rhythms...with the use of pedal points, other suspended tones, and polytonality."⁷² At the same time, Jester Hairston established himself as a conductor, composer/arranger, and actor. After he and Johnson arrived in Los Angeles, they shared their spiritual arrangements with McNeil, which later the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers performed. Since 1960, there have been several talented composers/arrangers of spirituals. Moses Hogan, more than any other arranger, is praised for revitalizing the early arrangements of a cappella spirituals. His arrangements go well beyond the boundaries of simple four-part hymns. They are concert pieces that are virtuosic vocally, displaying rhythmic and harmonic complexity, while standing on their own as concert pieces.

In 1968, nearly one hundred years after the Fisk University Jubilee Singers traveled to Europe, McNeil and his Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles, inspired by the

⁷² Thomas, André J. *Way over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*. Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2007. 38.

musical legacy of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, departed for their first concert tour to Europe to promote the spirituals.⁷³

The Legacy of Professional Black Choirs on the West Coast

The legacy of professional black choirs on the West Coast begins with the arrival of Hall Johnson and the Hall Johnson Choir in Los Angeles in 1936. The choir was hired to sing in the film *The Green Pastures* that Rodia McNeil helped cast. Johnson and his assistant conductor, Jester Hairston, were mentors to directors of black choirs throughout the United States during this time. Professional, church, and community choirs began to emerge as a result of their mentorship to young, aspiring African American choral conductors.⁷⁴ It was also during this time that the fifteen-year-old McNeil met Hairston, and they became fast friends. He was greatly influenced personally and musically by both Hairston and Johnson. He loved to sit with both conductors and listen to their stories about the spirituals and learn how to interpret and teach them by observing rehearsals that both of them directed.⁷⁵ Their leadership contributed to the development of an impressive African American lineage of Los Angeles choral conductors who nurtured the performance and preservation of the spiritual, including McNeil, Dr. Gwendolyn Wyatt, Dr. Don Lee White, Dr. Hansonia Caldwell, and Dr. William Carter. Those who continue

⁷³ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 1, Folder 012.

⁷⁴ Caldwell, Hansonia L. *African American Music, Spirituals: The Fundamental Communal Music of Black Americans*. 82, 83.

⁷⁵ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, March 2007, interview session 2, transcript, 6, 7.

to nurture the performance of the spiritual include Paul Smith, Byron Smith, Diane White-Clayton, and Charles Dickerson III, among others.⁷⁶

In 1964, McNeil first organized his own group known as the Albert McNeil Singers. They performed throughout the state of California, primarily in churches. The choir's reputation spread and in 1967, a local impresario named Irwin Parnes from Beverly Hills reached out to McNeil. Parnes was known for producing multi-ethnic shows that featured singing and dancing and was the longtime managing director of the International Concerts Exchange Foundation and manager of the Performing Arts series at the University of Judaism (now American Jewish University, Los Angeles). He also presented the International Folk Dance Festivals in Los Angeles annually for more than forty years.⁷⁷ He heard McNeil's group perform and phoned him a few days later to ask if he would like to take his choir on their first international concert tour to Europe. McNeil did not take him seriously at first. As a matter of fact he told Parnes, "You're crazy!" He could not imagine taking his choir outside of the United States, because they were not known internationally like other American groups Parnes managed. Who would come to their performances? Parnes reassured him by explaining how he successfully managed several tours for the Fisk University Jubilee Singers, and because of that experience he knew exactly where they should perform and how to promote their concerts in order to

⁷⁶ Caldwell, Hansionia L. *African American Music, Spirituals: The Fundamental Communal Music of Black Americans*. 83.

⁷⁷ Parnes, Joy, and Irwin Parnes. *Irwin Parnes Takes the "Bull By the Horns"*. Benson, AZ: World University Press, 1988.

maximize audience attendance.⁷⁸ McNeil remembers the initial phone conversation he had with Parnes when he knew taking his group to Europe was going to become a reality:

Parnes called me up one day and said, "I've got permission from the State Department for [your choir] to go on a three month tour of nine countries." So I called all my singers together and asked, "What are we going to do?" I said, "I'm going to take a leave of absence; I'm going to get a Teacher's Credit Union loan to pay my mortgage." And then I said, "What are you guys going to do?" Then I asked two of my former high school students who had just graduated from high school. They were both nineteen. I said to them, "Okay, you guys got to go." Then I said, "What can you all do?" They said, "Well, we're gonna take a leave of absence. How long are we gonna be gone?" I gave them the dates. So in 1968 we made our first tour of Europe.⁷⁹

McNeil never imagined that this simple invitation to travel around the world with his choir would open the doors to the legacy of his career:

It was an amazing experience. I look back on it now, and I think, "Oh, gosh, did I have the chance of a lifetime! And I kept saying, "I came from a little neighborhood where everybody knew everybody," and I said, "I never thought in all of my life, when I went to Saint Peter's for the first time, that I would walk into that gorgeous basilica," [pause] those are the kinds of feelings that you get. We've been to seventy countries altogether, and when you think [pause] I didn't have to pay...I was paid to go to those countries...can you believe it?⁸⁰

The First European Tour (1968)

In 1968, the Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles departed for their first three-month, fifty-city European tour to Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, England, Switzerland and Italy, under the auspices of the International Concerts Exchange Foundation and accompanied by Irwin Parnes, tour manager.⁸¹ Tickets for the Los

⁷⁸ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, March 2007, interview session 2, transcript, 57, 58.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁸¹ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Boxes 1, Folder 012.

Angeles Jubilee Singers Gala Farewell Concert were only \$2.50, which had roughly the same purchasing power that \$18.00 does in 2017.⁸² A pre-tour press release proclaimed, "In their forthcoming tour of Europe the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers will sing with the voice of a whole people—their joys and sorrows, hopes, triumphs, despair and faith echoing from three centuries of beautiful song."⁸³

Highlights of the tour included a professional recording, released under a major European label, of their Paris concert at the Salle Gaveau Concert Hall; a tour of France sponsored by the Jeunesses Musicales, and a twelve-concert tour during the week of Easter for the United States Army servicemen and their families which started in Frankfurt and ended in Berlin.⁸⁴ After their debut in Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, England, a favorable review by Stan Reed appeared in *The (London) Evening News*:

To the South Bank's Queen Elizabeth Hall by way of concert in Portugal, Spain and France came the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers on their three-month tour of Europe. I met them and found a happy, excited bunch. It's their first time out of Los Angeles, where they are based at the Congregational Church. They are a mixed choir of 14 with conductor, and their spiritual singing was spot-on. It had depth, it had attack and it had polish. It was a pleasure to hear them sing [selections] such as "Deep River," "Hold On" and "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray." The soloists, too, had that same earnest quality. Here was music with guts.⁸⁵

Fannie E. Benjamin, the esteemed Los Angeles pianist and organist, accompanied the group's first European tour. She studied piano, organ, theory, and teaching at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. She became the head organist in 1923

⁸² "Calculate the value of \$1 in 1968." Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=1&year=1968>.

⁸³ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Boxes 1, Folder 012.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

at the People's Independent Church of Christ. Starting in 1960, she worked closely in music and worship with McNeil and then at the Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship beginning in 1965 until her death in 1996. When she was not traveling with the Jubilee Singers and playing the organ for church, she worked as a funeral director and counselor at several Los Angeles mortuaries.⁸⁶

The 1968 Jubilee Singer tour roster included distinguished soloists such as Fred Thomas, baritone with the New York City Opera and the first African American to win the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air in the early sixties, Bert Lindsey, tenor with the Metropolitan Opera national touring company, and James Kennon-Wilson, lyric tenor with the New York City Center Opera.⁸⁷

Highlights of Subsequent Tours

During the summer of 1970, the mayor of Los Angeles, Samuel Yorty, designated August 22 as "Los Angeles Jubilee Singers Day," honoring the choir and McNeil before their departure for a ten-nation, three-month tour of music festivals, concert hall performances, and presentations for the U.S. armed forces hospitals and bases abroad. That same day the choir received a resolution from the Los Angeles City Council that read:

Whereas, the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers, under the direction of Professor Albert McNeil, will soon embark on a second overseas goodwill tour, singing for tens of thousands of people from the Netherlands to Israel; and whereas, they will be bringing Afro-American spirituals and folk music to the Perugia Religious Music Festival, to young people through the Jeunesses Musicales de France, to American men and their families on bases and in hospitals of the United States

⁸⁶ "Fannie E. Benjamin, organist and mortician, circa 1941/1950, Los Angeles: Charlotta Bass/California Eagle Photograph Collection, 1870-1960." Accessed February 22, 2017.

⁸⁷ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Boxes 1, Folder 012.

Armed Forces abroad: Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers are the musical ambassadors of the city whose name they proudly bear; and furthermore, be it resolved that the words of faith, hope and brotherhood so vividly expressed in their beautiful songs be the message of all the peoples of the city of Los Angeles to all the peoples, old and young in the many countries they will visit.⁸⁸

The group's tour repertoire included spirituals, a medley from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, jazz and ballads sung by soloists, African American folk songs, and a section titled, "Songs of the Black Bible," which included *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*, *Little David Play on Your Harp*, *Daniel*, *Daniel Servant of the Lord*, and *Ezekiel saw the Wheel*.⁸⁹

In 1972, they toured for four months through Europe and the Near East. They presented ninety-six concerts and donated the final two weeks of their tour to the United States Army troops and their families in Germany and Italy giving special holiday performances of spirituals, gospel, jazz, and folk music at bases and military hospitals. Their manager was continually pleased that the group performed for capacity audiences:

The Singers' performances were telecast in Italy where they were the first [African] American spiritual choir to appear in the venerable Sagra Musicale Umbra Festival commemorating the anniversary of the birth of St. Francis of Assisi. In Yugoslavia, crowds packed outdoor theaters to standing room capacity to hear the "new" Negro spirituals...in the Ancient palace of the Roman emperor Diocletian, which was broadcast and televised throughout the nation."⁹⁰

A live recording of their concert tour to the Holy Land was unprecedented for an American choir visiting Jerusalem. As soon as they returned to Los Angeles a recording by CBS (Columbia), "Pilgrimage to Jerusalem," was released worldwide. Their journey through Israel included concerts in the first century Roman amphitheater of Caesarea to

⁸⁸ Ibid., Box 1, Folder 002.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Box 2, Folder 013.

⁹⁰ Parnes, Joy, and Irwin Parnes. *Irwin Parnes Takes the "Bull By the Horns"*. Benson, AZ: World University Press, 1988.

borders where gunfire from the Arab-Israeli war could be heard.⁹¹ During this same tour they arrived in Munich, Germany, at the same time of the attack during the 1972 Summer Olympics in which the Palestinian terrorist group took hostage and eventually killed eleven Israeli Olympic team members. McNeil recalls their experience of performing for a city in mourning, "We were in Munich at the time of the massacre of the athletes. Everyone was in shock! We were the only attraction allowed to perform that night in the auditorium, where we dedicated our performance to the memory of those boys."⁹² Veteran member, Virginia White recalls that historical night in Tel Aviv as if it were yesterday:

The Jubilee Singers were landing in Israel in Tel Aviv at that time and we were told that our concerts were cancelled. I was warming up in the bus and I was singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" as a warm up. Irwin Parnes bolted up out of his seat and ran to the back to Albert, and said, "Let's open up the concerts as a memorial to the athletes that have lost their lives in Munich." So what we did was... [*quiet pause*] I'm gonna cry... [*stifled sob*] we sang our spirituals. And in the middle of that first half, I went out to sing, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" by myself. We didn't have an arrangement at the time. I started as a soloist. I walked out and started to sing. About eight bars into my solo, the choir was aware about what I was doing, they started to hum behind me in harmony. It lifted me up off that floor. I felt I was flying 'cause the sounds were so glorious and I kept singing like it was prearranged, but it was not. It was spontaneous. It was amazing! Just amazing. And then another girl who was in the group at the time, her name was Barbara White. She sang "Deep River." Then another guy sang "Old Glory" or something like that. You could not find a dry eye in that building. We were in the Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv. It gets me every time. [*quiet pause*] They opened up all the concerts again and we continued to do that the whole time we were in Israel. I can't begin to tell you how amazing it was.⁹³

⁹¹ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 2, Folder 013.

⁹² Feather, Leonard. "Albert McNeil: Prof. Spiritual." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), October 18, 1981.

⁹³ White, Virginia. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 12, 2016.

Two years later the choir traveled to Africa, Asia, and Europe giving thirty concerts in six weeks. They visited Tunisia, Morocco, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal and Central Asia.⁹⁴ After their successful performance in Covilha, the American Embassy in Lisbon sent a telegram to the United States State Department expressing deep appreciation to the group and their director:

The political left in Portugal has been very active in Covilha. It is considered to be a socialist/communist stronghold. Posters announcing the concert were plastered all over town. The small auditorium where the singers were to perform seats 250 people, but an extra 150 squeezed in and literally jammed the auditorium. Audience response to the concert was sensational! People came backstage afterward to ask for autographs and to express their appreciations. Others waited for the singers in the street to ask for autographs and to applaud them...the decision to route the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers to Portugal was a happy one. They are professional artists of the highest rank. Their performances in Portugal were received with great enthusiasm by the Portuguese public. The pride they take in their talent, their dignity, their pure musicality, and the good humor with which they put up with heavy programming under difficult conditions signify much of what is best in America.⁹⁵

In Parnes' book, "Irwin Parnes Takes the Bull By the Horns," he writes about an experience in Cairo, Egypt that took place during the group's 1974 tour:

The Los Angeles Jubilee Singers were about to embark upon their first official cultural exchange mission for the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Information Agency. I was particularly delighted with the itinerary because it included a visit to Egypt where persons of the Jewish faith, regardless of their nationality, were not admitted at the time...here we were in Cairo at last, a beautiful green patch on both sides of the Nile, then nothing but desert...Professor McNeil, Joy and I were invited to meet with the American ambassador, Nicholas Veliotes. We held a most congenial conversation over some cold drinks, mainly about, of all things, American Indians...after dinner we awaited the Egyptian folk singers and dancers. We were informed of a so-called last minute switch in plans. They would not come to see us, but we would bus across town once again to see them.

⁹⁴ "L.A. Jubilee Singers Set Concert Tour." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Sep 02, 1974.

⁹⁵ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 2, Folder 016.

We arrived a half-hour later at one of the largest tent theatres I had ever seen. There must have been at least 6,000 persons in attendance. Another official delegation met our bus and we were rushed to the front center section that was reserved for our party. The audience cheered our entrance...then suddenly, the master of ceremonies introduced the world famous Jubilee Singers who were kind enough as a special courtesy to sing a selection of songs...so our little band of Christian spiritual singers went on stage to celebrate the end of the Moslem holiday Ramadan...the audience was enthralled, demanding encore after encore!⁹⁶

According to Parnes, "...the four concerts they performed in Cairo were sold out within twenty-four hours" and the group was "the first American concert attraction to perform in Egypt since the two countries had reassumed diplomatic relations."⁹⁷ White will never forget the group's first performance in Cairo:

This is where we first heard that undulating chant. I swear they were going to tear down that tent! They started that undulating thing [*high pitched vocal sound*] and they were climbing on the poles. The place was rockin'! And they were stomping their feet and the dust was coming up on the stage. We're trying to sing, but the dust...we sang another song. I thought this is the end. They were astounded at what we could do with our voice percussively, as well as sing that [way] in the song [McNeil] picked...we just couldn't [sing] another one. There's just no way [as we were exhausted]. They were out of their minds! [demanding more singing] And we thought it was because they were hungry! It was amazing! But I thought those tents were gonna come down right on us because the entire thing was shaking!⁹⁸

On return from their extensive 1974 tour, McNeil received a congratulatory letter from the American ambassador of Africa expressing his profound satisfaction with the group's performances:

Dear Mr. McNeil, The plaudits for the Abidjan performances of the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers are still coming in! Whenever my wife and I see any of the Ivorian Ministers or any of my diplomatic corps colleagues, they tell us how

⁹⁶ Parnes, Joy, and Irwin Parnes. *Irwin Parnes Takes the "Bull By the Horns"*. Benson, AZ: World University Press, 1988.

⁹⁷ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 2, Folder 016.

⁹⁸ White, Virginia. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 12, 2016.

thrilled they were to hear your group. It is not simply that Abidjan does not have the privilege of hearing many first-class music ensembles. It is not just that Negro spirituals, gospel and jazz strike warm chords in many heads and hearts. It is basically that all of you put on a fantastic show here. The audience warmed up to you, and you responded warmly to the audience, and everybody—yes, everybody—went away humming or singing, smiling and happy. It was truly an exhilarating pair of evenings.⁹⁹

Shortly thereafter, the group made their first appearance in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion at the Music Center in Los Angeles. A concert review by one of the local newspaper music critics favored the choir's debut performance:

A responsive audience made it clear that the event was as rewarding an occasion for listeners as it was a successful one for the local ensemble conducted by Albert McNeil...the ensemble's collective technique was sharpened and disciplined to a point of almost soloistic flexibility and tonal refinement. What opulent harmonic textures, what precision in attacks, and what subtle dynamic shading.¹⁰⁰

The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion was home to the Los Angeles Master Chorale and their director, Roger Wagner. He would invite McNeil and his Jubilee Singers to join the Master Chorale in performances at the Music Center. White was of the opinion that Wagner needed to be educated on the spirituals: "Roger was a very interesting person. He had a concept of black music that most people had at that time...that it was fun music full of energy, meant to be sung as a concert closer. The Master Chorale would do the serious music and the Jubilee Singers would do the fun music. We had to educate him that that's not what spirituals are."¹⁰¹ She was not pleased about one of the performances they gave with Wagner and the Master Chorale because in her opinion he did not treat the group and their heritage with respect:

⁹⁹ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 2, Folder 016.

¹⁰⁰ Riley, Robert. "Jubilee Singers at Pavilion." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), April 11, 1974.

¹⁰¹ White, Virginia. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 12, 2016.

We [the Jubilee Singers] ended the first half of the concert before intermission. After we sang the audience was on their feet giving us a standing ovation. When we walked off the stage Roger was standing there. He looked at me and said, "How are we [the Master Chorale] supposed to top your performance?" At the end of the concert he wanted us to join the Master Chorale singing "When the Saints Go Marching In." [The Master Chorale] had pop whistles and all kinds of things and people shouting Hallelujah! and all kinds of stuff! That was supposed to be our encore but we didn't participate. We just stood there. The write up in the paper the next day, oh boy! The Master Chorale really got criticized because they saw that the Jubilee Singers did not appreciate the sacrilegious treatment of the song. There were black singers in Wagner's Master Chorale that joined our group because they were so unhappy with Roger... We did our own concerts a couple of times in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. As a matter of fact, Roger Wagner tried to ban [the Jubilee Singers] from performing there. Roger said, "What are [the Jubilee Singers] doing in our theatre?" Mrs. Chandler told him, "This is my theatre and I'll have who I want." That's how Roger was. He felt that we were not good enough to be in his presence. But the crowd and the newspaper critics let him know that there was a new group in town.¹⁰²

Another flattering review worthy of mention was written a couple of years later in response to the Jubilee Singers farewell concert for their upcoming fourth international tour:

Under the genial hand of Albert McNeil, and using unobtrusive staging and choreography... the Jubilee Singers demonstrated the most artful kind of showmanship in the service of direct musical expression. Spirituals comprise the bulk of the Singers' programs and one could wish for no more elegant, touching or intense presentations than those given by this fifteen member chorale. No visual gimmicks mar the aural beauties of these arrangements, and no phoniness intrudes on their textual purity; utter sincerity and musical thrust characterize each item. And self-listening, immaculate attacks and releases, dependable intonation and firm balances mark the a cappella singing. Exceptional solo singing adds to the musical excitement... and in more contemporary items, the performers held the stage, moved their audience and made music with the same command shown in their singing of spirituals.¹⁰³

Because of their excellent reputation as musical ambassadors, they were selected several times to serve the United States State Department and the United States Information

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Cariaga, Daniel. "Jubilee Singers at El Camino." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), January 11, 1977.

Service Cultural Exchange Program in areas of the world that were considered hostile during the seventies. The group made a lasting impression upon everyone they met because of their powerful singing voices, beautiful smiles, and friendly spirits. They were highly effective as cultural ambassadors of goodwill which is evidenced in this statement from the American ambassador in Cairo, Egypt, where they sang at the city's largest celebration of the Muslim holiday of Ramadan: "The Jubilee Singers contributed appreciably to the new relationship between the United States and Egypt which we are trying to achieve...I hope that we will have the pleasure of having them here again."¹⁰⁴ Henry Kissinger, who was Former Secretary of State at that time, sent a telegram to the United States Information Service (USIS) in Beirut, Lebanon, expressing his appreciation for the efforts of the Jubilee Singers on behalf of the American people.¹⁰⁵

In 1975, the group made a tour of the West Coast and Midwest states. They received multiple positive concert reviews with the following titles, "Concert By McNeil Singers Should Rate A Gold Medal," "Jubilee Singers Bring Out Best in Spirituals," "Smooth Singers Please Audience," "Jubilee Singers Enjoyed by Crowd," and "It Was A Standing Ovation for Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers!"¹⁰⁶

Two years later they toured in Italy, Turkey, Iran, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Abu Dhabi, Oman, Bahrain, Cyprus, Greece, and London. After their performances in Dacca and Chittagong, the local music critic was of the opinion that the Jubilee Singers were a success in Bangladesh partly because of their warm personalities:

¹⁰⁴ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 2, Folder 016.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Box 2, Folder 017.

A little more than a decade ago they were among the unknown choral groups in their country. What then has made them now rank among the most widely acclaimed ensembles in the musical world? Their sparkling universal success lies partly in the brilliance of the all-black choral group's director Professor Albert McNeil and his love of the Negro Spirituals; and partly in the devotion and warm personality of the individual singers. All these combinedly contributed to the standing ovations that they received in Bangladesh and elsewhere. We are certain that the memories that the Jubilee Singers have left behind will be cherished forever by the music lovers in this country.¹⁰⁷

Later that same year under the direction of Zubin Mehta, one of the world's leading conductors, they joined forces with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and sang the first performance of the late African American composer Margaret Bond's setting of W.E. DuBois' *Credo*. The poet's widow, Shirley Graham DuBois, called their performance of the work: "...one of the most moving moments of my life. I believe that tonight we have heard a work of art that is eternal, that will live as long as people love each other and really believe in brotherhood."¹⁰⁸

Before each new concert season McNeil spent hours reading through new choral music finding repertoire to include on their performances. During the mid-seventies he included a couple of calypso-style songs and a set of gospel songs for their upcoming South America tour. During that tour they had the privilege of performing in Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela.¹⁰⁹

During 1979, the group toured from the West Coast to the East Coast of the United States followed by a tour to Eastern Europe where they were the first African American choir to perform on live television in Jerusalem. Itinerary highlights included

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Box 1, Folder 009.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Box 2, Folder 018.

concerts in Ein-Hashofet, a kibbutz in northern Israel, the Jerusalem Theater, Israel's largest center for art and culture, and the Israel Philharmonic resident concert hall in Tel-Aviv. After concertizing for two weeks in Israel they traveled to Frankfurt, Prague, Bucharest, Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden.¹¹⁰ After McNeil returned from their tour to Israel, he sat down with Los Angeles Times staff writer, Leonard Feather, and shared his thoughts regarding the incredible opportunity of performing in East Berlin:

It was a fantastic experience to be on the other side of that wall, where young people in their twenties would rush up onto the stage and tell us, "We want you to know that we're Christians too! May we come to your hotel and talk to you?" Well, in those hotels they have a guard sitting watching you on every floor and you're not allowed to bring people to your room, so I agreed to meet them in the downstairs lobby.¹¹¹

In the early eighties, the repertoire of the group had expanded to include a choreographed Duke Ellington medley arranged by member, Larry Farrow, a well-known African American composer and arranger from Los Angeles; and a thirty minute composition by African American composer Robert Ray, *Gospel Mass*, which sets the words from the Catholic Mass to the harmony and rhythm of African American music.¹¹²

The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers are well-known and admired by the national choral community, having been honored on numerous occasions with command performances before the prestigious American Choral Directors Association at divisional

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Box 2, Folder 019.

¹¹¹ Feather, Leonard. "Albert McNeil: Prof. Spiritual." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), October 18, 1981.

¹¹² Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 3, Folder 021.

and national conventions held in 1981 in New Orleans; 1985 in Salt Lake City; 1997 in San Diego; and 2000 in Los Angeles.¹¹³

The New York City Chapter of the National Black Music Caucus hosted the Jubilee Singers in a concert in early 1984 at the Lincoln Center in New York. During the performance, McNeil was awarded the prestigious Black Music Caucus National Achievement Award for his outstanding accomplishments as founder-director of the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers and as author, editor, and professor of music at the University of California at Davis.¹¹⁴ Included in the chapter's newsletter, "The New York Voice," was a complimentary commentary on the group's Lincoln Center performance:

The audience was captivated by the musical artistry of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles at its New York City debut concert last Sunday afternoon...the Duke Ellington medley had fascinating choreography as well as beautiful singing. Ensemble is an apt description for these highly disciplined singers and their conductor. Each singer seemed capable of solo work yet blended beautifully with the others. These musicians were such experienced professionals that whatever they sang seemed effortless.¹¹⁵

They were the only African American choir invited to sing for Pope John Paul II during his 1987 visit to Los Angeles. In April 1988, the Jubilee Singers headlined at the First Choral Festival in Jaffe, Israel and a year later, on Martin Luther King Sunday, they performed with the world-famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir aired by CBS Radio and Television for their special program honoring Dr. King. This performance was

¹¹³ "Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers." The Official Site of The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles. Accessed April 12, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 3, Folder 022.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Box 3, Folder 021.

considered an historical occasion because it was the first time an African American choir had performed in the Mormon Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah.¹¹⁶

They have had collaborative concerts with professional ensembles such as the Los Angeles Master Chorale, the Dale Warland Singers from St. Paul, Minnesota, the all-male vocal ensemble, Chanticleer, from San Francisco, the Vancouver Chamber Choir from Canada, and Pro Musica of El Paso, Texas. During the summer of 1992, the Jubilee Singers made their first Far East tour of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan. A performance highlight was singing in the two thousand-seat Hong Kong Culture Center Concert Hall. Later that season they went to Segovia, Spain, to perform at the XXIII Semana de Musica de Camara, in the Real Coliseo Carlos III in El Escorial, the historical residence of the King of Spain, performing not only their concert of spirituals, but also the Renaissance music of Victoria and Morales.¹¹⁷

The Jubilee Singers completed a successful six-week tour of Europe during the winter of 1993, and culminated their concert season with a performance in the Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena, California. After returning to the U.S. from touring in Puerto Rico and the Carribean, the choir had the honor of being featured guests via National Public Radio (NPR) on the series "Beverly Sills Presents," a live, two-hour broadcast of their Ambassador Auditorium performance in Pasadena. Not long after, they

¹¹⁶ Buttars, Lori. "Jubilee Singers in Historic S.L. Appearance." *The Salt Lake Tribune*, (Salt Lake City, Utah), January 8, 1989.

¹¹⁷ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 3, Folders 021-026.

were featured on the Smithsonian's "Wade in the Water" series, which traces the origins of African American spiritual music.¹¹⁸

The Jubilee Singers joyfully made their Kennedy Center debut in January 1995, where they "arrived to take the audience by storm with a joyous celebration of songs arising from the deep roots of black music within American society."¹¹⁹ They continued on to complete an eight-week tour of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and France. Along the way, the group sang in Paris' historic Église Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Munich's Herkulessaal, Monte Carlo and also Bremen's St. Petri Dom where they appeared before an enthusiastic audience of two thousand people. They had the honor of being featured at the International Choral Festival in Taipei, Taiwan. They were so popular among the people in Japan during their 1996 tour that they made four successive encore tours after their first visit.¹²⁰

David Brubeck, one of America's great jazz pianists and composers, was commissioned to compose a special work commemorating the one hundredth anniversary celebration of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento, California. Brubeck chose the ancient Gregorian chant *Pange Lingua* as the basis of his work called *Pange Lingua Variations*. His composition called for a large choir, and McNeil, then professor of music at the University of California at Davis, was asked to assemble a group of an appropriate size for the performance. He combined his Jubilee Singers, the newly

¹¹⁸ "Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers." The Official Site of The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles. Accessed April 12, 2016.

¹¹⁹ "Kennedy Center Performance Highlights from the 1990's." Kennedy Center Performance Highlights from the 1990's. Accessed January 30, 2017.

¹²⁰ "Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers." The Official Site of The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles. Accessed April 12, 2016.

organized Sacramento Symphony Chorus, the Sacramento Masterworks Chorale, and selected members of the University Chorus from UC Davis, to accompany the famed Brubeck Quintet in the premiere.¹²¹

The Jubilee Singers enjoyed collaborating with the Honolulu Symphony performing concert excerpts from Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" to sold-out audiences on the Big Island of Hawaii and Kauai. In 1998 they had the honor of being invited to record a program for the award-winning show "Saint Paul Sunday Morning" aired via National Public Radio and heard in virtually every state in the country. The NPR program generated hundreds of letters from across the United States and Canada of appreciation and admiration for their performance of the spirituals.¹²²

After eighteen sold-out European tours, twelve tours of the United States, tours of the Middle and Far East, Africa, South America, and Canada, the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers have garnered international acclaim as musical ambassadors for the city of Los Angeles. They were selected three times to serve the United States State Department through the U.S. Information Services Cultural Exchange Program in areas of the world, known in the seventies as "behind the Iron Curtain," including East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Iran, India, North and West Africa, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.¹²³

What is it that draws the large capacity audiences to hear the Jubilee Singers? What is that makes audiences jump to their feet in heartfelt appreciation for the music

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

they heard? What is it that "wows" the audience? Perlmutter answers: "Not massed voices perfectly blended and balanced and applied to multi-part singing. Not rousing gospels...the answer is showmanship. What the group boasts *in excelsus* is a body and soul delivery, no matter the musical category."¹²⁴ There are those who attribute the group's broad appeal largely to the singers' heartfelt renderings and the music's uplifting lyrics and energetic rhythms. The following excerpt from a 1970's concert promotional letter written by their concert manager attests to the fact they were beloved throughout the world:

As person-to-person ambassadors of brotherhood, the [Los Angeles Jubilee Singers] are unsurpassed. In Berlin's massive Philharmonie Hall, the entire audience rushed toward the stage to shake the singers' hands, at Paris' historic church Église Saint-Eustache, a capacity crowd broke into loud rhythmic clapping and stomping—a sound never before heard in the four centuries of that venerable edifice. At the Teatro Municipal de Sao Luiz in Lisbon, the entire local chorale stood at the close of their concert, singing the same spirituals the Jubilee Singers had brought there, two years earlier. In Ljubljana, the university town of Jugoslavia, their concert hall was sold beyond its capacity and when irate ticket holders threatened to break down the doors, the performance was moved outdoors while the local police blocked traffic for a mile around, to make sure the Jubilee Singers would be heard.¹²⁵

McNeil's constant drill and focus on the emotional expression of the text made an impact on every audience member who had the privilege of hearing them sing:

[The audience] didn't know what words we were saying, but they could tell what we were transmitting because these were the sounds that the slaves had produced to express their belief that God was real and that he was going to move in their lives. So when we sang the spirituals, we were in these little, tiny poor towns in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. They felt it. They heard it. They felt the music and it was so incredible to see them weeping.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Perlmutter, Donna. "Music Review: Body and Soul by Jubilee Singers." *Los Angeles Times*. Accessed February 25, 2016.

¹²⁵ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 3, Folders 021-026.

¹²⁶ Griffin, Douglas. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 5, 2017.

The passion and intensity that characterized the group's performances profoundly moved audiences. No other professional African American choir has brought more prestige and dedication to the upholding of the black choral tradition than the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. When they began their journey almost fifty years ago, they sang only to preserve the sacred music of their heritage. Yet the group achieved far more than they had originally anticipated. Through their passionate singing, audiences were awakened to songs that enthralled and captured their hearts and souls.

The success and longevity of this ensemble and their director forms a unique chapter in the history of American choral music. In his book, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century*, author and choral scholar, Nick Strimple, gives recognition to the ensemble's impressive musical reputation, along with the Fisk University Jubilee Singers, as being one of the most outstanding African American choirs of the twentieth century including the Hall Johnson Choir and the Moses Hogan Chorale.¹²⁷

The Singers

At the very core of the Jubilee Singers are the women and men who helped form the group and gave them its worldwide reputation. Those who had the privilege of singing in the select touring group had to obtain lengthy leaves of absence from their employers. Without their talent, willingness, and commitment to McNeil's mission of preserving the Negro spiritual, there would be no story to tell. More than one hundred-fifty men and women hold the distinction of being a member of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. All of them shared a love of music and a desire to promulgate the history of their ancestors through the singing of spirituals and music of the African diaspora

¹²⁷ Strimple, Nick. *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century*. Portland, Or.: Amadeus Press, 2002.

throughout the world. Not only did their musical performances impact the lives of the audiences for whom they sang, but also their own lives were transformed in positive ways. Douglas Griffin, Jubilee Singers tenor, remembers traveling through the Midwestern United States noticing that the white people would go out of their way with acts of generosity as a way of saying how sorry they were for the way their ancestors treated black people during the time of slavery:

When we went to Iowa or Indiana, I remember those specifically because those are some of my most fond memories. The people's deep desire to connect with us, it's as though they, here's the weirdest thing I'm going to say, okay. It's like they wanted to make up for hundreds of years of misunderstanding between the races. They so wanted to connect, and it's just like what can we do to make you feel welcome, to make you feel loved? They were so amazingly generous and loving because, you know... [*quiet pause*] I'd visited and seen people be hospitable. But I hadn't seen people just so desire to connect and want to make amends. They never said those words, but that was the feeling I got. The wonderful thing is that people wanted to connect with that story and say, "Yes, I understand what you went through. I understand the history that you're bringing. Even though we didn't go through that, we represent those people. On behalf of my ancestors, I want to represent them and embrace this culture and embrace this music and help the tradition to continue." It was an extremely emotional thing...it's like we were royalty. And it's like, if we could atone for everything, and just by how generous we are to you, we will do that. The way we were treated some places I'll just never forget it. It was their genuine desire to connect and say, "We understand your story and we empathize and we love you and here's our way of showing that we get it."¹²⁸

The singers were all residents of Los Angeles and represented a cross section of American life. Some were professional singers whose names, when not touring with the group, were found on opera and professional choir concert programs, and church choir rosters.¹²⁹ One of the members who played a significant part in the success of the Jubilee Singers was Byron Smith. He was accompanist for the group starting in 1985 through

¹²⁸ Griffin, Douglas. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 5, 2017.

¹²⁹ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Box 2, Folder 016.

2006. Smith is a well-known pianist, composer, and arranger from Los Angeles. He is the founder and director of The Spirit Chorale of Los Angeles and president of the National Association of Negro Musicians. He recalls when he became a member of the group:

We learned how to be Jubilee Singers from [veteran] Jubilee Singers. We learned how to have a certain air on stage and a lot of that came from the membership, not as much from Albert saying, "You have to do this." It's just something that developed in terms of the quality that was there and the little tricks that you learned. Maybe you don't need to do it this way, and you learned a lot from those veterans that came in...Albert's really been blessed by being able to pull in some talented people and pulling in some talented voices to establish and make that what it is, and there was a day when they really had a unique sound...but you know, a lot of it still has the same heart and that's what's most important. It's a music that I have found all over the world people have an appreciation for. I give great mad respect to the Jubilee Singers for being able to keep it alive all these years.¹³⁰

Other vocalists who played a part in the success of the Jubilee Singers included Bradley Baker, soloist with the Los Angeles Music Center Opera and television evangelist for Robert Schuller's "Hour of Power" broadcast service at The Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California.¹³¹ Carver Cossey, when he was not singing with the Jubilee Singers, was both a soloist and chorister with the Roger Wagner Chorale, Los Angeles Master Chorale, and Los Angeles Opera.¹³² Larry Farrow, well-known composer and arranger, joined the group as a young teenager. Jester Hairston was a mentor to young Farrow in the same way he was to McNeil in his early years. Farrow has worked in radio, television, and film as a composer and arranger. He has collaborated with famous musicians such as Harry Belafonte, Gladys Knight, Aretha Franklin, and The Jacksons. Several of his arrangements of spirituals were and still are a part of the standard concert

¹³⁰ Smith, Byron. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 22, 2016.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² "Concert: The Sounds of Americana. Sunday, March 12, 2017." Festival Singers. Accessed February 28, 2017

repertoire of the Jubilee Singers to this day.¹³³

Remarkably, there is one singer who, at the time of this writing, has been a faithful member of the Jubilee Singers since the Albert McNeil Singers formed several years before the 1968 European tour and is still singing with the group today. Her name is Virginia "Gini" White (Figure 3). White has distinguished herself as contralto soloist with the group for more than fifty years.¹³⁴ She is known as the "O Happy Day" lady because that was her signature solo that she sang all over the world and at home. White remembers one afternoon swimming in the Mediterranean Sea, when a girl jumped in front of her and exclaimed, "Oh happy day!" She looked at her stunned and asked her how she knew that was her nickname and the girl said, "I remember when you [and the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers] were here two years ago!"¹³⁵ Clint Erney, staff writer for the Orange County Register, stated: "If there had to be a star among the starry soloists, Virginia was it!"¹³⁶ According to Parnes, "One was constantly reminded of the late, great Mahalia Jackson when listening to Virginia White, who was not only exceptional in the slow, emotion-packed ballads but the extension of the range into the head voice and the ability to improvise these was a real delight to hear."¹³⁷ There were other music critics who appreciated White's artistry as well, such as Los Angeles Times music critic Daniel

¹³³ "Larry Farrow -." Larry Farrow -. Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.fredbock.com/Promo.asp?page=243>.

¹³⁴ White, Virginia. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 20, 2016.

¹³⁵ White, Virginia. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 12, 2016.

¹³⁶ Erney, Clint. "A Joyous Evening of Singing." *Orange County Register*, (Santa Ana, Calif.), September 29, 1981.

¹³⁷ Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Irwin Parnes Collection. Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles., Box 2, Folder 017.

Cariaga, who wrote, "...when Miss White turned on the emotional juices of 'Moanin' Dove,' there shouldn't have been a dry eye in the hall."¹³⁸ Lee Peters wrote, "One of the most moving selections was 'Oh Sorrow' by Virginia White, whose contralto voice, beautifully disciplined, sounded each note and registered the emotional impact of the music like a true artist."¹³⁹ She took on the duties of group administration several times throughout her career with the group. She prides herself on having excellent negotiation skills. She recalls a time when they were going back to Spain to sing for the Segovia Series, and the group's manager was not going to give them any more money for their performance. McNeil went to White and expressed his disappointment. She told him to go back and negotiate with them for room and board. The next day he contacted the coordinators of the Segovia Series and submitted his request. Shortly after, they agreed to provide the group with room and board.¹⁴⁰

In an interview with the author, White was asked how much longer she was going to stay with the group. She replied, "I'm contemplating retiring, but I like singing too much. I wouldn't trade the Jubilee Singers experience for the world! This small town girl has been many places and experienced so much joy! If I never do another thing, if I never go any [other] place in life, I'm satisfied."¹⁴¹

The Conductors

¹³⁸ Cariaga, Daniel. "Jubilee Singers at El Camino." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), January 11, 1977.

¹³⁹ Peters, Lee. "Concert by McNeil Singers Should Rate A Gold Medal." *Red Bluff Daily News*, January 12, 1976.

¹⁴⁰ White, Virginia. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 20, 2016.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, January 12, 2016.

Albert McNeil has been the only conductor of the group since its inception as the Albert McNeil Singers in the early sixties. Even though he has been the only conductor, there have been assistant conductors through the years who provided qualified leadership whenever he was not able to be present for rehearsals and/or performances.

The Jubilee Singers board of directors met in early 2015, shortly after McNeil had celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday, and discussed the need to relieve him from his full-time conducting responsibilities. It was unanimously voted to search for and hire an interim director to take on half of the duties of rehearsing and directing the ensemble.¹⁴² After several auditions and interviews, the board of directors announced that Diane White-Clayton (Figure 4) would serve as the interim director and McNeil would assume the title Director Emeritus. At the time of this writing White-Clayton has assumed full-time directorship of the ensemble but has not been officially named director of the Jubilee Singers.

White-Clayton is an experienced pianist, conductor, and composer with a PhD and Master of Arts in Music Composition from the University of California at Santa Barbara and graduated with honors from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Music with emphases in composition, voice, and piano. She received a Rotary Scholarship to study for a year in France. She has served as a workshop clinician, vocalist, pianist, conductor, and lecturer.¹⁴³ She has held numerous positions across the country including Artistic Director for the Washington D.C. Performing Arts Society gospel choral program, Artist-in-Residence with the

¹⁴² McNeil, Albert. Interview by author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

¹⁴³ "UC Santa Barbara Alumni Association." Alumni Spotlight: Diane White-Clayton. Accessed February 17, 2017.

School of Music and Assistant Director of African-American Student Development at Appalachian State University, Composer-in-Residence at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Scholar-in-Residence at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa. She was the creator and Artistic Director for "This is Her Story, This is Her Song: Black Women & Song in America," a three-day symposium on black women as creators and interpreters of song in American culture. Following in the tradition of Albert McNeil, she is not only a conductor and teacher; she is a composer and arranger as well. Her compositions and arrangements have been performed in such venues as the John F. Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, the Air Canada Arena and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles.¹⁴⁴

Operational Procedures

Only two artist management organizations, Aya World Productions and Century Artist Bureau (Walter Gould, impresario), managed the group after impresario Irwin Parnes. Almost all booking and monetary negotiations were handled by McNeil and management. He and his wife managed all of the arrangements with regard to payment of singers.¹⁴⁵

In 2014, the Jubilee Singers Board of Directors was organized because McNeil was aging, and he wanted to make sure the group would continue moving forward. Founding board members included former assistant director and singer, Nell Walker and original member, Michael Wright. Former singer, John Jackson along with Gregory Cheng, former UC Davis student of McNeil and financial businessman, co-chair the

¹⁴⁴ White-Clayton, Diane. "Diane White-Clayton." Open Biola. Accessed January 29, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ McGee, Isaiah. *The Origin and Historical Development of Prominent Professional Black Choirs in the United States*, 2007, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

board. Soon after, the newly organized board of directors met and discussed what the future of the Jubilee Singers would look like, they immediately began working towards receiving a tax-exempt status for the group and by the end of that year they obtained their 501(c)(3) status.¹⁴⁶

Beginning in the fall of 2017, the choir will be partnering with California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), as Artists-In-Residence. CSUDH will be home to the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers archive collection. This collection will be held in their new, state-of-the-art Archives and Special Collections Department. This department is the "principle repository for rare, special, and digital materials supportive of the university's research, creative, and service commitments within its mission."¹⁴⁷ The collection will be contained within The Georgia and Nolan Payton Archive of Sacred Music. The primary goal of the archive is "to facilitate research and documentation of collections of African diaspora sacred music (church music and religious concert music) created and/or performed by the multicultural population of southern California."¹⁴⁸

With the official transition of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers to CSUDH, the group will present concerts in the University Theatre, various community venues, continue to collaborate with southern California music ensembles providing the group opportunities to re-establish themselves under their new interim director, and possibly assist in the instruction of an African American music course offered to CSUDH students. They plan to continue collaborative concerts such as their January 2017

¹⁴⁶ Cheng, Gregory. Telephone interview by the author. March 22, 2016.

¹⁴⁷ "African Diaspora of Sacred Music and Musicians of Southern California." The Official Site of the California State University, Dominguez Hills, Georgia & Nolan Payton Archive and Living Legend Collections.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

collaboration with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (LACO) and the Los Robles Master Chorale in the first Los Angeles performance since the fifties of Kurt Weill's "gripping musical, *Lost in the Stars*."¹⁴⁹ In a pre-concert press release article for the performance of *Lost in the Stars*, LACO staff writer Maddy Routon wrote, "Few places in America have ever had the opportunity to see and hear a live performance of the work because the first national tour was cancelled in protest when the producers learned that black cast members would be denied the right to stay in the same hotels as white cast members."¹⁵⁰ Collaborative performances like this are part of the re-imagining of the future for the choir.

The ensemble, interim director, and its board of directors is committed to continue the legacy of McNeil and his Los Angeles Jubilee singers by serving as a resource for anyone interested in learning about the history and performance practice of spirituals and music of the African diaspora, participating in collaborative projects with various music groups in Los Angeles, and performing original compositions of African American composers.

*"God sent his singers upon the earth.
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again." -Longfellow*

¹⁴⁹ Routon, Maddy. "Maddy Routon." Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. N.p., 05 Dec. 2016. Web. 24 Mar. 2017.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.



Figure 2. Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers ("Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers." The Official Site of The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles.)



Figure 3. Virginia White (Photo courtesy of White to the author.)



Figure 4. Diane White-Clayton ("Diane White-Clayton." Open Biola. Accessed January 29, 2017.)

CHAPTER 4

CONDUCTOR AND TEACHER OF THE SPIRITUAL

Introduction

The discussion of McNeil's teaching methods and techniques contained within this chapter are limited to the experiential knowledge of the interviewees, and articles authored by, and interviews conducted with Albert McNeil. Each interviewee was asked to articulate their understanding of his teaching methods and techniques. Some interviewees found it difficult to remember specifics because it had been several decades since they had sung with him. McNeil resisted talking about his philosophy of teaching but stated that he lived and exemplified it in his approach to the music he taught. Some interviewees mentioned he emphasized particular areas of choral teaching such as vocal tone, blend, diction, and performance practice. After more than seventeen hours of interviews, it was evident that McNeil's teaching methods and techniques were spontaneous, reacting organically to what he heard from his choirs.

The writer asked McNeil if she could look at his personal choral scores, music conference presentation outlines, class lecture notes, and syllabi in order to glean more information about his methods and techniques. He informed her that he donated all his materials to the Living Legends collection of the African Diaspora Sacred Music and Musicians of Southern California archives, housed in the Special Collections department at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). In November 2016, the author flew to Los Angeles and visited CSUDH to view McNeil's personal collection. Because it had been less than a year when the collection had been donated the author was only allowed to see it but not to search through it item by item, because it had not yet been

documented and catalogued. In January 2017, she contacted the archive librarian at California State University, Davis, and asked if there were archived copies of Professor McNeil's class syllabi from the years that he taught. The librarian contacted the author and informed her that he was not able to obtain any archived class syllabi. This process has made insightful examination of written documentation of his teaching methodology and techniques challenging. One is left to personal interviews of students, singers, and professional acquaintances.

To the present-day choral music educator, McNeil's teaching methods and techniques would not be considered revolutionary. Since his time, much study has been placed on teaching with attention to learning styles. However, in his era those techniques were novel.

Personality

According to McNeil the one aspect of his teaching style that has been consistent throughout his teaching career was his use of empathy in the choral rehearsal. What John Finley Williamson taught him during his year in Switzerland will be etched in his memory forever:

Williamson always taught me...empathy is the most important aspect of your conducting. You don't have to explain anything. You do it. As a matter of fact he used to conduct without body movement. Your body language, your facial expression, your look at your singers will convey empathy of what you really want to happen. You can't talk music. You have to literally experience the music.¹⁵¹

Almost all of McNeil's former students and the Jubilee Singers viewed him as a father figure because he cared about their personal lives and families outside of the

¹⁵¹ "The Negro Spiritual in America: A Conversation with Albert McNeil." Interview by Cristian Grases. *Tactus*, January 2015.

rehearsal. This is evident in the way he remains connected to many of his Jubilee singers and UC Davis students long after they have graduated or moved on. He influenced his students not only personally but also professionally. Several of his students and Jubilee Singers have had significant careers in music as performers and teachers. Byron Smith, former pianist of the group, stated, "I've learned a lot of skills from Albert...he has been a blessing by giving lots of musical opportunities to all of us...I have great respect for keeping the Jubilee Singers alive."¹⁵² Lloyd Mallory, former singer, believes "he is worthy of our honor, praise, and respect because he has given so many musical opportunities to singers over the course of decades and has given them the means to put food on their tables and clothes on their backs."¹⁵³ Donna Di Grazia, music professor at Pomona College in Southern California, knows she is a better musician today because he believed in her:

His enthusiasm and belief in the ability of his students...made us want to do our best. He used a positive and encouraging approach in his teaching. He believed in getting students involved and giving them opportunities. It was because of those opportunities that I came to discover not only that I liked choral conducting but I was kind of good at it. I would never have dreamed of becoming a choral conductor...without his belief in me.¹⁵⁴

She remembers his "infectious enthusiasm for music...and his stalwart efforts to promote the spiritual as a choral art throughout the world through his founding and directing of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers."¹⁵⁵ Schools, churches, choral communities, choral

¹⁵² Smith, Byron. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 22, 2016.

¹⁵³ Mallory, Lloyd. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 4, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Di Grazia, Donna M. Interview by the author. Email correspondence. February 5, 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

conductors, and audiences everywhere have been changed forever by the principles that shaped him as a caring and loving educator, mentor, and friend.

McNeil connected intellectually, personally, and emotionally with audiences everywhere. Griffin believed McNeil's desire to create synergy with the audience was a distinctive quality of his:

Unique to Albert was his desire to connect with the audience on a personal level. I've worked with fantastic choral directors who really are intent on presenting the music...their focus is on the performance because they've rehearsed for a long time and they want to show them what they've accomplished. Albert almost lets that go. He believes that is going to take care of itself. When he's on stage he wants to connect with the audience. He wants to have a personal experience with the audience and he wants the audience to have a personal experience with him. It was his desire to get the audience to respond and enjoy themselves.¹⁵⁶

Griffin knew that the most important part of McNeil's ability to connect was a direct result of his charismatic personality:

Wherever he goes people just adore him and swarm him saying, "Oh Al!" They just love him because he loves them. He loves music and wants to share it. People pick up on this man who just has this love for life and this passion and so the opportunity to be around him and to share in that was just wonderful! That's part of the reason people are so dedicated to him. It's just because of the goodwill that he spreads, the love that he spreads, the joy that he spreads, his desire to spread the message that these songs were bringing about.¹⁵⁷

Teaching Methods and Techniques

In a 1991 interview with music educator Carole Glenn, McNeil was asked, "What are the most important musical and personal qualifications for a successful [choral] conductor?" He responded:

Primarily a good conductor must be a good musician and must know the craft. Certainly the conductor must know the "silent language" with which ideas are communicated using empathetic methods and having good eye contact with the

¹⁵⁶ Griffin, Douglas. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 5, 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

musicians. One must understand performance practices of all the periods. One must know how to produce a good tone and how to develop a sense of ensemble. The conductor must know these basics in order to build the organization into an instrument. This requires serious preparation, comparative listening (live and recorded), and experimentations. The more years of experience one has, the more concerned one is about the art and then the more one learns what to do. From my own experience I've noticed that as I listen to tapes from my previous performances I wouldn't dare let some of those things go by now. It takes time, experience, and constant study to learn all that one must know in the choral art. One never stops learning.¹⁵⁸

In a January 2017 interview he was asked, "Do you have a philosophy [pedagogy] that you have formed and developed through the years that is unique and important you?"

McNeil immediately responded, "There's no one single thing. There's no one single system... a lot of elements are not divorceable—pronunciation, diction, blend—they're inseparable... you can't have one without having the other."¹⁵⁹ He believed each element of his teaching of choral tone, interpretation of the text, understanding and performing the spiritual, and rehearsal structure, was derived from the needs of the music. According to Lesley Leighton's research about prominent Southern California choral conductors, Howard Swan, Charles Hirt, and Roger Wagner, their predominant teaching pedagogy emphasized using metaphor to guide and shape choral groups rather than direct instruction.¹⁶⁰ Like his Southern California colleagues, McNeil was finding his way as a choral conductor and music educator. But ultimately, his success as a conductor was accomplished through the power of his will, charisma, and personality.

¹⁵⁸ Glenn, Carole. *In Quest of Answers: Interviews with American Choral Conductors*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Hinshaw Music, 1991. 83.

¹⁵⁹ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Leighton, Lesley. *Howard Swan, Charles Hirt, and Roger Wagner: Their Influences and the Building of Choral Culture in Southern California*, University of Southern California, 2012.

Regarding the audition process, most interviewees were unable to recall specifics. Mallory recalls his audition involved vocalizing, sight-reading, singing a prepared solo, and a pitch memory test.¹⁶¹ McNeil placed great importance on the ability to read music:

All singers are auditioned for pitch discrimination, melodic memory, and sight-reading. They must have some music reading ability either as an instrumentalist or pianist. If they have a problem with the music, they should be able to solve it. They will be able to improve intervallic problems, etc. If they can pick it out they will be able to hear it. In a ten-week period we have to cover a great deal of music and if there are too many in the group who can't read, then this is going to impede the progress of the whole group.¹⁶²

Rehearsal Structure

McNeil learned from observing Hall Johnson's rehearsals that he could accomplish much in a two-hour rehearsal provided the pace of the rehearsal did not lag. McNeil's rehearsal expectations demanded that each singer give their best effort during rehearsal in order to be excellent musicians, not just to sing for the sake of singing. His rehearsals were "really intense laboratories for discovering how this music was supposed to be delivered to an audience."¹⁶³ Always having their best interest at heart, he took into consideration the singers "physical stamina, motivation, interest, and excitement."¹⁶⁴ His charisma kept the singers engaged during the fast-paced rehearsals. The joy of singing took priority over the technical aspects of rehearsing:

I am careful with too much technique. Technique is fine but I'm careful not to get too technical. [The singers] are there to sing, so I have to be subtle enough to turn that word [technique] into an exercise without them even knowing it. In other

¹⁶¹ Mallory, Lloyd. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 4, 2017.

¹⁶² Glenn, Carole. *In Quest of Answers: Interviews with American Choral Conductors*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Hinshaw Music, 1991.

¹⁶³ Griffin, Douglas. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 5, 2017.

¹⁶⁴ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

words what I'm saying is, what do you put first, the [technique] or the singing? The joy of singing or the mechanics of singing? A lot of [conductors] get those things confused and then it takes away the joy...you have got to be careful that you don't make things too technical that it destroys the joy of singing.¹⁶⁵

Several interviewees were of the opinion that McNeil's vocal warm-ups were not advanced enough for the professional singers in the group. He had less experience as a vocal pedagogue and more experience as a keyboardist as a result of his piano and organ studies. Hence, he preferred to play and teach from the piano during rehearsals. In terms of the physical organization of the group, Mallory recalled:

He liked for everyone to sit a certain way. He wanted the sopranos to be in a certain place, tenors behind them, altos to be opposite, and the basses behind them. Then he would place you according to your voice type- firsts and seconds. After that he ran his rehearsals as such that he would play for his rehearsals as well as he would teach. He taught based on the way he taught his collegiate rehearsals. Some of the singers weren't strong sight-readers so he would take the time to do some part banging. His wish was that we would always come prepared [to rehearsal]. We would get the music and he would want us to come ready to sing it. When he felt that we had a fair comfort of mastery then he would begin to shape further by allowing us to see how he was going to conduct it.¹⁶⁶

Tone

McNeil believed in achieving beautiful tone quality through the unification of the vowel. The majority of his preferred vocal warm-ups focused on unifying the vowels in order to achieve a blended sound: "If we had the problem of some people who just couldn't blend I'd say sing that note and hold it. Then I would ask each singer one by one to add to that note that way they got a blended sound and they became very much aware that they were one voice."¹⁶⁷ The singers sat in sections according to the voice part they sang in order to work on blending with the others in their respective sections. He worked

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Mallory, Lloyd. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 4, 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

towards achieving a homogenized sound with his choir, having only one singer sing a select word of the text then one by one adding singers to the sound, listening to see if they blended with the lead singer. He would tell the singers, "If we're gonna sing a piece we're gonna unify the vowel so the section sounds like one voice. Then we'll manipulate it the way we want to so each singer becomes part of a whole. It's a basic premise of choral music that doesn't change. To me that's extremely important."¹⁶⁸

Byron Smith remembers it was difficult to blend vocally as a brand new singer and having to rely on the instruction given by the experienced singers:

We learned how to be Jubilee Singers from [other] Jubilee Singers...that sound back then just developed because you had those big voices. You fit into that Jubilee sound. I think that's what established the sound. Albert would really work on unifying the sound and a lot of things came from inside [the group]. He's been blessed by some talented voices to make it what it is...you had to know when to pull it in and be a choral singer. And that's very difficult to do, to take a soloist and make them into a choral singer. Being willing is all part of being in an ensemble.¹⁶⁹

Throughout the early decades the group's sound was unique as a result of having many professional opera singers in the group. A powerful sound came from the blending of those voices, which is why McNeil accepted a wide range of singers as long as they had the ability to listen, balance, and blend within the ensemble. Smith recalls McNeil preferring to spend his time working on the notes and interpretation of the text with group:

The sound back then [in the early decades] was just developed because he had those big, professional voices. That is the biggest thing in terms of how the group's sound developed. It also developed because the singer fit into that Jubilee sound. Muriel Bennett...big voice...they broke her down to make her fit in...when new people came in then she taught them how to do the Jubilee sound.

¹⁶⁸ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

¹⁶⁹ Smith, Byron. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 22, 2016.

I don't think a lot of people realized what was going on...that's what really established the sound—veteran singers teaching new singers how to “jubilize” the sound...most of it came from “inside” the group. Albert would then work on the interpretation of the music.¹⁷⁰

Smith's masters thesis topic was about the discovery of tuning issues in the professional African American chorus. Listening to recordings of the Jubilee Singers it is evident the group had intonation issues. Smith commented about the group's vocal tone and intonation issues:

When you study European [vocal] sounds...you have a lot of things that you would do to try to keep the pitch. When you're dealing with a certain tonality in the music that has a minor key, the weight of [vocal] expression to make it sound authentic, makes it very difficult for the singing to be in tune. A brighter tone is easier to keep in tune. When you're trying to give that feeling, the depth of a spiritual, you can't sing a spiritual with a European straight tone. It doesn't work or fit into the idiom...unless we were doing something sensitive, some of those specific teaching techniques like unification of vowels just wasn't a part of establishing the sound of the group.¹⁷¹

It was next to impossible for the professional singers in the group to sing the spirituals with a straight, or "European" tone. Virginia White recalls the work it took to control the vibrato:

We all went through changes with our vibrato. Sometimes we would have to sing straight tone in order to blend. You can't imagine how difficult it was for all of the voices. So to blend the way we did, we really had to listen to each other. There were some [singers] who joined later who had to be told they had to listen because that was Albert's thing. He would say, "You have to listen to blend. You're not soloists in this group." So when they weren't soloing, they had to blend collectively with the rest of the group.¹⁷²

Listening to recordings of the Jubilee Singers it is easy to assume that the ensemble never achieved a straight tone but favored a tone rich with vibrato, which enhanced expression

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² White, Virginia. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 12, 2016.

of textual meaning. However, it is clear from White's interview that the singer's worked on a great variety of sounds and timbres.

Ethnic Makeup

Since its inception, the group membership had been entirely African American up until the mid-nineties. It was then that McNeil started accepting non-African Americans into the group based on his premise that everyone, no matter their race, deserves the opportunity to learn about and sing the spirituals:

I'd say about 20 years ago or so, I accepted non-African Americans into the group. Look at Robert Shaw and his chorale. He has always had a black person in there. I thought to myself, why are we segregating this and allowing only black people to be in [the Jubilee Singers]? The white people that were in the Robert Shaw Chorale, for example, were first of all musicians. If my choir is going to be of that quality, they have to be musicians. I don't care what color they are. If they want to know about spirituals they should be in the company of people who are making music called spirituals.¹⁷³

Wright was of the opinion that, later on in his career, McNeil was too inclusive when it came to which singers he accepted into the group:

When you're an educator you don't see color, right? He wasn't inclusive at the beginning. There weren't any [white] people standing in line to be a Jubilee Singer...if you have four white singers that sing the same thing as four black singers, most of the time you can close your eyes and you can tell the difference...it has to do with tone color, diction, feeling, timbre, all of those things...I say this not from a racial standpoint because that was never part of it. But if you put girls in the Vienna Boy's Choir it's no longer the Vienna Boy's Choir.¹⁷⁴

Smith believed the sound of the group suffered when McNeil started to lose his hearing and the group had a lot of turnover: "There were times where the intonation was so bad and we would look at Albert and say, "Do you hear that?" But you know, he was still

¹⁷³ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

¹⁷⁴ Wright, Michael. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 21, 2016.

making money...this is kind of bold for me to say, and I love Albert, but sometimes it seemed like it was more important to make money, instead of making music."¹⁷⁵

Exact pitch clarity was perhaps less of a priority in the hierarchy of elements in the sound of the ensemble. There were times when some of their performances were not perfectly in tune for various reasons, such as the acoustics of the hall, making it difficult for them to hear each other. Additionally, because they did not use microphones during performances, they would over sing to be heard in the larger concert halls. Yet the group would still receive standing ovations because their singing was from the heart and the audience still experienced the spirituals in a powerful way in spite of the occasional lapses of intonation. McNeil firmly believes: "The spiritual has words. It has tone, but the focus is the words. If the focus is the words, then the overall activity of that is the feeling."¹⁷⁶ This should speak volumes to our current choral culture, if we are to understand more authentically how to represent this literature, to re-prioritize the issues of a Western European tone and sense of blend in lieu of telling the story.

Understanding the Spiritual

Lloyd Mallory, former member, believed that one of the most important philosophies to McNeil was understanding where the spiritual came from and how it needed to be sung with "passion and from a depth of soul and experience."¹⁷⁷ McNeil was of the opinion that the spiritual was "just as valid as the classical art song because it

¹⁷⁵ Smith, Byron. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 22, 2016.

¹⁷⁶ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Mallory, Lloyd. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 4, 2017.

demands just as much vocally and emotionally."¹⁷⁸ His deep desire is that all directors research and study the a cappella spiritual tradition before they teach it:

Do your homework. Find out where it happened. Listen to recordings of respected African American choirs singing a cappella spirituals in order to hear their tone production, blend, diction, and interpretation of the text. Go with it from the standpoint of being a cultural expression of an oppressed people...once you get that idea, then you can go beyond."¹⁷⁹

In the *School Musician Director & Teacher* article, he defines the following five guidelines for the performance of spirituals:

1. That every effort be made to choose arrangements which preserve the integrity of the original melodic line and avoid sensational, slick settings popularized by some publishers.
2. Avoid the use of dialect or artificially contrived bodily movements.
3. To be performed a cappella.
4. Do not use instruments to "modernize" the setting (drums, bass, tambourine, etc.)
5. The spirituals represent the classic Black music of an enslaved people. Treat them as you would any other piece of religious music.¹⁸⁰

McNeil made it his mission to help choral directors delineate the differences between a spiritual and a gospel song. The majority of music teachers with whom he interacted throughout his career were confused regarding the definitions of a "spiritual" versus a "gospel" song. He was particularly adamant that the spirituals not be perceived

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Grases, Cristian. "The Negro Spiritual in America: A Conversation with Albert McNeil." *Tactus*, January 2015. 7.

¹⁸⁰ McNeil, Albert J. "The Arranged Spiritual: A Brief History of Its Evolution as Concert Music." *School Musician Director & Teacher* 51 (October 1979): 7.

as "jazzy" or "popular" songs.¹⁸¹ The following table, from the same article published in *School Musician Director & Teacher*, describes these six differences:¹⁸²

Spirituals:

1. Folk songs handed down by oral tradition from slavery.
2. Sung with no instrumental accompaniment.
3. Words often based on stories from the Bible.
4. Melodies usually simple, with never more than a few notes sung to each syllable.
5. Sung in unison or simple harmony.
6. Syncopation used, but not in complex patterns.

Gospel songs:

1. Composed songs
2. Voices usually accompanied by musical instruments such as piano, organ, drums, and electric bass.
3. Words often a personal expression of faith and hope in salvation.
4. Melodies often embellished, with many notes sung to one syllable.
5. Usually contain modern harmonies often associated with jazz.
6. Several syncopated rhythms used simultaneously (polyrhythms).

Michael Wright, former student and long-time member of the Jubilee singers, remembers McNeil's passion as an educator of the spiritual:

Albert has always been an academic and his primary purpose, goal, and vision has been to educate the world at large on the music of Black America and of the spiritual and that was his passion...I think that's what made the group so special. He took the skills that he had learned in the old halls of the university and applied them to his teaching [of the Jubilee Singers].¹⁸³

Performing the Spiritual

It is important to note that the West Coast lineage of spiritual preservationists began in Los Angeles in 1936 when Hall Johnson and his choir arrived in Hollywood to

¹⁸¹ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

¹⁸² McNeil, Albert J. "The Arranged Spiritual: A Brief History of Its Evolution as Concert Music." *School Musician Director & Teacher* 51 (October 1979): 7.

¹⁸³ Wright, Michael. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 21, 2016.

sing and act for the movie *The Green Pastures*.¹⁸⁴ He established his choir in 1925 with the intention of presenting and preserving the spirituals.¹⁸⁵ In 1951, similar to McNeil's Jubilee Singers, the Hall Johnson Choir was selected by the United States State Department to represent America at the International Festival of Fine Arts in Berlin, Germany.¹⁸⁶ McNeil was first in the line of several Los Angeles African American choral conductors to learn from Johnson and his assistant conductor, Jester Hairston.¹⁸⁷ Drawing upon their influence and mentorship, McNeil also made it his mission to assist choral conductors in helping them be more effective in their understanding and performing of the spiritual. He did this by giving concerts and lecture-style presentations with the Jubilee Singers at music conferences nationally and internationally.

In a January 2015 conversation with Cristian Grases, associate choral director at the University of Southern California, regarding the performance of the spiritual, McNeil stated:

I don't believe that you cannot sing a spiritual if you don't sing it with the proper dialect and pronunciation. I certainly wouldn't make a decided effort to have my singers try to sound like black people. That's ridiculous. Sing English the way it is. Don't attempt to imitate what you think is a black sound. I think that is deadly. How can they conceive of this when they don't even live in that culture and have no idea? Just sing it in English, and if they're singing correctly, it'll come out fine. I'm so opposed to using dialect and so was Jester Hairston, although he wrote a lot of pieces using dialect.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Simpson, Eugene Thamon. "The Hall Johnson Legacy 1889-1970." *The Choral Journal* 11, no. 5 (1971): 10.

¹⁸⁵ Harris, Carl G. "Three Schools of Black Choral Composers and Arrangers 1900-1970." *The Choral Journal* 14, no. 8 (1974): 13.

¹⁸⁶ Simpson, Eugene Thamon. "The Hall Johnson Legacy 1889-1970." *The Choral Journal* 11, no. 5 (1971): 10.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Grases, Cristian. "The Negro Spiritual in America: A Conversation with Albert McNeil." *Tactus*, January 2015. 6.

In the same conversation, McNeil instructed that gospel music and a cappella choral arrangements of spirituals are not the same thing: "They are not always concert closers in contemporary programming, and neither clapping nor snapping is appropriate in the performance of a spiritual."¹⁸⁹ He is a firm proponent of listening to recordings and/or live performances of African American choirs: "I tell people who sing spirituals...you need to listen to a lot of black choirs sing spirituals. You need to know the style. You need to know how they handle the tempo. You need to know how they handle the dynamics...just like you would learn to sing Bach, Mozart, and Brahms."¹⁹⁰ He also believes the best way to understand learn about performing spirituals is to sing in an African American choir: "You can talk about spirituals because you've experienced them not just from the printed page. Then you can go and teach spirituals."¹⁹¹

Drawing upon McNeil's own experience as a conductor, as well as his apprenticeship with Hairston and Johnson, this last section summarizes his techniques of how to perform an a cappella spiritual according to the West Coast spiritual preservationists of the twentieth century.

The authentic interpretation and performance of a cappella spirituals sung by school and church choirs has been of the utmost importance to McNeil throughout his career and retirement. As stated earlier, he served as a choral clinician and adjudicator in

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, June 2007, interview session 3, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 63.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

the United States and abroad. More times than he would like to admit he heard misinformed interpretations of the a cappella spiritual performed by school and community choirs:

I've gone to festivals where I've heard all-white choirs and they've just desecrated the performance of spirituals. Tempos were wrong, mispronouncing of words, and lack of the feeling. If you're going to do spirituals and you're a white conductor, you've got to learn and listen to what black choirs sound like, particularly those who sing concert spirituals.¹⁹²

Dialect

Dialect has been one of the most controversial techniques among choral directors through the years. In the "Preface" of his 1949 publication, "Thirty Negro Spirituals Arranged for Voice and Piano," Hall Johnson wrote, "The Negro spiritual is a distinct style of music which resembles no other and therefore requires special treatment in performance."¹⁹³ Included in the "Preface" he provides suggestions about how to understand and perform the spiritual, along with suggestions on how to treat the dialect:

The texts of these songs are in the older Negro dialect. The racial qualities should be neither unduly exaggerated in the hope of being more entertaining nor, still worse, "purified" into correct English—for any reason whatsoever. Either process would utterly spoil the artistic integrity of the performance. It should be observed that dialect forms do not necessarily arise from ignorance of the correct pronunciation. Sometimes they are deliberately chosen in order to avoid harsh or difficult sounds, or to render the word more serviceable for the immediate occasion.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ibid., 104.

¹⁹³ Johnson, Hall. *Thirty Negro Spirituals, Arr. for Voice and Piano*. New York: G. Schirmer, 1949.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

He and Jester Hairston earned a reputation among fellow choral musicians as experts on the performance of a cappella spirituals.¹⁹⁵ In 1960, Hairston published a book titled, "Negro Spirituals and Folk Songs: Sixteen Choral Arrangements." In the "Forward" of the book, he and co-author, Harry Robert Wilson, discuss a number of aspects of the spiritual such as origin, authenticity, and singing style.¹⁹⁶ Like Johnson before him, Hairston specifically instructs on the use of dialect:

Another debatable point in the singing of these songs is the extent to which Negro dialect should be used. After all they were created in dialect. Much of their charm is enhanced by dialect. . .when all dialect is eliminated, the singing sounds unnatural and affected. On the other hand when most choirs attempt to render them in meticulous dialect the performance sounds stilted. Probably the wisest course is to introduce dialect, which is natural to the music and universally accepted. . .they are most effectively performed when the original spontaneity of the words and music that gave them birth is preserved.¹⁹⁷

He goes on further to inform:

Jazzy arrangements and popularized style of singing spirituals should not be condoned. Spirituals are not dance music of the music hall type. . .but they should be understood and preserved as expressions of a man singing to his God. . .there should be some bodily response to the sway of the rhythm, and the face and eyes should reflect this response. Spirituals run the gamut of human expression. Some express the ultimate of despair. . .some express humility and reverence. . .and some are rhythmic. . .in performance, the body and emotions must reflect these moods of expression.¹⁹⁸

McNeil first met Johnson and Hairston in the early forties while he was assisting the motion picture industry by providing African American singers for movie productions.

¹⁹⁵ Caldwell, Hansonia L. *African American Music, Spirituals: The Fundamental Communal Music of Black Americans*. 3rd ed. Culver City, Calif.: Ikoro Communications, 2003. 83.

¹⁹⁶ Hairston, Jester, and Harry Robert Wilson. 1960. *Negro Spirituals and Folk songs: Sixteen Choral Arrangements*. New York: Bourne. 6.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Hairston was working with Johnson and assistant directing the Hall Johnson Choir.

McNeil proudly recalls the rare opportunity to work side-by-side with Hairston:

I read Hairston's manuscripts, accompanied him, and helped train union choirs. In the meantime, I learned a great deal about black music, Afro-American music, and spirituals in particular. It was Jester who encouraged me to continue with a little group we called the Albert McNeil Singers. As I continued my studies, I learned about the original Fisk Jubilee Singers who sang in the jubilee style and I have endeavored to carry on in that tradition.¹⁹⁹

McNeil remembers Hairston told him it was acceptable if the song included dialect but to take care not to place undue emphasis on or accent such dialect words for the articles *the*, *that*, and *this*.²⁰⁰ Similarly when the Fisk University Jubilee Singers presented the spiritual under the direction of Mr. George White, the "dialect was not stressed but was used only where it was vital to the spirit of the song... White strove for an art presentation, not a caricature of atmosphere."²⁰¹ Recent research suggests the Fisk University Jubilee Singers and other early African American college choirs avoided the use of dialect in their performances of the spirituals.²⁰² At the end of the nineteenth century, dialect was associated primarily with the lower class African Americans and at times was a reminder to them of life during the American Civil War, which they preferred to forget.²⁰³ Virginia White recalls Hairston visiting rehearsals of the Jubilee Singers and he would comment that Africans were not illiterate people:

¹⁹⁹ Glenn, Carole. *In Quest of Answers: Interviews with American Choral Conductors*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Hinshaw Music, 1991. 85.

²⁰⁰ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

²⁰¹ Work, John W. *American Negro Songs: 230 Folk Songs and Spirituals, Religious and Secular*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998. 15.

²⁰² Graziano, John. "The Use of Dialect In African-American Spirituals, Popular Songs, and Folk Songs." *Black Music Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (2004): 261.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 264.

Jester would remind us that Africans weren't illiterate. Do you know how many languages do not have the letters "t-h" sounding the way Americans do? French, German...the first slaves were owned by old English people who spoke like this [*demonstrates a Cockney accent*]. This is how Africans learned how to speak. They how you have 'de' and 'duh', but they never mistake the rule for 'thee' and 'the.' They always put it in the right place. It's interesting they were called ignorant and uneducated because they didn't speak like everybody else. Who did they learn from? They learned [English] from immigrants who did not speak English...it wasn't anybody's fault, but you don't put someone down because of how they were taught to speak [English] by people who didn't know.²⁰⁴

Doug Griffin, current Jubilee singer, remembers Hairston's influence on McNeil.

McNeil had recalled that during his time as Hairston's apprentice, he and Hairston would frequently discuss the inclusion of dialect and other musical aspects of Hairston's arrangements of spirituals:

Albert was close friends with Jester Hairston and Hall Johnson so he knew the people who had written a lot of the spirituals, which I guess is an advantage of being born in the early 1900s. So he grew up with these songs. He heard them when they were originally done. He tells us a story where he was with Jester when he was writing some of his songs and Jester would ask his opinion about the music. So [McNeil] knew how the song was supposed to go.²⁰⁵

Griffin also mentioned that McNeil was "always careful to that balance in the dialect where we're not speaking the King's English...but also not going too far so that it sounds like buffoonery...the Jubilee Singers would have many discussions during rehearsals trying to find the balance of not hitting the 'th' sound too hard or too soft."²⁰⁶ He would tell the singers "to relax the enunciation and not to be too worried about trying to enunciate every consonant but rather be concerned about the meaning of the song."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ White, Virginia. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 12, 2016.

²⁰⁵ Griffin, Douglas. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 5, 2017.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Lloyd Mallory remembers being thrilled to have not only the opportunity to sing with McNeil but also to learn what he had gleaned from his early mentors, Hairston and Johnson:

When the Jubilee Singers sang a Hall Johnson or Jester Hairston spiritual arrangement we knew we were getting the generation of something special passed down from one teacher to another...[and] it brought more authenticity to the music because we knew that McNeil had a one-on-one relationship with these icons and arrangers of spirituals.²⁰⁸

McNeil has shown consistency throughout his career about his preference on the use of dialect in the performance of spirituals. In a 1979 article in the *School Musician Director & Teacher* regarding the singing of choral arrangements spirituals, he wrote, "avoid the use of dialect."²⁰⁹ However, there were times he instructed his choir not to overcorrect the dialect so as to sound contrived or unnatural. Griffin recalls McNeil's instruction, "Don't sound like you are pronouncing the King's English or going so far that it sounds like mimicking. If in doubt, just relax the dialect, it shouldn't be forced or overdone."²¹⁰ Griffin continues, "He grew up in an era when Hollywood had discovered African American music and spirituals and had asked the singers to go too far sometimes. He was always very careful that the [performance] wasn't a mockery or too 'black'."²¹¹

McNeil remembers Hollywood movie producers insisting that his singers speak and sing like the men and women of the Civil War South. But in the sixties, a time when African Americans strove for equality and respect, those who spoke with a dialect were

²⁰⁸ Mallory, Lloyd. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 4, 2017.

²⁰⁹ McNeil, Albert J. "The Arranged Spiritual: A Brief History of Its Evolution as Concert Music." *School Musician Director & Teacher* 51 (October 1979): 7.

²¹⁰ Griffin, Douglas. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 5, 2017.

²¹¹ Ibid.

looked down upon as uneducated and unsophisticated. By de-emphasizing the beginning consonant of dialect words such as *dis*, *dat*, and *dey* he brought more refinement to the singing of spirituals. He wanted his Jubilee Singers performances to avoid any connection to the minstrel performances of his parents' generation. Rather, he desired that the spirituals be afforded the same status as the classical art songs.²¹²

Text and Storytelling

McNeil believes that text is paramount in the performance of a spiritual. During rehearsals he would take his Jubilee Singers through a series of questions in order to help them understand the meaning of the story behind the words:

Albert would ask, "What story does this song tell?" It's not just a piece of music that is beautiful. There's a story that happened. They used music in order to transmit some message to an audience. It's important to find the message in the song. Then to ask, "What is the most dramatic and articulate way to get that story across to the audience? What tempo do we need to take this song at in order to understand what the story is? What is the rhythm? What is the right emotion?" He would work the song until we got across the intent of the composer so that the story he was trying to tell would have been told by the time we were done singing. He would put the songs in order so as to tell the story of struggle, hope, and victory.²¹³

According to Griffin, McNeil would construct the order of the concert program in such a way that the audience would experience a historical and emotional journey. The ensemble performed every concert from memory because he wanted the audience to understand and experience the stories behind the spirituals, not just aurally but also emotionally, essentially saying, "Here's what we went through and here's how God delivered us from it."²¹⁴ He felt the singers could not give the listener that kind of

²¹² McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

²¹³ Griffin, Douglas. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 5, 2017.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

experience if they were holding folders in their hands and looking down at the music during their performances.

However, McNeil's ultimate goal for each singer was to recognize more than just the text and elements of the music, but to extract and embody the significance of the spiritual resulting in an inclusive, dramatic performance.²¹⁵

Intent of the Arranger

During a typical rehearsal the group sang through a song first and then discussed as a group the story the spiritual was telling. He created an environment in which the singers felt encouraged and inspired to "go beyond [the text and the notes] to honor the intention of the arranger."²¹⁶ McNeil encourages choral conductors to research the origin of the text and historical background of the arranger, so as to give a more authentic performance of the spiritual. Because he worked so closely with Hairston as he was arranging spirituals McNeil got to know what Hairston intended because of his tempo indications, style of the arrangement, dynamics, and text selection. McNeil strongly encourages when considering a modern setting of a spiritual, to choose a setting that does not distort the original melody and holds its original value amongst the exotic harmonies and complex rhythms.²¹⁷

From its earliest beginnings of simple rhythms and four-part harmonies to the present form today, the spiritual has evolved to display complex compositional

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, March 2007, interview session 2, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 56, 57.

techniques and virtuosic vocal writing. An example may be found in the a cappella spiritual arrangements of the well-known African American contemporary choral composer, Moses Hogan. In 1980, at the young age of twenty-three, Hogan was writing choral arrangements of spirituals for his own volunteer choral group, The New World Ensemble. It was then that he realized the singing of a cappella spiritual arrangements of early arrangers, such as Johnson and Hairston, was decreasing in popularity. Hogan made the decision to become an ambassador for the singing of choral arrangements of spirituals by arranging new ones.²¹⁸ Marti Newland, author of Hogan's biography for the Oxford African American Studies Center, wrote:

Moses Hogan single-handedly established concert spirituals into standard choral repertoire and introduced professional choral spiritual singing to the world, revitalizing a tradition that by the 1980s had become somewhat ossified. His arrangements became staple pieces for high school, church, community, and professional choirs, known for their harmonic and rhythmic complexity.²¹⁹

McNeil was well aware of Hogan's complex style of arranging spirituals by early 1985 when he commented:

There's a group of new composers coming to the forefront who have their own contemporary concept of how early arrangements of spirituals should sound. I've argued several points with them, like don't distort the melodic material, don't over-harmonize or make it too lush or contemporary, or, if you do make it contemporary, keep it as sacred as you can.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Newland, Marti K. "Hogan, Moses." African American National Biography, edited by Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr., edited by and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. Oxford African American Studies Center, 2006.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Wheelock, Julie. "Jubilee Singers Keep in the Spiritual of Things." *Los Angeles Times*. (Los Angeles, Calif.), February 9, 1985.

In spite of the complex rhythms and harmonies, McNeil approved of Hogan's arrangements and performed them regularly with his Jubilee Singers. He was excited because he felt Hogan managed to capture the same nuances found in the early spirituals:

The young composer Moses Hogan brought the most interesting approach to contemporary settings of spirituals. I think his settings of spirituals are absolutely unique. If you compare Moses Hogan with Jester Hairston you can see the difference right away. Harmonically and rhythmically even though the words are the same but with a different slant. He was more adventurous with exotic harmonies...you see distinctive differences in the same setting of the same text of that spiritual because of the evolution of musical knowledge and more training in compositional technique. He and other black composers have managed to capture...those nuances that will survive all time.²²¹

McNeil had tremendous admiration for Hogan and his groundbreaking a cappella arrangements of spirituals:

Moses Hogan is so successful because he's innovative. What he did was very clever harmonically, rhythmically. His sense of form was unbelievable and the use of various choirs, either women or men, or soloists. The man was near genius because of what he could do. He really turned a form that was one way for many years into another kind of innovative, contemporary form. It met the needs of contemporary performances. Choirs love to sing them. It was a sad thing that he passed away at such a young age. He was the answer to where we are going to go with the spiritual.²²²

McNeil believes the quality of choral performances of spirituals has improved because the greater community of choral conductors has gained more knowledge about spirituals through the opportunities to attend professional music workshops, clinics, and

²²¹ Albert J. McNeil, interview by Karin Patterson, March 2007, interview session 2, transcript, UCLA Center for Oral History Research, Digital Collections UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA. 56, 57.

²²² McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

conventions that feature presenters who teach interpretation and understanding of spirituals.²²³

Conclusion

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the performance practice guidelines of other well-known African American choral conductors, but it is interesting to note that although some of them have differences of opinion regarding dialect, virtually everyone agrees on tone, text and story telling, and honoring the intent of the arranger. They also agree that spirituals should continue to be sung by soloists and choirs of all ages. Spirituals are a powerful testament to the people who created and developed them. McNeil believes this music still has the ability to touch people in their daily struggles and triumphs in life:

If you believe that the power of God comes through the music then you're transmitting a spiritual thing. I'm not putting this into words very well. What I'm saying is empathizing. I learned that from John Finley Williamson, who was my teacher when I was in Switzerland. He would say to me, "Al McNeil, you're not black." I'd say to him, "Well, you know, I had a mother who taught me to appreciate the spirituals. She would be in the kitchen, washing dishes or cooking or something, and she would be singing... a spiritual, anything that would move her. And I'd walk into the kitchen and she'd be crying, tears coming down her cheeks. I would say, "Mom, why are you crying?" She'd say, "Because I feel this music." My mother used to tell me, if you're going to be effective, you have to approach the material humbly. Like the song, "Live a humble, Lord, humble yourself..."²²⁴

Spirituals have always intended to uplift, encourage, and remind. It is the responsibility of choral conductors and voice teachers, who teach and perform spirituals, to honor and

²²³ Glenn, Carole. *In Quest of Answers: Interviews with American Choral Conductors*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Hinshaw Music, 1991.

²²⁴ McNeil, Albert. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, January 6, 2017.

respect the intent of the arranger and the people from which they came, and most importantly, not to be afraid to *sing* the spirituals.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to document the life and legacy of Dr. Albert McNeil and his choir, the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. In order to accomplish this task, information was collected from all available sources pertaining to McNeil and his Jubilee Singers including: (1) personal interviews with McNeil, (2) personal interviews with select members of the Jubilee Singers, (3) personal interviews with select former UC Davis colleagues and students, (4) professional websites, books, newspaper and journal articles, (5) Irwin Parnes' personal collection contained in the UCLA ethnomusicology library archives, and (6) audio and video archives of McNeil accessed through the UCLA ethnomusicology archive online library.

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What was McNeil's upbringing, musical background and education?
2. Who influenced his love for the African American a cappella spiritual?
3. What event(s) led McNeil to establish his choir?
4. What was the mission of the choir?
5. Why has the group been consistently successful for more than fifty years?
6. What were his teaching methods and techniques?

Despite the difficulties of accessing most of McNeil's teaching syllabi, presentation outlines, musical scores, and lecture notes, all of the information collected

for this research is sufficient enough to confirm McNeil's status as a West Coast "Living Legend."²²⁵ There are three reasons this title is well deserved:

1) He is one of a handful of African Americans who successfully preserved and protected the genre of the spiritual. As a leader of the second generation of West Coast spiritual preservationists, he knew firsthand the power of this music and how to sing it with a sense of honor and respect. He truly merited his nickname "Professor Spiritual."²²⁶

2) He founded and directed the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, a first-rate singing ensemble known for their passion, showmanship, and powerful sound. Their performances, full of drama, were consistently received with standing ovations and multiple encores. Their renderings were often considered definitive; a model of authentic performance practice to be emulated.

3) He tirelessly traveled to forty-four states and seventy-seven countries to introduce and promulgate the spiritual as an American national treasure. This achievement alone is worthy of special mention in a chapter of American choral music history.

While his teaching methods and techniques are exclusive to his personal opinions and preferences, his knowledge was passed down to him from esteemed choral musicians; founders of the early twentieth century American choral tradition. He was known at times to preach about the African American spiritual during his rehearsals, concerts, and presentations at music conferences. In turn, his preaching style was

²²⁵ "African Diaspora of Sacred Music and Musicians of Southern California." The Official Site of the California State University, Dominguez Hills, Georgia & Nolan Payton Archive and Living Legend Collections. Accessed April 12, 2016. <http://www.adsmm.org/index.php>.

²²⁶ Feather, Leonard. "Albert McNeil: Prof. Spiritual." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), October 18, 1981.

conveyed in the dramatic singing of his choir. His legacy is a culmination of talent, intellect, and charisma, combined with his life experiences as an African American.

Throughout the process of interviewing members, former students, and professional acquaintances, all interviewees agreed that his life story has not been authoritatively recorded and should be given proper recognition:

Traveling and concertizing worldwide with the Jubilee Singers could not have happened had not all of the singers been willing to lay down our lives for Albert. That aside from his musical talent is his biggest claim to fame with the group...he inspired us...he was knowledgeable. He was intelligent...he was charismatic and he had our best interest at heart...Albert has never really gotten his due and I don't think he's going to get it in his lifetime.²²⁷

Smith is also of the opinion that McNeil has not been given the respect he deserves for the work he has done touring with the Jubilee Singers and promoting the performance of spirituals:

I guess the point I'm trying to make is, Albert has not received the recognition because in the opinion of some people, preserving the spiritual isn't special to a lot of them. They'd rather write an article on the 200th anniversary of Bach. So I think there are many reasons why there's a lack of respect for what Albert does, a lack of respect for spirituals and how special they are, and a lack of respect for those who do it.²²⁸

As mentioned in chapter three, McNeil's legacy will continue to live on through the new generation of Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers and their director Diane White-Clayton in the Artists-In-Residence program at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

Suggestions for Further Study

²²⁷ Wright, Michael. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 21, 2016.

²²⁸ Smith, Byron. Interview by the author. Digital recording. Los Angeles, November 22, 2016.

This study will serve as a resource for those interested in learning about McNeil's life, teaching techniques, and performance practice guidelines of spirituals. The writer suggests further study of the Albert McNeil Collection housed in the archives department at California State University, Dominguez Hills library. This collection includes his personal scores, class lecture notes, photographs of the Jubilee Singers in concert, Jubilee Singers promotional materials, concert programs, newspaper articles, concert reviews, and letters of correspondence. These artifacts are invaluable to a deeper study of McNeil's choral pedagogy, his teaching at the University of California, Davis, and the Jubilee Singers concert tours.

The Albert McNeil Collection also includes several videotapes of performances and workshops. At least two members of the Jubilee Singers are also known to possess video recordings of multiple concert performances, workshops, and choral clinics. It is important to catalogue these videos and assemble them in chronological sequence. They would serve as a valuable resource for his performance practice guidelines, as well as add to the historical record of the Jubilee Singers.

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APPENDIX A

AWARDS, RECOGNITION, AND PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Awards

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1974 | National Association of Negro Musicians Outstanding Achievement Award |
| 1991 | UCLA Alumnus of the Year for Professional Excellence |
| 1999 | Chorus American Michael Korn Award for Distinguished Conducting |
| 2003 | Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from California State University at Northridge |
| 2003 | Professor Emeritus University of California at Davis |
| 2004 | American Choral Directors Association Lifetime Achievement Award for Outstanding Contribution to Choral Music |
| 2004 | American Choral Directors Association Command Performance Award |
| 2007 | National Association of Church Musicians Lifetime Achievement Award |
| 2010 | Honorary Doctor of Music Degree from Westminster Choir College of Rider University |
| 2014 | Howard Swan Lifetime Achievement Award California American Choral Directors Association |

Memberships

- Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia (Beta Psi)- National Fraternal Society in Music
- Phi Delta Kappa (Alpha Epsilon)- National Educators Society
- Omega Psi Phi (Lambda)- International African American Fraternity
- Mu Phi Epsilon, Sterling Patron
- American Choral Directors Association (Lifetime member)
- Chorus America (former board member)
- Los Angeles Master Chorale Board of Directors
- National Association of Negro Musicians (Lifetime member)
- National Endowment for the Arts (former board member)

Professor Emeritus of Music, University of California at Davis
Puerto Rican Choral Directors Society (Honorary Lifetime member)

Guest Conducting and Presenter

1993 Federation for Choral Music Conference in Seoul, Korea
1993 Presented interest sessions on African-American Spirituals and Art Songs at the
World Symposium on Choral Music in Vancouver, B.C.
1995 World Youth Choir tour of Canada and the United States
1995 Disneyland Christmas Candlelight Ceremony and Processional, Anaheim,
California
1996 International Choral Festival in Taipei, Taiwan
1998 Canadian Choral Conductors in Halifax, Nova Scotia
1999 Carnegie Hall debut with the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers
2000 Choral Conductor's Guild Convention in Pasadena, California
2000 International Choral Festival in Taipei, Taiwan
2001 Carnegie Hall Jester Hairston 100th birthday Celebration
2001 Des Moines International Children's Choral Festival
2004 Presenter America Cantat IV in Mexico City
2014 65th Annual Stairway of the Stars Choral Festival, Los Angeles, California

Publications

The Albert McNeil Choral Series (Gentry, Lawson-Gould, and Fred Bock catalogs)

Co-author and editor of a series of music education textbooks for Silver-Burdett-Ginn
Publishing Company

APPENDIX B

ALBERT MCNEIL CHORAL ARRANGEMENTS

All My Trials. Los Angeles: Gentry Publishing, 1987.

Don't Stay Away. Los Angeles: Gentry Publishing, 1985.

He's Got the Whole World in His Hands. Los Angeles: Gentry Publishing, 1983.

Hold Out Your Light. Los Angeles: Gentry Publishing, 1983.

John, the Revelator. Los Angeles: Gentry Publishing, 1988.

My Long White Robe. Los Angeles: Gentry Publishing, 1984.

O Mary, Don't You Weep. Los Angeles: Gentry Publishing, 1984.

Open the Window, Noah. Los Angeles: Gentry Publishing, 1986.

APPENDIX C

ALBERT MCNEIL JUBILEE SINGERS: 1964 TO PRESENT

(LISTED ALPHABETICALLY)

Debi Anderson	Cheryl Fox	Bobby Laird
Cheryl Ascione	Christopher Gambol	Roscoe Lewis
Larry Ayers	Gerald Garrett	Rosa Lindo
Bradley P. Baker	Ruth Garrett	Bert Lindsey
Robert Ball	Trevin Goin	Nemesia Lockhart
Carl Ray Bell	Geraldine Goodwin	Jay Loft-Lynn
Celeste Lea Bemby	Shannon Goodwin	Anthony Lowe
Fannie E. Benjamin	Victor Graham	Patronella Luke
Muriel Bennett	Lisa Gray-Ashley	Lloyd Mallory
Michael Bijou	Charles Grays	Jesse Martin
Omega Bone	Susan Grayson	James Matlock
Kay Bowen	Joe Green	Harriett McClendon
Gertrude Bradley	Lonnie Green	Andrea McCreary
Delaina Brown	Douglas Griffin	Peter McDaniel
Joel Brown	Gwen Hale	Toncie McElroy
Eric Browning	John Hale	Caroline McKenzie
Victoria Burnett	Cherice Hall	Jesse Means
Annette Burton	Sandra Hall Hill	Marie Mesby
Elmer Bush	Dorothea Hanley	Tom Moore
James Calhoun	Michael Hart	Michael Morgan
Reggie Carson	Tracey Hart	Teresa Moseley
Frances Cash	Perry Hayes	Gary Murphy
Hazel Chapman	Alphonzo Hicks	Eric Myricks
Leberta Clark	Thelma Hicks	Joseph Nalls
Carver Cossey	Roderick Hines	Lisa Naulis
Alan Crowley	Wardell Howard	Charlotte Neveau
Dolores Davis	Wilbert Gene Howard	Aaron Nigel-Smith
Javier Delgado	Veronica Howell-Abel	John Nix
Jackie D'Mesa	Elliott Jackson	Aleta O'Brien
Yvonne Dowd	Johnnie Jackson	Gary Osby
Barbara Dumas	Michael O. Jackson	Autris Page
Anne Dunn	Richard Jackson	John Patton
Sherrita Duran	Sidney Jacobs	Marcia Perkins
William Endsley	Harry C. Johnson	Leroy Peterson
Ashleyh Faatioli	Leroy Kelley	Ralph Pettiford
DeReau Farrar	Marie Kelly	Colleen Pierre-Louis
Larry Farrow	Michael Kelly	Desmond Pierre-Louis
Yvonne Farrow	Donna King	Bob Radke
Raymond Firth	Elizabeth King	Ed Razor
Mary E. Flowers	Sam Kivi	Dabney Ross-Jones

Patrick Russell
Sonja Sardon
Deidre Saunders
Claudia Schwartz
Jacquelyn Sebastian
David P. Sharp
Adrian Shaw
Jonas Sills
Byron J. Smith
Michael P. Smith
Paul A. Smith
Ruby Smith
Russell Smith

Versell Smith
Michele Sorel
Rozlyn Sorrell
Helen Stewart
Louvetta Stewart
Vikki Strange
Mark Summers
Ian Tan
Shelia Tate
Darryl Taylor
Richard Taylor
Fred Thomas
Jim Tompkins-McClain

Elex Vann
Nell Walker
Madelyn Washington
Winter Watson
Tommy Webb
Yolanda West
Barbara White
Virginia White
Rudy Williams
James Wilson
Carol Wooten
Dianne V. Wright
Michael A. Wright
Richard Wyatt
Leonard Young
Thomas Young

APPENDIX D

1968 EUROPEAN TOUR DOCUMENTS



RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the

have been hailed as one of our nation's foremost interpreters of American folk music; and

WHEREAS they will soon embark on a goodwill tour of Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, England, Switzerland and Italy; and

WHEREAS all members of this group being signally honored are residents of Los Angeles; and

WHEREAS the LOS ANGELES JUBILEE SINGERS have been selected by the United States Army to perform special Easter Holiday concerts in Germany; and

WHEREAS the group is to sing for the youth of France in 21 cities under the sponsorship of Jeunesses Musicales of France; and

WHEREAS such efforts bring favorable publicity and goodwill for our country and our city;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the presentation of this resolution the Council of the City of Los Angeles does hereby commend the ALBERT MCNEIL LOS ANGELES JUBILEE SINGERS and their sponsors, the INTERNATIONAL CONCERTS EXCHANGE FOUNDATION, Irwin Dames, Managing Director, for the work they are doing.

Resolution by

Albert W. Lindsay
Councilman 9th District

Seconded by

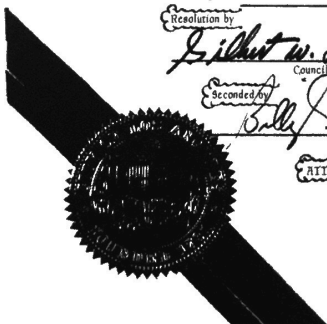
Billy J. Hill
Councilman 8th District

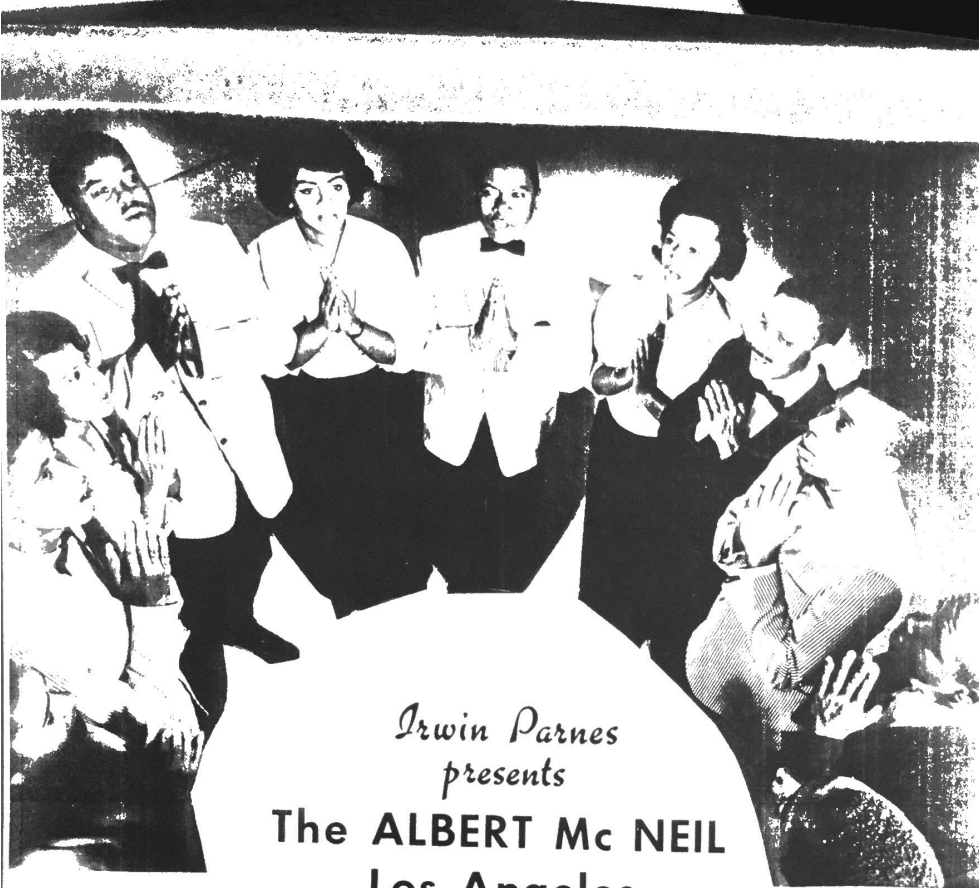
HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing resolution was adopted by the Council of the City of Los Angeles at its meeting held January 5, 1968.

R. Linnale
President of the Council

ATTEST:

Mattie P. Thiel
City Clerk





Irwin Parnes
presents
The ALBERT Mc NEIL
Los Angeles
JUBILEE SINGERS



NOTED GUEST SOLOISTS

FRED THOMAS, Baritone

BERT LINDSEY, Tenor

SATURDAY EVENING, JANUARY 20 8:30 P.M.

BEVERLY HILLS ACTORS THEATRE

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presents

THE ALBERT McNEIL
LOS ANGELES JUBILEE SINGERS

BERT LINDSEY, TENOR — FRED THOMAS, BARITONE

ALBERT McNEIL, DIRECTOR

Fannie Benjamin at the Piano

"Festival of Negro Spirituals, — Afro American
Folk and Work Songs"

I

Walk Together Children
There Is A Balm in Gilead
 Bert Lindsey, Tenor
Soon I Will Be Done
Witness For My Lord
 Victor Graham, Baritone

II

Wade in the Waterarr. Jester Hairston
Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray
 Annetta Burton, Soprano
Go Down in the Lonesome Valleyarr. Jester Hairston
Ain't Got Time to Diearr. Hall Johnson
 Annetta Burton, Soprano
 Victor Graham, Baritone
 Fred Thomas, Baritone

III

Were You There
Jesus Lay Your Head in the Windowarr. Hall Johnson
 Bert Lindsey, Tenor

IV

Hold Onarr. Jester Hairston
I Got A Key to the Kingdom
 Bert Lindsey, Tenor
In His Care-O
When I Was Sinkin' Downarr. Hall Johnson
What Kind of Shoesarr. Jester Hairston

intermission

V

Travelin' Manarr. Jester Hairston
 Michael Wright, Baritone
Goin' Down That Lonesome Road
Long John Done Gone
Band of Angels

VI

Glory to GodE. L. Pittman
Old Man RiverJerome Kern
 Fred Thomas, Baritone

VII

Ride On King Jesus
Sometimes I Feel Like a Moanin' Dove
 Virginia White, Contralto
God's Gonna Build Up Zions Wall
Set Down Servantarr. Margaret Bond
Ezekiel Saw the Wheel
 Annetta Burton, Soprano

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9015 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills, California

"SUCCESS STORY"

Albert Mc Neil

LOS ANGELES JUBILEE SINGERS

Twenty years ago a dedicated university student, sorrowed by the neglect almost universally accorded the musical genius of his people, determined to create a voice worthy of those composers past and present, famous and anonymous, whose richly vital outpouring comprises the music known as "Afro-American."

Perhaps no where could a young man be found so suited for this task. After four scholarship years at the University of California at Los Angeles with graduate studies at the University of Southern California, Occidental College and the Westminster Choir School of Princeton, New Jersey, he had won a scholarship to study choral music at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland and had come home inspired by the unfolding horizons in the potential of the human voice.

Though his zeal, unflagging idealism and musicianly astuteness - - which critics have compared to Roger Wagner and Robert Shaw - - the Albert Mc Neil Los Angeles Jubilee Singers rose quickly to national prominence.

Bursting on the scene with memorable west coast premieres of "Lonesome Train" and "Ballad for Americans," the Chorale was tapped by the famous Greek Theatre for summer runs in "Show Boat," "Finian's Rainbow," "Annie Get Your Gun," and "Carmen Jones."

Hollywood Bowl followed; then a national radio series, a long stage run and major label recording of the folk opera "Carnival Island," films, television, and a succession of tours highlighted by special performances for Prime Minister Nehru, President John F. Kennedy, Governor Edmund G. Brown of California, U.N. representative James Roosevelt, and other notables.

Their impressive string of motion picture soundtracks includes "Porgy and Bess," "Carmen Jones," "Something of Value," and "Land of the Pharaohs" - - but the Chorale is far prouder of their recent prize-winning documentary on the Negro in America, "Oh Freedom," now being distributed worldwide by the Encyclopedia Britannica.

For despite the Chorale's commercial successes, McNeil has never lost sight of his original purpose. He has faithfully sought out, encouraged, arranged and presented the music of his people - - from primitive work songs to contemporary cantatas, from Spirituals to Freedom Marches. He has conducted world premieres of major works by almost every important Afro-American composer or lyricist; Jester Hairston, Hall Johnson, Langston Hughes and, most memorably, William Grant Still's "And They Lynched Him On A Tree," and John W. Work's "Longfellow Cantata" - - the latter in a historic coast-to-coast broadcast with a Chorale augmented to a thundering thousand voices. For this devoted dedication, McNeil and the Chorale have received many honors, including commendation of the National Association of Negro Musicians and the Urban League's citation as "Citizen of the Year."

In their forthcoming tour of Europe the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers Chorale will sing with the voice of a whole people - - their joys and sorrows, hopes, triumphs, despair and faith echoing from three centuries of beautiful song.

LOS ANGELES JUBILEE SINGERS

Benelux-Tour

- February 6 : Arriving Brussels Hotel Central
Place de la Bourse
Brussels (near of La Bourse)
- February 7 : Concert at 20.15 h. Hotel id.
Centre Culturel et
Artistique d'Uccle
Rue Rouge -Uccle
(Parc Wolvendael)
- February 8 : Travel by autocar from Brussels to Liège
Concert Liège at 20 h. Hotel Le Phare
Ciné Palace Koningin Astridplein
Rue Pont d'Avroy Antwerp
After the concert travel from Liège to Antwerp
- February 9 : Concert at 20.15 h. Hotel: id.
Arenberg Theatre
Arenbergstraat
Antwerp
- February 10 : Travel from Antwerp to Eindhoven Hotel Wildeman
Markt 9
Concert at 20 h. Eindhoven
Eindhoven PHILIPS ONTSPANNINGSCENTRUM
- February 11 : Travel from Eindhoven to Heerlen Hotel Terminus
Parallelweg 12
Concert at 20 h. Heerlen
Heerlen STADSHOLWABURG
- February 12 : Travel from Heerlen to Brussels Hotel Central
Place de la Bourse & Brussels
LAREN ~~Brussels~~ for T.V. production
From Heerlen travel to Brussels → *SINGER CONCERTZAAL*
- February 13 : Travel from Brussels to Charleroi Hotel id.
Concert at 20 h.
Palais des Beaux Arts
Charleroi
After concert return to Brussels
-

THE LOS ANGELES JUBILEE SINGERS

Tour of Great Britain

February 1968

Itinerary

THUR.	15	FEB.	LONDON, Queen Elizabeth Hall 7.45 p.m.	LONDON, Lincoln Hotel, 117-125 Cromwell Road, S.W.7 Telephone: FRO 4444
FRI.	16	FEB.	DAY OFF	LONDON, Lincoln Hotel
SAT.	17	FEB.	CHATHAM, Central Hall 8.0 p.m.	LONDON, Lincoln Hotel
SUN.	18	FEB.	BRISTOL Colston Hall 7.30 p.m.	LONDON Lincoln Hotel
MON.	19	FEB.	CROYDON Fairfield Hall 8.0 p.m.	LONDON, Lincoln Hotel
TUE.	20	FEB.	PORTSMOUTH Guildhall 7.30 p.m.	LONDON, Lincoln Hotel
WED.	21	FEB.	BOURNEMOUTH Winter Gardens 7.45 p.m.	LONDON, Lincoln Hotel
THUR.	22	FEB.	SOLIHULL Civic Hall 8.0 p.m.	LONDON, Lincoln Hotel
FRI.	23	FEB.	MANCHESTER Free Trade Hall 7.45 p.m.	LONDON Lincoln Hotel

best time-tables Italian tour

March 26	<u>GENOVA</u>	d.	° 6,10 a.m.		6,40 a.M.	
	Voghera	a.	↑	no change	7,43	change
	"	d.	↓		7,54	
	<u>MODENA</u>	a.	10,31		10,07	
° leaving from Brignole Station						
March 27	<u>MODENA</u>	d.	10,36 a.m.	12,23	1,27 p.m.	2,40 p.m.
	<u>MILANO</u>	a.	12,55	2,30 pm	3,40 p.m.	4,40 p.m.
March 28	<u>MILANO</u>	d.	9,45 a.m.		12,12 rapid	
	S.Benedetto del Tronto	a.	5,36 p.m.	change	5,05 p;M;	change
	S.B.Tronto	d.	°6,05 p.m. (bus)		° 5,10 p.m.	° 5,35 p.m.
	<u>ASCOLI PICENO</u>	a.	6,58 p.m.		6;03 p.m.	6,28 p.m.
° the bus is much quicker. It leaves from the Station square.						
March 29	<u>ASCOLI P.</u>	d.	° 9,57 a.m.			
	S.Ben.Tronto	a.	10,50 a.m.			
	"	d.	11,17	change		
	Ancona	a.	12,28			
	"	d.	1,14 p.m.	change		
	<u>TERNI</u>	a.	4,34 p.m.			
° bus						
March 30	<u>TERNI</u>	d.	8,09 a.m.			
	<u>SULMONA</u>	a.	12,05			
March 31	<u>SULMONA</u>	d.	8,15 am	11,28 am	2,50 pm	5,15 pm
	<u>ROMA</u>	a.	12,58	3,33pm	5,48 pm	7,40 pm

TOURING SHOW ITINERARY

NAME OF SHOW UNIT: "Los Angeles Jubilee Singers"---

DATE	PICK UP TIME	P E R F O R M A N C E		SITE PREFIX & PHONE NO	NAME & PHONE NO RESPONSIBLE SSO REPRESENTATIVE	NAME, LOCATION PHONE NO. OF BILLETS
		I E	SITE			
2 Apr		Travel from Rome to Vicenza, Italy				
3 Apr		2030	Olympia S/C Vicenza			
4 Apr		2000	Bosco Mantico			
5 Apr	0654	Travel via Brenner Express to Munich Arrival Munich picked up at Main Bahnhof				
	1900	2015	Warner S/C	2525-8881	Mr. Duffy 2521-8463	Columbia Hotel Muenchen, Jagdstr. 2521-8698 Civ 5165941
6 Apr	1900	2000	Henry S/c	2525-7797	" "	
7 Apr		D A Y O F F				
8 Apr	1800	2030	Sheridan S/C	2581-8563	Mr. Schesveter 2581-8518	
9 Apr	0900	Deliver to North Bavaria to arrive NLT 1200 hrs				
	1615	1800	Finder S/C	2623-850	Mr. Meadors 2621-6587	USA Transient Billets Nuernberg Mil 6632
		2100	Merrel S/C	2625-870	" "	
10 Apr	1530	1800	Ansbach S/C	2671-8858	Mr. Morris 2633-819	
		2100	Illesheim S/C	2633-895		
11 Apr	1615	1815	Herzo Star Theater	2652-8816	Mr. Ruth 2652-8816	
		2100	Erlangen S/C	2631-871	" "	cont'd next page

DATE	PICK UP TIME	P E R F O R M A N C E		SITE PREFIX & PHONE NO	NAME & PHONE NO RESPONSIBLE SSO REPRESENTATIVE	NAME, LOCATION & PHONE NO OF BILLET
		TIME	SITE			
12 Apr	1500	1800	Vilseck S/C	2641-754	Mr. Lindahl 2643-891	USA Transient Billets Mil Nuernberg 6632
		2100	Algiers S/C	2643-742	" "	
13 Apr	1130	1400	Open Hearth S/C	2643-657		
		2030	Bindlach S/C	2681-844	Ted Ruth 2652-8816	
14 Apr	0945	Deliver to	Franconia District to arrive NLT 1200 hrs			
	1300	1400	US Army Hospital Wuerzburg	2326-860	Virginia Harvey	Hotel Ochsen, Wuerzburg Juliuspromenade 3 Tel: 53546
		1930	Conn S/C Schweinfurth	2323-8266	Carol Afflalo	
15 Apr			D A Y O F F			
16 Apr		Deliver to Rhein	Main AB			

Lundi 26 Février, à 21 heures, Grand Amphithéâtre de la Faculté des Lettres
Sous la Présidence de Monsieur Pierre ABELIN, Président du Conseil Général de la Vienne, Député-Maire de CHATELLERAULT

NEGRO SPIRITUALS

LOS ANGELES JUBILEE SINGERS

ENSEMBLE VOCAL NOIR, Direction Albert Mc NEIL

BERT LINDSEY, Ténor
du Metropolitan Opera de NEW-YORK

FRED THOMAS, Baryton
Winner Metropolitan Opera Auditions

PROGRAMME

WALK TOGETHER CHILDREN.

Don't you get weary
There's a great camp meeting
In the promised land

SOON I WILL BE DONE.

With the troubles of the world
Going home to live with God

WITNESS FOR MY LORD, sol. V. GRAHAM.

My soul is a witness for my lord

I GOT A KEY TO THE KINGDOM, sol. Bert LINDSEY.

COULDN'T HEAR NOBODY PRAY, sol. A. BURTON.

Way down yonder on my knees

AIN'T GOT TIME TO DIE, sol. A. BURTON, V. GRAHAM, F. THOMAS.

Keep so busy praising my Jesus
Keep so busy working for my Master
Keep so busy working for the Kingdom

WERE YOU THERE, sol. Bert LINDSEY.

When they crucified my lord
Some times it causes me to tremble

HOLD ON.

Keep your hand on the plough
Noah let me come in
The doors all fastened
And the windows pinned

SOMETIMES I FEEL, sol. V. WHITE.

IN HIS CARE'O.

One day as I was walking
Down the lonesome road
The spirit spoke on to me
And filled my heart with joy
I thank my lord
I'm in his care' o

WHAT KIND OF SHOES.

Are you gonna wear
Golden Shippers
I'm bound to wear when I reach my heavenly
home

TRAVELIN' MAN, sol. M. WRIGHT.

Sleep all day and run all right
Travel best when the moon is bright

LONG JOHN DONE GONE.

They put Long John Behind the prison wall
But he said that he wouldn't stay

BAND OF ANGELS.

Ten little angels in the band
Obediah, Zachariah, Malachiah, Schemiah, etc.

OLD MAN RIVER, sol. F. THOMAS.

RIDE ON KING JESUS.

No man can hinder me

SET DOWN SERVANT, sol. A. BURTON.

GODS GONNA BUILD UP ZIONS WALL.
Great day the righteous marches

EZEKIEL SAW THE WHEEL

Way up in the middle of the air

PLACES : 6 F. (Cartes ABONNÉS valables sans changement) à demander à la Permanence (Faculté de Droit), les Jeudi 15 et 22
Samedi 17 et 24, Lundi 26.

✕

IRWIN PARNES

présente

THE ALBERT McNEIL

LOS ANGELES JUBILEE SINGERSBert LINDSEY, *ténor* · Fred THOMAS, *baryton*Albert McNEIL, *directeur**Au piano, Fannie Benjamin*

✕

I.

Walk Together Children
 There Is A Balm in Gilead
Bert LINDSEY, Ténor
 Soon I Will Be Done
 Witness For My Lord
Victor GRAHAM, Baritone

II.

Wade in the Water..... arr. Jester Hairston
 Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray
Annetta BURTON, Soprano
 Go Down in the Lonesome Valley..... arr. Jester Hairston
 Ain't Got Time to Die..... arr. Hall Johnson
Annetta BURTON, Soprano
Victor GRAHAM, Baritone
Fred THOMAS, Baritone

III.

Were You There
 Jesus Lay Your Head in the Window..... arr. Hall Johnson
Bert LINDSEY, Ténor

IV.

Hold On..... arr. Jester Hairston
 I Got A Key to the Kingdom
Bert LINDSEY, Ténor
 In His Care-O

When I Was Sinkin' Down..... arr. Hall Johnson
 What Kind of Shoes..... arr. Jester Hairston

Entr'acte

V.

Travelin' Man..... arr. Jester Hairston
Michael WRIGHT, Baritone
 Goin' Down That Lonesome Road
 Long John Done Gone
 Band of Angels

VI.

He has the whole world in his hand
 Old Man River..... Jerome Kern
Fred THOMAS, Baritone

VII.

Ride On King Jesus
 Sometimes I Feel Like a Moanin' Dove
Virginia WHITE, Contralto
 God's Gonna Build Up Zions Wall
 Set Down Servant..... arr. Margaret Ross
Annetta BURTON, Soprano
 Ezekiel Saw the Wheel

Piano GAVEAU

Bureau de Concerts Marcel de VALMALETE - 45, rue La Boétie, PARIS (8^e) - 359-28-38

CONCERT

du VENDREDI 1^{er} MARS 1968 - Palais des Fêtes de Périgueux

Los Angeles Jubilee Singers

DIRECTION Albert Mc Neil - SOLISTES : Bert Lindsey, ténor,
Fred Thomas, baryton.
Au piano : Fannie Benjamin

Présentation par André Gauthier

PREMIERE PARTIE

Walk Together Children
Soon I Will Be Done
Witness For My Lord
Victor GRAHAM, baryton
I Got A Key To The Kingdom
Bert LINDSEY, ténor
Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray
Annetta BURTON, soprano
Ain't Got Time to Die
Annetta BURTON, Victor Graham
and Fred THOMAS, solistes
Were you There
Bert LINDSEY, ténor
Hold On
Sometimes I Feel Like A Moanin' Dove
Virginia WHITE, contralto.
In his Care-O
What Kind of Shoes

DEUXIEME PARTIE

Travelin' Man
Michael WRIGHT, baryton.
Long John Done Gone
Band of Angels
Old man River
Fred THOMAS, baryton
Ride On King Jesus
Set Down Servant
Annetta BURTON, soprano
God's Gonna Build Up Zions Wall
Ezekial Saw the Wheel

Piano de concert PLEVEL
fourni par la Maison GIRARD

Conservez soigneusement ce
programme pendant tout le
spectacle. Peut-être vous résér-
ver-il une agréable surprise.

N° 300070

Avant de se produire ce soir au Théâtre

“Los Angeles Jubilee Singers” ont découvert les beautés de la citadelle médiévale



● En dépit de la froidure, les chanteurs noirs et leurs hôtes ont bien voulu poser un instant devant la Cité. (Photo M. L. « L'Indépendant »).

AINSI que nous l'avons annoncé, l'ensemble des « Los Angeles Jubilee Singers » donnera un récital ce soir, au théâtre. Ce concert s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une tournée que les chanteurs noirs américains effectuent cette année en France.

Ils se sont produits ou se produiront à Poitiers, Cognac, Limoges, Agen, Périgueux, Castres, Toulouse, Albi, Perpignan, St-Gaudens, Carcassonne, Béziers, Auch, Pau, Mont-de-Marsan, Bordeaux, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Arcachon et Châtelleraut.

Les chanteurs noirs ont visité la Cité hier, en fin de matinée. Mme Devèze, dont l'on sait la compétence, les a guidés dans cette visite. Sa connaissance parfaite de la langue anglaise a permis un dialogue fructueux entre les chanteurs américains et leurs hôtes, dont certains, du reste, parlaient fort bien la langue de Shakespeare.

Anetta Burton, Virginia White, Fred Thomas, Michael Wright, Bert Lindsey et Victor Graham paraissent enchantés de leur séjour à Carcassonne. Une seule

ombre au tableau : la température. Les chanteurs avaient tous pris soin de se préserver la gorge...

Après le Congrès national du M.O.D.E.F.

Le Mouvement de défense des exploitations familiales de l'Aude nous a fait tenir une relation de son congrès national dont nous extrayons ce qui suit :

Les 230 délégués venus de 67 départements de France, représentant toutes les productions agricoles et viticoles de notre pays, ont, durant deux jours, les 9 et 10 mars à Saint-Ouen, discuté des moyens de faire respecter les intérêts des exploitants familiaux de tous les départements, y compris la Corse qui avait ses délégués.

L'Aude était représentée par douze membres dont deux femmes, ce qui démontre si besoin était l'influence du M.O.D.E.F. dans le département. M. Alfred Nègre, membre de la Chambre d'Agriculture du Gard, présidait le congrès national.

Dans le rapport moral présenté par M. Raymond Mineau, secrétaire général national, furent développés les grands problèmes agricoles et préconisées des solutions constructives.

Des commissions de travail eurent pour mission de mettre au point des résolutions concernant les productions spécialisées : céréales, élevages, vin, pour ne citer que celles-là, et une motion générale.

Des délégations venues d'Italie, de Belgique, d'Allemagne fédérale...

Tribune libre

Les méfaits de... sur les...

M. Antoine Courrière, sénateur, communique :

« Le Monde », journal sérieux et dont les informations économiques ne prêtent pas à contestation, a publié dans son numéro du 29 février 1968, en rubrique financière, un article dont le titre est particulièrement évocateur : « La généralisation de la T. V. A. a provoqué une forte hausse en janvier ».

On s'en serait douté mais lorsque l'on entendait les propos apaisants et limitifs du ministre des Finances et de tous ceux qui sont chargés de faire sa propagande, on finissait par douter de ce qui est devenu une bien désagréable réalité.

La flambée des prix est incontestablement due à la T. V. A. commerce de détail.

La hausse est particulièrement sensible pour l'alimentation, 1,6 en un mois ; dans le secteur des services, 0,9 ; elle est plus réduite pour les produits manufacturés 0,4.

Dans l'ensemble, les prix ont augmenté de 1 % au cours du mois de janvier, ce qui en année pleine, donnerait une augmentation catastrophique de 12 %.

Certains contestaient jusqu'à maintenant la répercussion de la T. V. A. sur les prix des produits de première nécessité.

Reprenant « Le Monde » qu'il me soit permis d'indiquer que les prix du pain, de la pâtisserie, de toutes les viandes à rôtir et à braiser, de la charcuterie, de la triperie, du poisson frais, du lait frais, du beurre, des fromages ont augmenté. A augmenté également le prix du vin, ce qui n'est pas pour inciter les marchés à une amélioration quelconque, et qui explique au moins en partie le malaise et le marasme que connaissent actuellement les places méridionales.

Les fruits et les légumes sont également en hausse. L'indice du restaurant est en augmentation, de même que les prix des cyclomoteurs, des automobiles, de l'huile de graissage.

En ce qui concerne les autres secteurs, on constate une hausse dans le prix du gaz et du fuel domestique, dans les hôtels et les prix de la plupart des biens d'équipement ménager et d'ameublement.

Egalement sont en augmentation les prix des produits d'entretien, de la blanchisserie et du nettoyage et des tarifs du coiffeur.

Le Comité exécutif de l'U.F. se réunira le...

On nous prie d'insérer : L'assemblée générale du comité exécutif de l'Union fédérale des anciens combattants et victi-

LA MAISON

APPENDIX E

ALBERT MCNEIL JUBILEE SINGERS TOURS

- 1968- Europe (Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium the Netherlands, England, Switzerland, Italy)
- 1970- Yugoslavia, Israel, Italy, Holland, Belgium, France, Germany
- 1971- Japan/Korea
- 1972-73- Russia, Italy, Germany, France
- 1974- Rome, Tunisia, Casablanca, Freetown, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Germany, Belgium
- 1975- United States of America
- 1976- Sicily, Venice, Rome, Istanbul, Tehran, New Delhi, Calcutta, Abu Dhabi, Athens, London
- 1978- Central South America
- 1979- USA, Spain, Israel, Italy
- 1980-81 Southern States USA
- 1982-83-France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Belgium
- 1984-85- Midwest USA, Israel, France, Austria, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Spain
- 1986- Midwest USA
- 1987- West Coast
- 1988- Israel
- 1989-90- US/European Tour
- 1991- US/Holland, Italy, Spain
- 1992- Far East Tour (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan)
- 1993- Europe
- 1994- Midwest USA, Canada, Puerto Rico, San Juan, Caribbean.
- 1995- Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, France
- 1996- United States, Italy, Spain, Japan
- 1997- Japan
- 1998- Japan, Hawaii
- 1999- Japan, Argentina, Uruguay, Germany, Austria, Switzerland
- 2000- Spain, Taiwan, Midwest USA
- 2001- Brazil
- 2002- East Coast USA, Midwest USA, Japan, Spain, Canary Islands
- 2003- West Coast USA, Spain, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg
- 2004- Venezuela
- 2005- West Coast
- 2006- Austria, Switzerland, Germany
- 2007- West Coast USA
- 2008- Europe
- 2009- West Coast USA
- 2010-11- New York, Los Angeles
- 2012- Mexico

APPENDIX F

DISCOGRAPHY

- Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, Jacquelyn Sebastian, Larry Farrow, and Albert McNeil. *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem*. [New York]: CBS, 1970, LP record.
- Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. *The Best of Jubilee, Volume 1*. Aya World Productions 2001. Compact disc.
- Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. *The Best of Jubilee, Volume 2*. Aya World Productions B0019W1BMO, 2005/2008. Compact disc.
- Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. *The Essential Recordings: 40 Years of Jubilee*. CD Baby B005BEL0DG, 2009. Compact disc.
- Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. *They've Got the Whole World in Their Hands*. Golden Jubilee Records MF00X2, 1991, LP record.
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- Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles. *Live from Shadyside Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, PA*. B000VO6EWI, 1997. Compact disc.
- Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles. *20th Anniversary Album*. McNeil-Farrow MF00X1, 1984. LP record.
- Los Angeles Jubilee Singers. *28 Negro Spiritual Songs*. Disques Jacques Canetti 48870/48871. LP record.
- The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles. *Spirituals: Soul Songs of Sorrow and Jubilation*. CBS 80133. LP record.
- The Los Angeles Jubilee Singers. *Songs of the Blacks, U.S.A.* Impresario Records LP1001, 1969. LP record.
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- The Los Angeles Jubilee Singers. *Music of the Black Man in America*. Bowmar World Cultures Series. LP1151. LP Record

APPENDIX G

ALBERT MCNEIL JUBILEE SINGERS REPERTOIRE:

1968-1992, 2012-2016

Repertoire taken from the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers programs 1968-1992, Irwin Parnes Collection, UCLA Archives, Boxes 1-3 and programs collected by the author. Repertoire listed in alphabetical order. Titles and composers are reprinted as found in the concert programs.

SPIRITUALS

Ain't-a that Good News *arr. William Dawson*
Amen *arr. Jester Hairston*
Ain't Got Time to Die *arr. Hall Johnson*
Band of Angels *arr. Jester Hairston*
Beulah Land *arr. Howard Roberts*
Bound for Canaan's Land *arr. Undine Smith Moore*
Certainly Lord *arr. Hall Johnson*
Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray *arr. William H. Smith*
Crossin' Ovah *arr. Richard Jackson*
Daniel, Servant of the Lord *arr. Undine Moore*
Deep River *arr. Larry Farrow*
Don't You Let Nobody Turn You 'Round *arr. Jacqueline Hairston*
Dry Bones *arr. Albert McNeil*
Elijah Rock *arr. Jester Hairston*
Elijah Rock *arr. Moses Hogan*
Everytime I Feel the Spirit *arr. William Dawson*
Everytime I Feel the Spirit *arr. Larry Farrow*
Everytime I Feel the Spirit *arr. Moses Hogan*
Ezekiel Saw the Wheel *arr. William Dawson*
Fare You Well Ev'rybody *arr. Undine Smith Moore*
Fix Me, Jesus *arr. Hall Johnson*
Give Me Jesus *arr. Wendell Whalum*
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah *arr. Lena McLin*
Go Down Moses *arr. Adolphous Hailstork*
Daniel, Daniel, Servant of the Lord *arr. Undine Smith Moore*
Go Down In the Lonesome Valley *arr. Jester Hairston*
God A'Mighty *arr. Howard Roberts*
God's Gonna Build Up Zion's Walls *arr. Jester Hairston*
Great Day *arr. Hall Johnson*
He's Got the Whole World in His Hands *arr. Albert McNeil*
Hold On *arr. Jester Hairston*
In Bright Mansions Above *arr. Leonard de Paur*
In That Great Gettin' Up Mornin' *arr. Jester Hairston*
It's All Over Me *arr. Jester Hairston*

I've Been In the Storm *arr. Robert DeCormier*
 I've Been 'Buked *arr. Hall Johnson*
 I Cannot Stay Here By Myself *arr. Hall Johnson*
 I Just Come from the Fountain *arr. Undine Smith Moore*
 I Wanna Be Ready *arr. Hall Johnson*
 I Want Jesus to Walk With Me *arr. Jester Hairston*
 I Will Trust in the Lord *arr. Undine Smith Moore*
 In His Care-o *arr. William Dawson*
 Jesus Lay Your Head in the Window *arr. Jester Hairston*
 John the Revelator *arr. Albert McNeil*
 Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho *arr. Moses Hogan*
 Let Me Fly *arr. Robert De Cormier*
 Little David Play on Your Harp *arr. Albert McNeil*
 Little Lamb *arr. Lena McLin*
 Mary was the Queen of Galilee *arr. Wendell Whalum*
 Moanin' Dove *arr. Albert McNeil*
 O By and By *arr. R. Nathaniel Dett*
 O Mary, Don't You Weep *arr. Albert McNeil*
 Oh Holy Lord *arr. Jester Hairston*
 Poor Man Lazarus *arr. Jester Hairston*
 Precious Lord, Take My Hand *arr. Roland Carter*
 Ride On King Jesus *arr. Hall Johnson*
 Rock-a My Soul *arr. Howard Roberts*
 Rock My Soul *arr. Richard Jackson*
 Rockin' Jerusalem *arr. John Work*
 Set Down Servant *arr. Robert Shaw*
 Sinner Man *arr. Howard Roberts*
 Sinner Please Don't Let This Harvest Pass *arr. Harold Montague*
 Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child *arr. Rosephanye Powell*
 Soon I Will Be Done *arr. William Dawson*
 Swing Low, Sweet Chariot *arr. Larry Farrow*
 Talk About A Child *arr. Howard Roberts*
 There is A Balm in Gilead
 Too Late Sinnuh *arr. Eugene Simpson*
 Wade In the Water *arr. Jester Hairston*
 Wade In the Water *arr. Howard Roberts*
 Wake Me Up, Lord *arr. Uzee Brown*
 Walk Together Children *arr. William H. Smith*
 Were You There? *arr. Albert McNeil*
 What Kind O'Shoes You Gonna Wear? *arr. Jester Hairston*
 When I was Sinkin' Down *arr. Hall Johnson*
 Who Is Dat a Yonder? *arr. Jacqueline Hairston*
 When the Saints Go Marching In *arr. Larry Farrow*
 Witness for My Lord *arr. Albert McNeil*
 Witness for My Lord *arr. Lloyd Pfautsch*
 You Better Mind *arr. Jester Hairston*

GOSPEL

He Never Failed Me Yet *arr. Robert Ray*
Jesus Will *arr. James Cleveland*
Let Everything Praise Him *by Thomas Whitfield*
Praise Him *arr. Dianne Wright/Richard Jackson*
Satisfied *arr. André Crouch*
Try Jesus *arr. Robert Ray*
Worthy to be Praised *by Byron Smith*

CALYPSO AND BALLADS

Gossip Gossip *arr. Jester Hairston*
Jamaica Farewell *arr. Larry Farrow*
Market Woman *arr. Larry Farrow*
Mary A Woman Uglier than You *arr. Leonard de Paur*
Ugly Woman *arr. Leonard de Paur*
World Goin' Down *by Arthur Cunningham*
Songs from South Africa *arr. Larry Farrow*

JAZZ/BROADWAY

Excerpts from "Drop Me Off in Harlem" *arr. Nell Walker and Douglas Griffin*
Jazz Medley *arr. Larry Farrow*
Medley from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*
Medley from *The Wiz*
Ellingtonia (Medley) *arr. Larry Farrow*

COMPOSITIONS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN COMPOSERS

Clap Praise *by Diane White-Clayton*
Sweet By and By *arr. Diane White-Clayton*
Stand By Me *arr. Moses Hogan*
I'm Determined to Walk with Jesus *arr. Raymond Wise*

AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN FOLK SONGS

Banzo Maracatu (Brazil) *arr. Jose Gomes*
Bullerengue (Venezuela) *Jose Antonio Rincon*
E Oru O (Yoruba) *arr. Rosephanye Powell*
Goin' Down That Lonesome Road
Haraje (West African Chant) *arr. Albert McNeil*
Long John Done Gone (Southern) *arr. Jester Hairston*
Oh Happy Day *arr. Larry Farrow*
Siyahamba (South African)
Swing A Lady Gum Pum (Children's Plantation Song) *arr. Jester Hairston*
Tataleo (Ghana) *arr. Jester Hairston*
Travelin' Man (Southern) *arr. Jester Hairston*
Umngomo (South African) *arr. Caiphus Semanya*
Yemaya Asesu (Cuba-Yoruba Ritual Song) *arr. Brian Tate*

LARGE WORKS

And They Lynched Him On a Tree by William Grant Still

Changed My Name by Linda Twine

Credo by Margaret Bonds

God's Trombones by James Weldon Johnson

Gospel Mass by Robert Ray

Spiritual Roots, Suite for Chorus and Orchestra by Larry Farrow

The Ballad of the Brown King by Langston Hughes and Margaret Bonds

APPENDIX H

JUBILEE SINGERS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please state your name.
2. In what capacity do you know Albert McNeil?
3. Why did you join the AMJS?
4. Tell me about the audition process. How did Albert choose his singers?
5. Tell me what rehearsals were like in the early years (70's/80's)
 - What was Albert's teaching method/pedagogy with the Jubilee Singers?
 - Rehearsal technique/style/format
 - Vocalises
 - Tone, Blend, Diction, Text
 - Choir Formation
 - Concert Repertoire
6. What is your impression of the philosophy Albert held that underlay his teaching of the concert spiritual?
7. Did Albert have his own set of performance practice guidelines when he rehearsed the spirituals?
8. What philosophies (musical or otherwise) of Albert's do you still carry with you today?
9. What are the non-musical ways that Albert influenced you?
10. What things were unique to him that you really didn't see exist in any other conductor?
11. What stories need to be told about Albert as a conductor and mentor?
12. What was it like to tour internationally with the Jubilee Singers?
13. Did the JS experience racial prejudice on tour?
14. Did the music of the spirituals break down racial barriers on the international tours?

APPENDIX I

FORMER STUDENTS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please state your name.
2. How long have you known Albert?
3. In what capacity?
4. What years were you his student at UC Davis?
5. What degree did you earn at UC Davis?
6. Which ensemble(s) did you sing in with Albert?
7. Did you take any music education or ethnomusicology classes from him?
8. Do you still have any syllabi, handouts or papers from any of these classes? If so, would you mind allowing me to have copies of these materials?
9. Did you study privately with him?
10. What types of rehearsal methods do you remember Albert using to motivate his students?
11. What was his philosophy of teaching (in the classroom and/or choral rehearsal)?
12. What did you find most enjoyable about singing under Albert?
13. What aspects of your musicianship improved from his instruction?
14. What do you remember Albert doing in order to achieve the highest standards from his students?
15. How did he influence you as a teacher (if applicable) or otherwise?
16. What do you consider his greatest strengths as an educator?
17. What do you consider his weakness(es)?
18. Would you say Albert is one of the most influential teachers you have had? Why?
19. What is one thing for which Albert should be remembered?
20. Do you have any further information in which you feel would be useful to this study?

APPENDIX J

ALBERT MCNEIL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What musical and non-musical elements determined the selection of singers for the ensemble?
2. Today the Jubilee Singers are ethnically diverse, what year did you select the first non-African-American into the ensemble and why?
3. How did you go about selecting the music for the Jubilee Singers?
4. What was your philosophy of programming the music?
5. Did you arrange the sequence of literature for purposes of calculated variety and pacing?
6. Which arrangers of spirituals did you prefer and why?
7. What are some experiences of touring with the Jubilees that stand out as most memorable?
8. What year did AMJS gain their 501(c)(3) status?
9. What year did Diane White-Clayton begin directing the AMJS?
10. Describe your pedagogy/teaching method with the Jubilee Singers.
11. How did you prepare yourself for each choral rehearsal?
12. Can you describe the choral tone that you considered ideal for the singing of spirituals?
13. What teaching techniques did you use to achieve the Jubilee Singers tone?
14. Were there other elements beyond tone that were important in achieving the Jubilee sound?
15. Did you have a specific concert formation of the ensemble, such as a mixed formation?
16. While rehearsing the Jubilees what was the most important element to you?
17. Describe your performance practice philosophy of the Spiritual--
Dialect, Text, Tempo, Rhythm, Vocal tone, Snapping or clapping, Spiritual as closer or opener

18. Who are the choral conductors who influenced you the most?
19. What imprint did they leave on your choral conductor canvas?
20. Tell me how Jester Hairston influenced you as a musician and choral conductor.
21. Tell me how Hall Johnson influenced you as a musician and choral conductor.
22. How would you describe yourself as a leader, teacher and mentor?
23. Where did you meet Helen and when did you marry?
24. What was your involvement in the Sacramento Symphony Chorus and Chorale?

INTERVIEWS

The following interviews, Appendices K through S, are arranged chronologically by the order in which they were recorded. Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.

Virginia White- January 12, 2016

Virginia White- November 22, 2016

Michael Wright- November 22, 2016

Byron Smith- November 23, 2016

Lloyd Mallory- January 2, 2017

Douglas Griffin- January 4, 2017

Albert McNeil- January 6, 2017

Donna Di Grazia- February 5, 2017

D. Kern Holoman- February 19, 2017

APPENDIX K

INTERVIEW WITH VIRGINIA WHITE

VIRGINIA WHITE

January 12, 2016

2:00 p.m.

In-person Interview, home of Virginia White

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

VIRGINIA WHITE. Jester Hairston is the dean of the spiritual for us and where we get a lot of our stories and expertise from. Of course Albert had some expertise, but he was known as the thing. If you wanted information about how the spirituals were born and that kind of thing, he was like the closest in knowing his grandmother who was a slave and how things came through, so there's a lot of stories from him. I've actually gone to his lectures and heard some things, gave me a lot of background for what I was doing when I had to teach. Well, actually, my very first lecture just blew my mind, some professors at the school I worked at said, we want you to come do a spiritual thing. We want to pick some songs and we'll back you up, whatever you need. And it was in Anaheim, it was for the Disciples of Christ and I thought, oh, this is something. I figured I'd be in a room like this maybe or have a hundred people or something like that and I walked on-stage and it was 8,000 people.

BRENDA MOHR. Oh my goodness.

VIRGINIA WHITE. I had a 350 voice choir behind me. I had, we did kind of a sextet behind me and other things. They had some dance interpreters for some of the numbers. It was amazing. My knees shook the whole time.

BRENDA MOHR. Tell me about touring internationally. How many years did the Jubilee Singers travel abroad?

VIRGINIA WHITE. We, it's just been the last three to four years we haven't traveled that extensively. We've been everywhere, even Japan. We had [inaudible] would bring us back, if it wasn't year, it was every two years we were in Japan so often.

BRENDA MOHR. And they paid your way?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes. I have to tell you. You know, when Europe was kind of inexpensive in the beginning, I can remember my first check that I remember was \$71.43 a week. And I brought money home.

BRENDA MOHR. Wow.

VIRGINIA WHITE. And I brought gifts cause the rooms were like a dollar. At the time, we were paying for our own rooms. I don't think I paid more than \$3 for a room because we were usually in doubles. And then later on it started getting more, so my next check was like \$100 and then got bigger and bigger as we went. But it wasn't until, and I can't tell you the year, maybe Albert can refresh my memory on that, but I remember we were in Spain and we were televised. There was someone who was doing kind of like talking about the Spirituals, as we went, some of the history. And we got picked up, somebody called Albert and said, we want you to come back in three months, that was unheard of. Everything in Europe, two years in advance, so this was in April or something like that and they wanted us to come back in August for the Segovia Series. And that was, oh, it was amazing. So he says, he called me, I guess I was the company administrator at that time, and he says, they want us to come back in August. And he was so excited. And he said, but they wont give us any more money. I said, Albert, ask for room and board. He say, what if they say no? I said, Albert, that's negotiation. Use your power, they want us back, they'll find a way. And called me back in ten minutes, they're gonna pay us room and board! He was just so excited and I'm going, Albert calm down. You see he's the kind of person who doesn't like confrontation he doesn't like to push. You would not think he's like that because he's so demanding otherwise. But there are some things he's just not into. So I just told him. We haven't had to pay for our rooms since. And so transportation and rooms and board and usually at least one meal and then we'd get a salary and we'd get a per diem.

BRENDA MOHR. So even when you get asked to perform for ACDA conventions, they've invited you. You're coming as guests?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Right. We were on the bills, like the King Singers and the Midwestern people were fighting over us. They're our Jubilee Singers! No, they're our Jubilee Singers! It was crazy, but we had some great times.

BRENDA MOHR. Are you aware of currently in the United States how many professional Black choirs there are?

VIRGINIA WHITE. I'm the wrong person to ask that.

BRENDA MOHR. I just started doing a little bit of research on it.

VIRGINIA WHITE. No, there's not because, I tell you, there not many that were traveling as extensively as we did. There were a few because there were a few that were takeoffs from ours. Byron Smith was in our group. He took a group off.

BRENDA MOHR. But their specialty is Gospel, right?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes, because they were warned not to try to go off with our arrangements. But Byron is an arranger of his own, in his own right, so he's done some things. They don't travel. They still have not traveled as much and we've had, one time, our men went off to some thing and I'm not sure it was Stockholm or some place like

that. The guy that came back to our group, Jim Tompkins, he was directing that group, so there have been groups that speared off from our group. And we've had, you know, just a lot of indirections with other groups around the country. Bruce Neering group, the Dale Warland group, those kinds of people. We did joint concerts with them. Roger Wagner who we educated.

BRENDA MOHR. What does that mean?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, Roger was a very interesting person. He had a concept of black music that most people, at the time, had. That it was the fun music. They do the serious music and then they do music for fun. And so we had to educate him that that's not what Spirituals are.

BRENDA MOHR. It's not a showstopper.

VIRGINIA WHITE. And so when we did a joint concert with them [Los Angeles Master Chorale], a couple times, but the last one that I really remember, we had a huge group of about 40 at that time and I mean, us getting us on stage was a big train, to do that half circle, you know? And I believe we ended the first half with the Master Chorale. They sang the first half. We sang the ending of that before intermission. Then we started the second half and the crowd was so up! And we got off stage and I was the last person off stage 'cause I'm usually on the end and Roger's going how we supposed to top that and I turned to him and I said, do your best, baby. And then we actually got singers from his group who had no idea, because he was doing things like when he did "When the Saints Go Marching In" that was everybody's thing. I'm so tired of hearing that song because people do it wrong. But he had pop whistles and all kinds of things and people going "Hallelujah!" and all of this kind of stuff, and that was supposed to be our encore. We didn't participate. We just stood there. And the write up about that. Fleischmann's write up, boy, they got really got knocked. They said the Jubilee Singers did not appreciate that. And there were black singers in his group that came to our group from there because they said something's amiss here. And we had some very successful people come with us. There are a lot of stories. It'd take me hours to tell you stuff that's happened to us with traveling incidents we've had and all that kind of stuff. It's just been crazy.

BRENDA MOHR. I remember going to Master Chorale concerts under Grant Gershon and the Jubilee Singers would be on the program. I'm assuming you were also on programs when Salamunovich was conducting.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, Roger Wagner tried to ban us from the Music Center. He said this is our venue. They don't have a right to be here and Dorothy Chandler told him you better shut up, I bring who I want here. And I remember, I don't know if you, well, you're not old enough for this, but in '74 we did a concert on dark night, on Monday night, and I had just auditioned for Ella Gerber, for Porgy and Bess for the LA Civic Light Opera and there were maybe four of us already doing the opera and she was looking for someone to do Lawyer Frazier and we told her that you have to see Victor Graham because he's just the type, big bass guy, big belly, ya know, be great with a Stetson hat. And so we told her

to come to the concert. Well, she came to the concert and she fell in love with Victor and that was it. But somehow Roger, I believe that was the time it happened, Roger said, what are they doing in our theater?! And so Dorothy told him, this is my theatre and I'll have who I want. And so we did our own concert at one time, a couple of times there. But he was like that. He felt that we were not good enough to be in his presence and then the crowd and the papers let him know that there was a new group in town.

BRENDA MOHR. I'm going to UCLA on Thursday to look at the Irwin Parnes collection. Nell referred to him as an impresario of the Jubilee Singers.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, he was the one that started us off because he, I'm not sure where he saw us, but in '67, he contracted us to do, "Revelations" for the Alvin Ailey Dance Troupe at the Greek Theatre, so we sang in the pit. And after that, we did the International Folk Dance Festival, or something like that, but our tour started that very next year.

He had a terrible reputation of leaving groups and the year he tried to pull that with the Jubilee Singers was the wrong year. He tried to book us for an extra week, but most of us had jobs to come back to. We were not contracted for two weeks with the Department of the Army. And he took off to go home to leave us there. And Albert happened to have a cousin who was a colonel that was stationed over there. We were very friendly with some of the colonels of rank and they figured out what was going on. At first, they said, six of you can go home today and maybe six tomorrow, but we worked it out. We got home. I got right on the phone and Irwin picked up the phone and I says, hello Irwin. He says where are you? I'm at home. How'd you do that? I said you don't mess with the Jubilee Singers because actually there's, one of the girls in the group, her uncle was in the Archie Savage, these are people you would never, it was the Archie Savage Dance Troupe that went over there and Irwin left them there and they had to fend for themselves and how to get home or whatever. Well, two of the brothers that were part of that, they stayed, the Hawkins brothers, and they became so into the Italian, they speak total Italian and became immersed themselves in doing things for the Catholic churches and stuff like that, so they made their way. One of them died, eventually, but Eddie is still there. And his niece still sings with the Jubilee Singers. But Irwin Parnes left them there. He had a reputation of leaving groups. Running with the money and just leaving them. So we let them know that he couldn't pull that on us. But he tried. He would do things like go in and go to the hotel thinking we didn't understand what he was saying. I need a room with a shower. The singers don't need showers. And I would go up to him and say, don't pay any attention to him. If he needs a shower and we don't need a shower, send him to another hotel. You know? He didn't like me at all. He stayed away from me because I caught onto his act real quick. So there were things that were going on. You have to really be on top of stuff when you're traveling with people that you really don't know and what they're negotiating and so I would always keep an eye on him. I had French in sixth grade. I had no idea it would come back to me at all. Oh, it didn't come back in a big way, but it was enough for me to converse to get rooms and stuff like that and I started understanding what he was saying. So I just go up there and move him out of the way. There's some interesting stuff we've gone through.

BRENDA MOHR. So how many original members are still singing today?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Just me.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. You know, it's interesting you mentioned blend because there were times during that rehearsal where the group had a good blend, but then there were other times where the blend struggled.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yeah, and it's really funny because our group is smaller now and even I've had some vocal issues. We are very versatile. But there's all kinds of things we're going through, but there's a certain quality when we really are listening to each other. That can bring people to tears.

BRENDA MOHR. I agree.

VIRGINIA WHITE. It's just incredible. And other times, you get people singing too loud or too boisterous or whatever and the quality gets lost, but for some reason, during concerts, we seem to pull it together.

BRENDA MOHR. I felt a good energy in the room when the interim director, Diane, was up there.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Oh, I love her.

BRENDA MOHR. I felt a wonderful energy all of a sudden it was like everybody calmed down and they were listening.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Diane is totally professional. Understands what we need. She's throwing music at us left and right, her arrangements. But I like working with her because she's very keen on what she wants to hear and we're what we're capable of doing.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. You just mentioned 'black sound.' What's your definition of that phrase, black sound?

VIRGINIA WHITE. That's an interesting question. The only way I can really give you a definitive answer, it's that there's a sounding board in us that's different. I hear a lot of groups copying Black singers now. Some of them do a great job and some of them do a lousy job of it. There's a resonance that comes through in a real singer like Leontyne Price. There's not too many people that would tell you that she wasn't the best at what she

did. There are a few other people that I like. I mean, there's so many other, it's like the athletes that we know. There's some gene of some kind that the power is there and there's power in our voices. It's rare that I don't hear a voice that I can't tell whether it's black or white.

BRENDA MOHR. I agree with you. I taught at the Glendale Adventist Academy for almost thirty years and there was a while when we had a lot of black students at our school from the Altadena Adventist Church. I could tell a difference in the sound of my choir when I had those black kids because the sound was just fuller. It had more depth.

VIRGINIA WHITE. There was a year we had six or seven Seventh-day Adventist kids in the Jubilee Singers. That was a fabulous sound. My understanding is that you can't go through the Seventh-day Adventist school without learning some kind of music.

BRENDA MOHR. That's correct.

VIRGINIA WHITE. And these kids really show up.

BRENDA MOHR. A former member of the Jubilees, Lloyd Mallory, is a Seventh-day Adventist.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yeah he is.

BRENDA MOHR. And then Jesse and Joel.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Their voices are just so smooth and effortless. I think about sometimes the various groups, and I'm going wow, we've lost so many people and unfortunately, some of them are dead.

BRENDA MOHR. Do you think the Jubilee Singers will go past 50 years? Make it to 60? I mean I guess it could now that Diane is interim director?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, I'm hoping she sticks with us.

BRENDA MOHR. Will she get the official title of director and take the interim off?

VIRGINIA WHITE. I don't know. She is so busy.

BRENDA MOHR. It would be.

VIRGINIA WHITE. I'm contemplating retiring, but I like singing too much so.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

VIRGINIA WHITE. Were you around in 1974 when the Munich massacre hit?

BRENDA MOHR. I was 12 years old.

VIRGINIA WHITE. [inaudible] The Jubilee Singers were landing in Israel in Tel Aviv at that time and we were told that our concerts were cancelled. I was warming up in the bus and I was singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" as a warm up. Irwin Parnes bolted up out of the seat and ran to the back to Albert, 'cause Albert was sitting in the back or midway, and says, "Let's open up the concerts as a memorial to the dead that have lost their lives in Munich." So what we did was...[quiet pause] I'm gonna cry...[quiet pause] we did our Spirituals. And in the middle of that first half, I went out to sing, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" by myself. We didn't have an arrangement at the time. I started as a soloist. I walked out and started to sing. About eight bars into my solo, the choir was aware about what I was doing, they started to hum behind me in harmony. It lifted me up off that floor. I felt I was flying 'cause the sounds were so glorious and I kept singing and I kept singing like it was prearranged, it was not prearranged. It was instant. It was amazing. Just amazing. And then another girl who was in the group at the time, her name was Barbara White we weren't related. And she sang Deep River. Then another guy sang "Old Glory" or something like that. You could not find a dry eye in that building. We were in the Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv. It gets me every time. And they opened up all the concerts again and we continued to do that the whole time we were in Israel. It was amazing. I can't tell you. It was amazing.

BRENDA MOHR. It's beautiful. Thanks for sharing that story. Just incredible, so powerful.

VIRGINIA WHITE. But it's so many stories like that. A lot of them can't relate to because they weren't there. But this group has had a really honorable legacy.

BRENDA MOHR. Absolutely. Which is why I've always wondered, why isn't there more out there for people to read about the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers?

VIRGINIA WHITE. There are people in Los Angeles who don't even know who we are. We carried their name the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers for years. We started out being coined as the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers because we were from Los Angeles and Albert McNeil was the director. And then it was the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers from Los Angeles.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

VIRGINIA WHITE. Because it's [spirituals] a sacred art. Sacred. It's not finger tone packed. And that's what people were doing. And that's why we spent time. We were constantly at colleges and schools and working with other choral organizations to educate people. When we had a two-hour concert, it was three and a half because Albert would talk and our feet were killing us, but it was important because they needed to know they were doing it [spirituals] wrong.

BRENDA MOHR. They still need to know.

VIRGINIA WHITE. We still got people out there who are taking away the importance of the spiritual by calling it traditional or writing their own version of a spiritual. I'm sorry, if you haven't gone through the pain, you can't write it.

BRENDA MOHR. That's right.

VIRGINIA WHITE. You know, there are some people that come close, but there's always some little tweak that isn't quite right.

You have to also understand that this music was born the same time as Bach and Handel, everybody else was writing stuff, when people say they can't get the rhythms right in a Spiritual, but they can get the rhythm right in a Bach is ridiculous. They're the same. The only twist is the dialect and the meaning of the music.

I'll never forget the time, I use this story when I'm doing lectures, Jester gave me the greatest tribute before that lecture I did. He says, you can't tell a story too grim during slavery. It all happened. And he told me the two things I use. There's one called "Jesus Lay Your Head in the Window," "Motherless Child" is another one. And I use the same story for it to get people to get the idea. Picture a lady who is, say what they used to say is, I hate to use the word, a house nigger. She was endeared by the family because she could work in the house. Her overseer comes to her and says I want you to put on your best dress, not that had she had much, and get your family together and dress them up. I'm taking you all into town for shopping. He piles them up in the buckboard, takes them into town, only to discover they are being sold on an auction block. Everyone is sold, with the exception of her. He brings her back home to her shack and here she is sitting at her window. She's sitting at her window and she starts to sing either "Motherless Child" or "Jesus Lay Your Head in the Window" and she sobs the loss of her family. A woman is outside hanging up laundry and through the lament starts to dance to interpret that music.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

VIRGINIA WHITE. I will tell you a funny story about me being called "O Happy Day." In 1970, we sang in Israel. In '72, we went back again and I'm out in the Mediterranean Sea, underwater, and I come up and this girl jumps up in front of me from Israel, and she says, "Oh, Happy Day!" I looked at her and said, "How do you know that?" I said, "We haven't sung yet." She said, "You did two years ago." I said, "You know a lot of times you see people out of context, they're not in their uniform or whatever and you don't recognize them." I thought how did she know who I was?!

BRENDA MOHR. I love your stories. Tell me about the relationship between Jester Hairston and the Jubilee Singers.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes. He's done several concerts with us. He's come to explain some

stuff to us sometimes. I'm trying to think if he did the Music Center with us. I know he did a lot of church gigs with us. Albert used to be the director of the sister church of this church, Church of Christian Fellowship in Los Angeles, right up the freeway. And he was there for many years and we did several concerts there. Jester was involved with those and then he was with us at the Music Center, I believe. It was either there or the Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena. We did a concert there, but he's done several things with us and he's been to several rehearsals to work with us.

BRENDA MOHR. Were any of his arrangements written for the Jubilee Singers?

VIRGINIA WHITE. No. I don't think so. They were already in existence and he just made sure we did them right.

BRENDA MOHR. Who are some of the other black composers that you met through your Jubilee Singers journey?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Robert Ray, Moses Hogan. Moses Hogan has done stuff with us. There's a young man who used to be with us. He died.

BRENDA MOHR. Richard Jackson.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes, Richard Jackson.

BRENDA MOHR. Richard was the music teacher at the Los Angeles Adventist Academy, so we were colleagues for a while.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Do you remember his brother?

BRENDA MOHR. Michael O. Jackson?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes. Phenomenal young man. He died first and then Richard. Well, Richard was a real gung ho Hall Johnson person and so he's done a lot of arrangements too. Hall Johnson, but he was much older so we never did anything with him.

BRENDA MOHR. Right. So he was older?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yeah, I don't think.

BRENDA MOHR. I'm trying to think when Hall Johnson died.

VIRGINIA WHITE. I don't either.

VIRGINIA WHITE. We've done some more but I can't think of her name.

BRENDA MOHR. Rosephanye Powell?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes. You knew where I was going. You're in my head already. Done a lot of her stuff and we've done some of Jester's cousin's stuff, Jacqueline Hairston.

BRENDA MOHR. Are there black composers today that are sending you their music asking Jubilee Singers to sing it?

VIRGINIA WHITE. No. The only person right now is Diane White.

BRENDA MOHR. Did the Jubilee Singers have a mission statement?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Our mission statement, as far as I'm concerned, has always been the spirituals are our meat. They're why we exist. This other stuff is because younger people have come in and said, Al, let's do this, let's do that. And Al can't say no apparently. I mean there are things I'm really serious about getting sitting him down and saying look, you know, let's go back to what we're supposed to be doing. Let's do samples, but we don't have to do whole program of it.

BRENDA MOHR. Or a whole set.

VIRGINIA WHITE. It doesn't make sense 'cause we're all older. He can't keep up. We have to remind him where he is all the time.

BRENDA MOHR. We can get that other music of the African Diaspora through other choirs, but it's pretty rare when we can get the spirituals from a professional Black choir.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes, because nobody's doing it! Everybody is doing gospel.

BRENDA MOHR. They're trying it, but they're not doing it the right way or doing it well.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. I really appreciate your time.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, I hope it helps. I mean there's just so much we haven't discussed, so many stories. It's just a multitude of things. Let me tell you this one story.

BRENDA MOHR. Please do.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Because it really involves how the music works apart from some of the other things I've already told you. We were in Yugoslavia and we were to travel from Titograd to Sarajevo by plane and we left the hotel at seven to be at the airport, which was small and not very far away, to leave by 8:30. So when we were walking out to the plane, it started to drizzle, just a little bit and so, that's no problem because we're getting

on a prop plane. And so we get on the plane and it starts to run more and more, and we take off, and after about a half an hour, I would say, into the flight, we thought we were being shot at because the plane was like somebody shooting and hitting the plane. It was like, ping! ping! ping! We're the only Americans in the group. Everybody else was first flight Yugoslavians. We flew right into the storm! They were jumping up in the aisles, heading for the doors to get out of the plane! The plane was like being on a rollercoaster. It was doing all these things! The only thing it didn't do was turn over! The people next to me, I was sitting in a seat that was facing to the back of the plane, the lady next to me had a baby in her arms, her husband was across from her and some other person was sitting across from me. The baby went up in the air [scream] and he's going [scream] and so I grabbed the baby! And I'm sitting there and I just said to myself, this plane is not going down with me in it. I put one eye on that baby, one eye on the propeller so I could see it. I don't know when it happened, but I started to hum. I can't tell you what song it was. I must have gotten louder and louder because when I get excited, my voice raises. Now, the Jubilee Singers, except for one, because that was Paul Smith. You know that name?

BRENDA MOHR. I know Paul Smith very well.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Paul Smith was sixteen in that plane, crying his eyes out! Tears were just coming down his face because he thought he was gonna die. The rest of the Jubilee Singers jumped up to help the steward and stewardess. There was a male and a female, to help get the people back to their seats as best they could because everybody's being thrown. It was a very difficult maneuver in there. All of the barf bags were gone and somehow or other somebody started to pick up what I was humming and the music settled everybody down.

We landed in Beograd, which was a big airport because that was the only one they could safely skid on without running into something. Getting out of the plane was very difficult. It was raining cats and dogs. It was like sheets coming down. We got into the airport. We were there all day long. About 2:30 in the afternoon, I'm trying to, I haven't sat down yet. I'm still carrying my handbags and running around. All of a sudden, my knees gave out! I'm on the floor. I think I was running around the airport because every time I tried to lay down anywhere, the couple of the baby I held kept throwing Coke in my face saying, "Drink? Drink?" And I didn't want to be bothered. I wanted to chill out but my knees gave out. The first people there to pick me up were the couple with their baby.

So here we are, still in the airport. We're due to be in Sarajevo concert at 9 o'clock. We had been there before, so people knew us. So here it is, 9 o'clock, Irwin gets on the phone, calls the impresario and says, we're just boarding. We're gonna have to cancel the concert. The guy says no, people here are waiting for you. You just come on. We got on the plane and 45 minutes later we're getting off the plane. The people waited for us in their private cars, picked us up, took our luggage in a van to go to the hotel, because we were required to carry our performance clothes, so we had those, and they took us to the venue. We had been there before. They waited for us to change clothes. When we walked out on that stage at 11:30, the place was packed! The story had gone out. They said, they weren't sold out, as far as I know, what I heard, the place was crowded. It was packed. People were standing in the doorways. Fire marshal would have [inaudible] everybody.

We sang for two hours. I finally looked at Albert, I was in tears, I said, "Albert, I can't sing another note. I can't." I turned and went to the window behind me and just laid in it. Before that happened, I saw this guy, out of all those people because they were sitting in the aisles too, he got up and was backing out over people's feet and everything, clapping and going on, I saw him leave. I thought it's time to stop anyway. So Albert explained that we had a terrible day and everybody knew and applauded that. We changed our clothes. We got in cars and at a restaurant, 3 o'clock in the morning. The man who had gotten up and left had opened up his restaurant, called his crew back and made us a meal. So we ate. We had just enough time to go to our hotel and change, wash up, do what we were gonna do, get back on the bus to leave and we were never gonna have a chance to sleep because we had a 7 o'clock.

BRENDA MOHR. Wow.

VIRGINIA WHITE. I'll never forget that experience. But that music we sang on that plane calmed the people down. And then the people, like I said, they knew us, so the reputation was they struggled to get there, you better be there.

BRENDA MOHR. I have enjoyed our time together. Thank you.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, thanks for asking me. This has been an honor.

BRENDA MOHR. Of course.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, there's so much, so many ins and outs. I was just thinking about, there's one more I can tell you that can show you how much troopers we are. There was a time we were late, we missed a plane, flight because of lateness, not because of our part, but because of the transportation. And we were in another amphitheater. I don't even know where this place was. It had to be some place in Pakistan or...must have been Pakistan. And we were in town on this bus. We started climbing this hillside and it was pitch black, we could hardly see anything. And all of a sudden we got half way up the mountain and we heard this, real high pitched undulating. Which we didn't know what it was at first, just that's another story after this one. They could see the bus coming up the hill. We're already late, but they were there and the whole crowd was yelling, undulating!

BRENDA MOHR. They were excited.

VIRGINIA WHITE. We get there and we're backstage trying to get in our performance clothes and discover there's no way these big huge blocks they use to build the pyramids, they have these big blocks, but the guys were climbing over the blocks overlooking everything, watching us, so we couldn't change clothes. So here we are, no makeup, travel outfits that bedraggled all day, sweated in them. We went on stage just like that. And sang out butts off. And they just did the same undulating! It scared us half to death at first.

VIRGINIA WHITE. And the other story I wanted to tell you was we were invited by the

entourage from America to go to experience Ramadan. You know what that is?

BRENDA MOHR. Yes.

VIRGINIA WHITE. They don't eat all day and they [inaudible]. And we were invited to this humongous carpet tent, built all with carpets. I don't know how they did it with the posts in the middle and that kind of stuff. And the ground was dirt. And it was our understanding that we'd be listening to instruments that go back as far as 5,000 years back. The same instruments they used at the time and they're still using those instruments. It was wonderful! And the word came down the pike that they asked us to sing, which was unbelievable because they didn't allow any outside groups to perform in those kinds of things. We thought, what?! Really?! I remember this song. It was "Soon I Will Be Done." If you know that song, soon I will be done with the troubles of the world, you know, it's really drumming. We, and Albert took it record speed! We sang that and this is where we first heard that undulating. I swear they were going to tear down that tent. They started that undulating thing and they were climbing on the poles. The place was rockin'. And they were stomping their feet and the dust was coming up on the stage. We're trying to sing, but this stuff. We sang that song. I thought this is the end. This is the end. They were astounded at what we could do with our voice percussively, as well as sing that in the song he picked was the right song and we just couldn't do another one. There's just no way, but they were out of their minds. And we thought it was 'cause they were hungry! It was amazing! But I thought those tents were gonna come down, right on us because the thing was shaking.

And in Israel and those places, we still talked about Jesus. We didn't alter our songs. One time we were asked and we said, why? What're we here for? Which takes away from what we were singing. We never altered our songs. Never.

BRENDA MOHR. Shows you how powerful the Holy Spirit is. And it shows you how it doesn't matter what part of the world you are in. You need to be spiritually fed and some people don't even realize it. And when they are fed, they are rejuvenated emotionally. Something has affected them. Brought them life!

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. You've given me such a gift. Thank you.

VIRGINIA WHITE. People need to know that this, like Albert has used this line and it came from Jester who said Africans were not stupid people. They weren't, what's the word I'm looking for? Illiterate. It has nothing to do with...let me give you another tidbit from Jester. Do you know how many languages do not have the letters t-h sounding the way we do?

BRENDA MOHR. No, I don't.

VIRGINIA WHITE. French, German...the first slaves were owned by old English people

who spoke like this [speaking Cockney]. This is how Africans learned how to speak. That's how you have *de* and *duh*, but they never mistake the rule for the and the. They always put it in the right place. It's interesting. But they were called ignorant and uneducated because they didn't speak like everybody else. Who did they learn from? They learned from immigrants who did not speak English. Okay?

Nowadays, you have blacks that are just lazy. I've heard so many white people say ax, not ask. Where do you think they got that? They learned it from them, so why are they the ignorant ones? It's little tidbits like that that you really get the history and you blame them for being who they are, but not how they were educated.

So that's another tidbit you can use because it wasn't anybody's fault, but you don't down somebody because of how they were taught to do certain things when they were taught by people who didn't know.

BRENDA MOHR. Interesting.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. Did Paul Smith get to conduct very much when he was in the Jubilee Singers?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes, he got to do some things. He's one of our real successes of that group. He really is. I have to give it to him because he's gone through some stuff, but he and you're right, that time of his life was devastating to him and to add insult to injury, he was accosted by the police one time, coming out of that same apartment before he was able to get rid of that stuff. He comes out to get into his car and some police grabbed him and slammed him up against his car, accusing him of being someone they were looking for and he fit the bill.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. Beautiful. You're special. Thank you so much.

VIRGINIA WHITE. It's been a pleasure.

[End of Interview]

APPENDIX L

INTERVIEW WITH VIRGINIA WHITE

VIRGINIA WHITE

November 22, 2016

10:00 a.m.

In-person Interview, home of Virginia White

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

BRENDA MOHR. When did you first meet Al?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, it's an interesting story. I was singing at a Methodist church on Vernon. I was part of that choir and we were doing wonderful things with Andre Green Wade was the director and we had some fabulous singers in there. We did the Verdi Requiem. I studied it for six months. I was the mezzo soprano in that. Somebody came to one of the Verdi rehearsals. They heard about, I didn't know they were coming for me, okay? And they came to the church and they were just sitting around and so when they introduced themselves, they said, we came to check out Virginia White. For what? They were forming a group called the Metropolitan Chorale and it was a group of selected singers to do a lot of show things and stuff and go to auditions and stuff like that. And so, we actually, as a group, became part of the 1964 theatre and around "Showboat" and I was the first one they hired out of the group. Then we started doing some other things around the city and in the group was Jackie Sebastian, Jacqueline Sebastian. She, literally, grew up under Al's tutelage and his sister. Al was four years older than Dottie. Dottie was four years old than Jackie, so everywhere they went, they carted her around 'cause she was too young to drive or whatever. And so she was in that group and so she asked me, she says, you know, my director at church is looking for contralto soloist to do "The Messiah" because the person that normally did it died that year, like in June or something. And she said, would you come and audition for him? So I went and auditioned and he accepted me, so I started singing for him in his church choir in 1964, December. And in '65, he asked me to be part of his group [Jubilee Singers], but he was so rigid on the time, it was every Saturday, every Saturday and it was at six o'clock and I worked in East LA, at a furniture store, and I didn't get off until six, but the way I drive, I could get there in fifteen minutes. So I told him, I'm gonna be fifteen minutes late. Well, you know, you're gonna get docked. And I said, well, I don't need your group.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

VIRGINIA WHITE. So they were gonna do some kind of a mini-tour going down to San Diego and on the way, they were gonna stop in Encinitas and sing at a cadet college. I was already doing guitar stuff at the church. I always do message songs, so I could sing that kind of stuff in the church, "Lean on Me" and things like that, and I had formed a trio

with Jackie and another girl, a friend of mine, Evelyn Davis, and we were always doing something at church and I was playing guitar. And he came up to me and he says, "Ginny, Ginny, we're going to a cadet school in Encinitas and I need that folk thing." And I said, "Well, you know how rigid you are with your rules, I mean I'm not gonna." So he says, "Forget about all that, forget all that." That man gave me 33 songs to learn in a week. 33 songs to learn in a week. Now, I have to tell you - because that group, as a young man, he started this group of people, fabulous musicians, some of them had perfect pitch, they never had to use a pitch pipe and they were cousins and sisters and brothers and couples and very tight group and they didn't want no stranger in there.

So the first person that really welcomed me was a lady called, Thelma Hicks, and she was the one that befriended me and it was after a while, they all liked me, but it took, to get through that wall because they were so. I mean, you could name a song and their harmonization was just out of this world. And so he gave me all these songs and I'm lookin' at, and I realized I could read a little bit because I'd been doing a lot of the stuff, ya know. And I'm going, where is that on this page? Because they were improvising and it was perfectly fitting. And I said, "Shoot, I can do that." I put the music down and I sang with them because my church only did major hymns and spirituals. I had the background. I was rarely, except for my own music, off book, you know? Because my mother and I when we'd get together, we'd always improvise. We'd reverse roles. She'd sing the soprano for the minute and then turn and sing the alto, and we'd just switch and we knew when we were gonna do it because we both had that flexible voice and so I was used to the hearing things and harmonies and stuff. And when I started to write, I would write that way, and so I thought, I can do this! I think I knew the first three pages of each song, and I said, "I can do that!" And so a lot them were going, like this to me, wow! And so finally, I became part of the group, they liked me. That's how it started.

BRENDA MOHR. I know he did an interview with someone years ago telling how he would get singers together for casting for Hollywood and entertainment when they needed African American singers for movies or soundtracks. Were you part of those?

VIRGINIA WHITE. We did "Amen," which was on television. We did "Blue Horizons." I remember the first time I met the guy that took Tony the Tiger. Real tall, funny guy, wonderful voice, ya know, the Tony the Tiger guy, and he was in that group, though there must have been 50 singers for this Blue Horizons place thing, so I was part of that. We auditioned for that and got that. I don't remember. I saw something somewhere, I thought, really? I forgot about that. It was something we did that had to do with the theatre, but he always involved because he worked with Leontyne Price and Richard Warfield, I mean, Robert. Richard? I've forgotten, anyway, her husband, and he sponsored us at UCLA, not UCLA, Northwestern University, and Evanston, which is the area I'm from. I'm from Lake Forest, Chicago, 40 miles north of Chicago. He sponsored us and I mean, wined and dined us. I mean, he just, it's a mazing, but he and Al were old friends, he and Leontyne Price were old friends.

Then the Music Center used a few times to do various things. Four of us were picked in '74 to do "Porgy and Bess," but only three of us were auditioned for it. I convinced the director to come to a dark night. We had Monday night at Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, it was the only night we could get in. We gave our concert and I

provoked her to come. I said, "You've got to see Victor Graham." She was trying to find somebody to be the lawyer, and I said, "You gotta come see this guy." And I just convinced her. And so she came and on the spot hired him. That's it! So we ended up four Jubilee Singers were in the production, 1974.

BRENDA MOHR. And then, between '64 and '68, Jubilee Singers must have been doing a lot of concerts, but not yet with Irwin, right?

VIRGINIA WHITE. No, we were doing things like going up to Northern California to sing. We went down South to sing, San Diego. We were actually just doing a lot of church gigs, but we were becoming very popular. I'm not sure where Irwin saw us. All I know is that in '67, oh, he was doing the International Folk Dance Festival. That's what it was I think. And he heard about us and we did some things with him, but '67 was where he put us in the pit for the Al McNeil Dancers. We did the "Revelations" and they used our recording for many years before they changed it to make it more modern. That was glorious. That was a lot of fun and in '68, we started touring with him [Irwin Parnes].

BRENDA MOHR. Would you say that that's the official year? I'm trying to figure out when is your 50th anniversary coming up? Or did it happen in 2014 or is it going to happen in 2018?

VIRGINIA WHITE. The 50th?

BRENDA MOHR. Yes.

VIRGINIA WHITE. We've already done that.

BRENDA MOHR. Were the Jubilee Singers officially established in 1964?

VIRGINIA WHITE. I say 1965. He may be looking at '68 as our start of touring because that might be more correct because we were, literally, since the original Jubilee Singers started, I think their year was 1870. We started in 1968. We used that as saying we are a hundredth anniversary of the first Jubilee Singers to go to Europe. And that's another story!

I can't remember if it was '70 or '72. It might have been a little bit later, but we were singing Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and the Queen was home and all the ads went out and they promised she was gonna be there. She didn't come. We spent ten miserable days in London 'cause it was cold, it was rainy, it was foggy. We went out to Manchester and Brighton and Glasgow and all those places and the bus always broke down coming home, so we were like up, out until like three or four o'clock in the morning and had to get up the morning to do something. And so the day we had off, they said you can for the Queen the day you have off, and we told her no. So people ask me, I said we refused Kings and Queens. That's my story and I'm sticking to it because we were exhausted. They were straight nine days and then the tenth day before we left, she wanted to, no, you didn't come when you had a chance in your hall, you know? And we sang for your grandmother. I mean, Jubilee Singers sang for your grandmother. You should have come

to see what it was all about.

So I'm thinking probably when we started touring Europe, when our first tour was in '68, so he might be going from there because the group wasn't known in '65 worldwide and we hadn't even traveled across the country because after that tour, we started singing for Columbia artists for two or three years. I think they dropped us one year and then they brought us back or something like that. And then other impresarios started picking up the ball because nobody like working with Irwin. And Irwin tried to leave us in Europe once, but it didn't work. He's done that before with the Archie Savage Group and one of the girls, Ann Dunn, her uncle, was in that group. He and his brother got left in Europe by Erwin and Archie Savage, who just took the money and left.

BRENDA MOHR. He stuck with you guys though for a long time.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Oh, he did. Well, he couldn't railroad us because I was sitting on his butt for a long time. I would not let him get away with stuff. Thelma and I stayed on him and Dottie. Dottie, the three of us, watched him like a hawk and he tried to pull some things on us.

BRENDA MOHR. Dottie being Al's Sister?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Sister, yes. She was the original company administrator. She took care of everything because Al is not a detailed person. He doesn't like confrontation. He doesn't like to negotiate. And then Michael and Diane, they were never company administrators, but they were more into the finance part of it, selling the stuff. When I wasn't doing it, they were doing it. I was the company administrator a few times. I know we were in Spain one time and I guess it was around April or so, and Albert, we were on television, and Albert got a call from somebody from Segovia thing. I don't know if you've heard this story before or not. And they wanted us to come back in August. Well, that's unheard of because they usually plan at least two years ahead for any kind of tour and they saw us on television and they said, no you gotta come back. You gotta come back in a couple of months. And so Al calls me on the phone and he says, "Ginny, Ginny, they want us to do the Segovia series." And he said, "But they're not gonna give us any more money." And I said, "Albert, go back and tell them that you'll accept room and board." Because at that time we were being paid, but we were paying for our rooms, and then it got to the point where he was paying half and we were paying half. I said, "Ask for room and board." They can't, if they want you, they'll find a way to house you.

BRENDA MOHR. Why did they want you so badly? I know, but I want to hear what you think?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, I think they just got excited because there was an announcer before each number and we had a live audience and they went wild over us. So he called me back in about 10-15 minutes later and said, "Ginny, they accepted it." I said, "Albert, it's called negotiation." He just wasn't into that. He didn't know how.

[Due to information of a confidential nature commentary has been omitted at the

discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. But they loved the Jubilee Singers.

VIRGINIA WHITE. They loved us.

BRENDA MOHR. It was the music; it was the passion of the singers.

VIRGINIA WHITE. You know, when you're going to a foreign audience that they hardly understand your language, and see the tears in their eyes while you're singing to them or even signing autographs, it's something hits that spiritual bone and people would come to us and say, "I've become a Christian." In China, you know, people didn't talk [about Christianity]. They didn't have any idea what they were coming to hear, but they clamor for the stuff they hear coming from the states. It was inspiring to us. No matter how many times you do something, you can't take for granted the audience that you're going to meet. You have to give them your best. And I used to always yell at Albert and say, "Don't give me no more tear-jerkers!" I get emotionally involved. I've learned how to let go and do whatever's gonna happen and the audiences love it. We were at Jeunesses Musicale in France, singing for kids, and he wanted to do "Monin' Dove," and I said, "Why?" They don't understand that kind of music. They loved it! I'm blubbering and they're just out there screaming. You just don't know what appeals to somebody who doesn't speak your language. It gets into your bones and you can't do anything, but accept it.

BRENDA MOHR. Was everyone in the group a Christian?

VIRGINIA WHITE. We had people that didn't go to church, but they had to be. Let me give you another example of that. We sang a joint concert with the Master Chorale of Los Angeles. There were some black singers in that group. One of them was a minister. I mean, I don't know if he became a minister after that or he was already, I know he was being trained for it, but John Knicks Reynolds was his name, big guy, wonderful tenor. He sang with Roger Wagner. Roger always treated Spirituals as "fun" music. It was their way to burlesque it and make it fun with pop whistles and "Hallelujah" kind of stuff. So of course the song they picked, "When The Saints Go Marching In" at the end of the program, they wanted us to join in. We stood there still as they clowned around. John had told me so many times, he said, "I saw the way you guys reacted to this music being clowned with." He joined us. He left their group and came to our group. There are so many blacks out there who don't understand what Spirituals are because they weren't raised up with it. They don't have the background. They didn't have the history. They were into gospel music, ya know? And all of that stems from Spirituals, the jazz, everything! And so, I said that to say when you're not knowledgeable of what the music is about and you have to experience it first hand, I can't tell you the number of audiences that are just stunned.

Another example-- I think we were in a small town in Germany or something, and this guy kept, the way he walked around was always with a briefcase, so important he thought, and the theatre was very intimate. It didn't house more than 300 people and he had the stage full of microphones all the way across because you people can't sing past

the third row. So he's obviously had a lot of gospel groups that weren't singers. They could scream a lot. I don't mean that disparaging, but they would yell or force the singing mechanism, which I can't stand the strain. And so first time, Albert says, "We don't sing with those mics." I was so proud of him for the first time. He got angry. And so the guy said, "Well, you're not going to be heard past the third row!" And Albert said, "Take the mics down!" The guy removed the mics. He was sitting down there in the second row with his briefcase on his lap. We sang first number and his face dropped. We sang the second number; his briefcase went to the floor. We sang the third number and by that time he was going, "My God!" Totally different. After the show, he was running around getting everybody's autograph. Another insult. He got to Albert and said, "You're not black. I don't need your autograph." You talk about somebody who got rid of that shirt and lit into that man! I'm black because of you! He went off! We all went, alright! So the guy was pleading with him to sign the stupid album and Albert wouldn't sign it. That was that misconception that he was not who you said he was. So that's one of those kinds of things. The music softens your heart. It just grabs you spiritually. You can't do anything else, but respond.

I've heard Albert say, "You don't snap to this music. You can clap, but you don't snap."

BRENDA MOHR. Yes, he says, "Snapping is Saturday night, clapping is Sunday morning." Part of me wants to rally the troops and say, "Look people, stop this." Really trying to get them to understand the meaning, the history of the spiritual and how it's not a showstopper. Stop treating it that way.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, that's how we when we toured across the country and being involved with the American Choral Director's Association. We got to train some of these people because they'd have us in concert or joint stuff and got the lecture and they changed. I saw them change. I heard them change.

You know, big groups like Dale Warland and Bruce Neering and these people, they got an education. They thought they knew it [performance of Spirituals] and they didn't. And so they totally did a one-eighty on how they treated the Spiritual from then on. They would fight over us. They're our Jubilee Singers! Because they became so, I found an article with Mormon Tabernacle Choir. I found a picture. I don't know what I did with it. It's in here somewhere. But it's, these people, I could not believe them. I said, well, all the stuff they went through. Of course, I'm finding out just in the last ten years, how much the Mormons were involved with the Underground Railroad until they were threatened. And then Brigham Young fled for his life because the owner was helping blacks to move from the north, but then they got scared and then the prejudice came back in again because we were traveling with, I don't remember, was it military at that time? But a young group, from Brigham Young University was housed in the same area that we were. They got the best barracks. They got the fluffy towels. And we got the leftovers. Until we opened our mouths and sang and then they went, "Oh my God!"

BRENDA MOHR. Did the Jubilee Singers experience racial prejudice while on tour internationally during the '70's and '80's?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Indeed. Even from our manager, Irwin Parnes. I mean there were times when Thelma and I really sat on him a lot. We started understanding more of the language and stuff like that. He would go up to the counter and say the singers don't need special accommodations. I want a shower. I want a view. The singers don't need anything. And I would walk up to the counter and I'd say, excuse me. He can go to another hotel. Send him out of there. If you don't have rooms enough for us to be able to shower and be comfortable forget him. He'd get so mad. But I sat on him, always. Thelma and I would always stay right on top of him.

BRENDA MOHR. But the audiences had open arms for all of you.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Oh yeah! People would take us out and wine and dine us. We did have a problem in one place we were staying, called the Grand Hotel. They had a lot of grand hotels in these places and they weren't grand. They were old. They were grand in their day. And a bunch of people took us out for a reception and quietly all got up and left us with the bill. And so when we left the restaurant, the man is coming out there and saying, you got to pay the bill. We weren't invited! It was a big scandal about that. The people that sponsored us snuck out thinking they were going to avoid the bill. Michael will tell you about that one.

We sang another joint concert with the LA Master Chorale before Roger Wagner passed away. He started the program. We sang the intermission then we came out and sang the second half. I'm usually because and there was like 40 of us then because it took us forever to get out on stage and we didn't stand on bleachers or anything like that. And I remember I was the last person because I'm the first person on and usually and the last one off. Roger is standing up in the wood part of the back stage and thought nobody could hear him and says, "How are we supposed to top that? I said, "Do the best you can, dear." [laughter]

BRENDA MOHR. I'm surprised that the Jubilee Singers don't have more recordings than they do.

VIRGINIA WHITE. We haven't recorded a lot lately. Albert keeps saying we're gonna do a recording and we haven't done it yet. So all of the stuff we have is dated. In fact, one of the recordings that's out there has this announcer that was announcing for us in Spain and it's a great thing, but it's old. You know, it was years ago.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. Did you sell recordings at your concerts?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes, a lot of times I was involved with that. I would either get somebody to do it for me or I'd sell them. I'd have to run during intermission and run out during the end of it. No, I think I found somebody to do it during the intermission so I could rest and then I'd get the latter part.

[Due to information of a confidential nature commentary has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. There was an article in the LA Times dated January 10, 1980. It says, "McNeil: Limited Recognition at Home, Spirituals are His Specialty." Why 'limited recognition' at home?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Do you know how many people I have talked to in the Los Angeles area who never knew who we were?

BRENDA MOHR. Yes, because I've told people about the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers and they tell me they've never heard of your group.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. Do you remember the broadcast with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in 1988?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes, those people could not stop crying. They cried and cried and cried.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. Would you say that one of the reasons you believed in the Jubilee Singers was because you wanted to be a part of Al's mission of preserving the Spiritual?

VIRGINIA WHITE. I became interested in history because of the Jubilee Singers. It prompted to me to know more about my family.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. What elements went into getting the Jubilee Singers sound?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well a lot of that is not only what he was asking for, because he knew what he heard and you can't imagine how different all of the voices were. And to blend the way we did, we had to listen to each other. And I think anybody's who is in the choral situation should learn that, but there are some people who came in, later, who had to be told, you've got to listen and that was Albert's thing. He says, "You have to, you're not soloists in this group." When you have a solo, you do your solo. When you're not soloing, you have to sing collectively with us. So we've gone with as little as ten people on tour and it sounds like thirty. We've had problems with things. There were times when Albert wasn't even there and we had to sing, like when Dottie died or something. He left tour to go home and I conducted from the side. We have other people in the group that

just stepped out and started directing if something happened. If Albert felt faint or something, whatever was going on, we learned how to just go on with the show and do what we had to do because we had been with each other long enough to be able to do that. And the new people that came would go, wow!

We had a young lady who had a gorgeous voice, but she always sang flat. Wonderful person. And we had to teach her, you have got to, when you sing with a piano, that's different from singing with a group, you know. You may or may not blend with the piano, but you can sing almost off the scale and still get by, but you have to be on your note. And you have to, and we all go through these changes with the vibratos. Sometimes you have to sing straight tone in order to do a certain thing. So we've learned being with each other long enough and hearing the stuff. And other people who have taken over to do the real hard work for, so he doesn't have to do it, but when he heard it he went wow. But it's a training process and you learn to want to do the best that you can do, sound wise, that the chords are fitting and they're not any of this. They're all even as possible. And everybody would marvel. You'd hear an individual and go, how can that voice blend with the rest of the people? But I mean, it does.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you try standing in different formations? Standing next to certain people?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes, we've done that. He's done the divided group with the women mixed in with the men. We've done just mixing up, just to be able to make sure everybody knows their notes. We've done that, but we've always found that the semi-circle with the altos and sopranos in the front has always been the best. But we have practiced with the mix up several times.

BRENDA MOHR. What was important to him in rehearsals? What did you feel like he always emphasized? Or wanted to work on?

VIRGINIA WHITE. He wanted us to read faster. And put the music down. And sometimes that was a good idea and sometimes it wasn't because you'd get started getting things, what we called, our usual term, we "Jubilized" it. Because we made it fit. Because you forgot or didn't have enough time with the music, but he wanted you to get that music and everything he do was always fast and furious. We're going, slow down now, Albert, so we can get, feel it, and then we can speed it up, once we learn it. Like I always feel, I was never the best reader in there, but it takes me at least three times to get it. I usually get the notes and the rhythm before I get the words. So I have to go back and once they start settling in, I'm fine. There were some people that would just read it down and some people have photographic memories. We've had that in the group. And a lot of, well, you're gonna see Michael later on. He'd probably tell you this. We'd jump on Michael a lot because when Michael couldn't remember something, he'd just improvise. And then he'd say, it worked, didn't it? But you know, but it wasn't the right thing and sometimes I've gone out on stage for things like "Monin' Dove" and didn't know what the first note was. I went, "Oh my God!" And I looked up in the heavens and I said, "Take it." I didn't know what I was gonna sing. So those things just go sometimes. And Albert would always say, "Just go with what you know." And sometimes you just have to let go

and get out of your head.

BRENDA MOHR. Was Jester Hairston around?

VIRGINIA WHITE. A lot!

BRENDA MOHR. Would he do some coaching?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yeah, when he was doing something, he'd say, "Don't sing it like that. I wanna hear this." He didn't have a whole lot to say, but when he said it, you know, we took it to heart because it was his music.

BRENDA MOHR. Was he a stickler about singing his arrangements exactly how you see it on the page?

VIRGINIA WHITE. He wouldn't say things like that. He went for the feeling.

VIRGINIA WHITE. We knew the music. It was just a matter of he would take something a certain speed.

VIRGINIA WHITE. But knew what he wanted to hear and he knew when it was just being sung or didn't have the feeling that he wanted to feel from it.

BRENDA MOHR. And how did he get that from all of you?

VIRGINIA WHITE. He would just say little things, just little tidbits. He didn't pick at anything particular. He would just say, "Let's try that again." I don't remember him being very meticulous pin pointing anything.

BRENDA MOHR. Like a technician kind of.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, one of the ways he'd get us to do it, he'd tell us a story. He'd tell us a story. Sometimes they were personal stories.

I went to a lecture at Cal State one time and he was lecturing. People were spellbound with his stories. There was his grandmother and the stuff she lived through and stuff like that and he would talk about the ethnic groups. He says, "Why blame black people for the way they talk? When back in the day slaves were taught to speak English from German, French and Cockney English speaking people." And he says, "You wanna know why they're lazy?" None of these languages have t-h sound in them, so that's why you get *de* and *duh*. You've never heard a black person misuse where those fall. It's *de* ocean, *duh* sky. I never forgot that. He said that because these people that own slaves were immigrants and they didn't speak our language. And the first indigenous slaves were from England. The poor people of England spoke with a Cockney accent that was difficult to understand. You have to really listen to hear what that is and that's because they didn't have a command of the [English] language. Everybody didn't speak high English; you know? And so that really spoke to me and it gave me a lot of fuel for fire

when I was lecturing about blacks of the south.

[Due to information of a confidential nature commentary has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. You just said he [Paul Smith] teaches his choir to sing spirituals correctly. What are the elements of teaching choirs to sing spirituals "correctly?"

VIRGINIA WHITE. It's not just singing the right notes and you have to take the words to heart to make them mean something so that musically, it comes out in what you're projecting. It's about the text and how the music allows that text to be projected from the heart because it is a heart filled music. You have to feel it in order to do it.

BRENDA MOHR. Is it appropriate for non-black choirs today to sing the Spirituals with the dialect as written in the music?

VIRGINIA WHITE. If you're going to sing a Spiritual the way that it was arranged and written by black people, you use *de* and *duh*.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

VIRGINIA WHITE. The classic Spiritual is a cappella.

VIRGINIA WHITE. That's the difference because even the Fisk Jubilee Singers, now, they don't sing traditional Spirituals hardly any more.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. Are the Jubilee Singers considered a semi-professional choir or a professional choir?

VIRGINIA WHITE. We were getting paid to sing.

BRENDA MOHR. So you're a professional choir?

VIRGINIA WHITE. Yes. So when people say, "What church are you from?" We say, "We're from various churches 'cause we're a professional group, not a church group."

BRENDA MOHR. Do you know how many professional Black choirs are in the United States?

VIRGINIA WHITE. No.

BRENDA MOHR. I think Jubilee Singers has been the longest acting professional Black

choir.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Oh, yeah. There was nobody doing what we were doing. We're better known in Europe and of course the Midwest.

[Commentary unrelated to the interview has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

BRENDA MOHR. Did Albert have his own performance practice of Spirituals?

VIRGINIA WHITE. I would actually love to hear Albert answer that myself because his main aim has always been, I would say, making them authentic, making them sound like it's an arranged piece because we know these were all single lined melodies at one time.

[Due to information of a confidential nature commentary has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

VIRGINIA WHITE. I wouldn't trade the Jubilee experience for the world. If I never do another thing, if I never go any place in life, I cannot believe this small town girl has been as many places as I've been and experienced so much joy.

I don't know if I've ever told you this story or not, but I have to give you an idea of what made us so appealing and I think this one concert we did will do it. We [Jubilee Singers] were in Paris. They had a very old concert hall. And we went in there. The place was packed with people. We went in there and we sang all of our music. We had like six encores. And we were the kind of group because the early stages we could pull up anything. And so Albert said, "We don't have anything else to sing!" and I looked at him and I said, "Let's sing the Hallelujah Chorus." He said, "Are you crazy?!" I said, "No, we don't need instruments for that. It holds together by itself. Let's show 'em we can do something other than spirituals." He looked at me and he says, "Okay!"

So we went back on stage. I gave them the pitch. We started to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus." It rang in that theatre like it never rang before. And when we stopped there was total silence. Albert looked at me and was gettin' ready to speak, and I whispered, "One, two, three...", and the audience immediately jumped to their feet and gave us a standing ovation! It shocked them that we could do something besides Spirituals. They went off the chart! I'll never forget that experience. It blew their minds!

BRENDA MOHR. I know what you're talking about because I've been to your performances at ACDA conventions and area churches here in Los Angeles. I know that feeling of when you guys are done, that feeling of rising to our feet to give the choir a standing ovation.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Well, I've gotta go to my storage bin and there's storage at the church and I've got boxes galore and I know every time I open a box I'm gonna see more Jubilee Singers concert programs and articles.

BRENDA MOHR. Yes, you will.

VIRGINIA WHITE. Being in the Jubilee Singers was my life. That was just what I was doing. And a lot of it!

BRENDA MOHR. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to sit with me and share your keepsakes. I really appreciate it.

[End of Interview]

APPENDIX M

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL WRIGHT

MICHAEL WRIGHT

November 22, 2016

2:00 p.m.

In-person Interview, Glendale City Seventh-day Adventist Church

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

BRENDA MOHR. Thank you for meeting with me this afternoon, Michael.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. My pleasure.

BRENDA MOHR. I'd like to start by asking you about Irwin Parnes the impresario responsible for the Jubilee Singers first tour to Europe in 1968. What kind of manager was he?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Irwin Parnes was a businessman and he was a very shrewd businessman who saw a great deal of potential and talent in folk music. Folk music and the music of indigenous people and he wanted to market that. Because in his career, I mean, what, the music of Trinidad and Cuba and Haiti and South America, and all. Irwin was very instrumental in getting, trying to get that out there, and I don't know where Irwin is from. I liked Irwin and I met him very early on. Irwin was a businessman and he was concerned with making money, period. And he was a hands on manager and Albert, as talented as Albert is, and was, all of us have our talents, all of us have our expertise, and the reason that some groups and entities work is because they have a team and everybody does their own part and carries on. Well, from what I understand, Irwin took the bull by the horns, which is the title of a book that he wrote.

BRENDA MOHR. Irwin wrote a book?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yeah.

BRENDA MOHR. What's the name of it?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Taking the Bull by the Horns. Something like that. Irwin heard the group and we performed for, what was the name of that, International Folk Festival.

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah, Gini mentioned that.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Right, which was Irwin's baby.

BRENDA MOHR. And did that take place here in Los Angeles?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yeah, at the Shrine Auditorium. We sang at that. Most of the singing we did with Al's group [Albert McNeil Singers] was primarily at churches, small churches, and we would take an annual trip to the Bay Area. That's when plane fare was nineteen dollars round trip. But we were doing little gigs like that and when we would do a gig at a large venue like the Shrine that was a big deal. It was Irwin's imagination that tried to get us to Europe the first time and I think I think that the first trip that was planned was something like '65 or '66, but it didn't happen and we just waited a year, and then the first trip was in '68.

BRENDA MOHR. So '65 is that the official starting date for the Los Angeles Jubilee Singers? So the group has already celebrated 50 years?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Right, well, you know what? The business end of it and Albert, you know, I don't want to step on any toes here, but from a business standpoint, I can see Albert coming up with the name, but coming up with the name at the suggestion of somebody whose looking at it more from a business standpoint, alright, which would have been Irwin. It makes sense because Irwin would have been trying to capitalize on what has come before.

BRENDA MOHR. Because all of the sources and newspaper articles, things I've read, say they started in 1964. No, it was 1968. And then this source says, nope, 1965 and so I'm trying to figure out which one is it?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Well, like you said, it was the Albert McNeil Singers. And then it changed to the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Why? Most of the material that we were doing was what we called songs of the black experience. So, what was interesting, was when we went to Europe, it was all we did was stand up and sing. There was no choreography, no razzle dazzle, or anything like that, so each and every year after that though, it changed because it's like, you know, how you gonna keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris? I mean, it kinda morphed, you know, that's what happened.

All through that I can honestly say, Albert has always been an academic and his primary purpose and goal and vision and his goal has been to educate the world at large on the music of Black America and of the Spiritual and that was his passion because you know, now, it's a little different because it's a much more commercial product that has been shined up and honed by everybody. But back then, at that time, we were the only ones. I think that what made the group so special was that Albert is a classical musician. He's a classical musician, but he took the skills that he had learned in the old moldy halls of the university and smoked it a little bit with the music of his people. The fact that he was very close with Jester, you know, had tremendous influence. And even though Jester was very deceptive and we're all products of our time, but Jester was a wily old guy who was funny, who was brilliant, who was intuitive, and extremely knowledgeable, and could read people, and had that, what, Clara Bow, 1926 movie star, they called her the "It Girl." Jester was the "it man." There was something about him that you immediately fell in love with. He was wonderful and that's what I think Albert was trying to take from him. And what was great, Albert really did adore Jester and Jester adored Albert.

Every time Jester would come up with a new arrangement of a song, he'd bring it to the group and we'd try it out. They had that kind of relationship. Jester had a professional relationship outside of Albert because Albert was always a teacher, but when Jester had a question about the pedagogy or the academics or the academic way of doing something, that's where he trusted Albert, and Albert, at the time, was a pianist. Albert's creative spirit to plug in was always a plus for him. Kids, even in school, kids would die for Albert. They'd ditch school, but they'd show up for choir. And Jester was the same way. Jester got me my first professional job. The Jubilee Singers, when it was the Albert McNeil Singers, it was primarily a lot of people that Albert had grown up with in that age and the 1960's touring group. I don't know if Gini touched on this, but most of the people, I was the baby, in the group. I was the youngest one and it was people that Albert had grown up with and he'd known and had been singing with 15, 20 years. And Gini and I always bumped heads on this. I'd say I came before her, she said she came before me. I had Albert in junior high school in like 1961, '62. So he was my teacher. I wanted to sing, so that's when I started singing with him and his group would rehearse every Saturday, no pay, every Saturday. But what was most important was the music. Everyone in the group had a love for choral music and everybody that was in the group, most of them, sang in his church choir, so there was a church rehearsal. There was a Jubilee rehearsal and in church choir, it was a congregational church and the congregational church has always been quite progressive and the congregational church was quite active in the abolitionist movement. Always been very political, so the rehearsals, because you had something about rehearsals, what were they like? It was a party. We sang, we rehearsed music, and what was really important, back then, was that Al wanted to get the music right, so we used sheet music and we read and that was his teacher coming out, in him.

BRENDA MOHR. What else do you mean by, he wanted to get it right?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. He wanted to be a musician. He didn't want to just sing. What's an eighth note? What's a quarter note? It's in 4/4 time. What key is it? And depending, and everyone in the group wasn't like that, but he knew he was playing the piano and people in the group, like I said, there was people in there that were old enough to be my grandparents, and they had been with him for awhile. There's a woman named Fanny Benjamin, who was a mortician and worked for Angeles Funeral Home. She worked for everyone. She worked for all the funeral homes and you can't divorce yourself from the community and I say that because when civil rights was a really big problem, the black community was very segregated and unto itself and I say that with Fanny, because Fanny, if you were black and you were buried, you were limited as to what mortuary you could go to and the running joke was that Fanny buried over half the black people in Los Angeles. She buried my grandmother, which is my family knew of her. They didn't know her, but they knew of her. And Hazel Chapman, who was in the first group, one of the, was a soloist at all the mortuaries.

You were limited as to what you could do musically and that's the Hall Johnson ilk, if you will, because he was a classical musician and it was very important to have class, to be educated, to have pride, to legitimize whatever it was you were going to do in the music and the music had to be legitimized and Negro Spirituals were never legitimized outside the black academic world. It was always the little ditties, you know? But they

recognized the importance and they recognized the importance of structure and of what it is, writing it down, and being able to perform it. If you look at the National Association of Negro Musicians and all of their chapters across the country, they were always classically oriented and classically based and they do Mozart and Handel and then turn around and sing a spiritual. Leontyne Price was like that. Robert McFerrin was like that. Fred Thomas, who was, let me get it right. Fred was the first African American to win the met auditions in New York. And within the black community, Fred Thomas's name had some stature, which is why he was billed as the soloist with the Jubilee Singers and even though he and Albert knew each other, it was Irwin's business sense that brought that marriage together, so that when he marketed it in Europe, he did that. And also, Bert Lindsey, who was another he was a soloist was there. Fred was a baritone, Bert was a tenor soloist, but Bert was a former student of Al's, alright, who had won some competitions, but here you have classical, but it's a black thing and when we took it to Europe they had never seen anything like that.

BRENDA MOHR. And they went crazy.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yes they did. We were the first black choir to tour. I'm sure that somebody could shoot holes in this statement, but we were the first black choir to tour Europe singing spirituals, in over a hundred years since the Fisk Jubilee Singers. And to some extent that was correct, but you have to take into consideration what was happening in the world. The Beatles were very hot and the reason I say The Beatles is that, I kid you not, you would have thought we were The Beatles in Europe. Europe was very different. I wish it was like that now. I had never really been out the states, but my first trip was we flew into Paris and what I remember more about everything, there weren't big, huge concert halls, but every town, I mean Europe has history, and it's the civilization, the art has gone up all over the place. And whenever we would perform, we would always perform in the churches, in the cathedrals, in the concert halls, and some of those concert halls dated back to the 1600's. Alright, with the raked stage and opera and if we'd of had any idea, all of us were excited and it was great. That was how it began and they loved the fact that we were doing Spirituals and the music had a magic that was not in any other music. I'm not trying to put anybody down. And I kid you not all concerts were packed.

BRENDA MOHR. I believe you.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. All reviews were incredible. The fact that when Europeans came to a concert there were no tails and tuxedo. Everybody came, men, women, children; they filled up these places. What Al always prided himself with, too, was it's a cappella, there's no amplification and this piano and that was the only accompaniment we had except that Ginny had her guitar and she played bongos. What else? Basically, that was it.

BRENDA MOHR. You tell me what you think, but I don't think those audiences would have gone as crazy if you were singing Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. No! Absolutely not! Right. What we were doing, they had never seen before. And even though they may have heard it, even now, I tell my kids when I'm

in school, there's nothing like live music. And they were seeing live music and we were, I mean, they would reach out and touch the skin of our arms and ask if they could touch our hair? Oh, and you sing too!

BRENDA MOHR. They wanted autographs.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yeah, oh yeah! It was crazy. It gave you a false sense for a minute that you were a superstar. Yeah, you were a Beatle.

BRENDA MOHR. Also, I think with the fact that you were a vocal group and not an instrumental group, because vocal singing is such a vulnerable thing to do.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Right, but you know what, now, let's look at it like this. Black music, it has to go back to black and white thing. Europe has always been a haven for African American artists and music. Always. Look at Josephine Baker. Look at Eubie Blake and Noble Sissel. Look at James Reese Europe, all the way back to World War I, his Hell Fighters. That song, how you gonna keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris, was especially for them and for the country bumpkins that had never been off the farm. I really got a kick out of the story that when James Reese Europe took the black band over there, they were playing a new music that hadn't really been called jazz yet, but it was earmarked with all the syncopations and the variations on the theme and the melody and at first, the French people didn't recognize the tune. But then, you know, when they did, it was like, yeah, oh yeah! The, what's the, it's funny, but it's sad, their instruments, they couldn't believe that these men, and they were all men, were playing their instruments like they were playing their instruments. They thought they were playing trick instruments because they didn't understand how they could get these sounds out of these instruments. But here's the funny part, they were all old instruments being held together with rubber band and band aids, ya know? And tape. But it's always the spirit of the artist that comes through and speaks to the audience. That's what it was then. That's what it was in '68.

Our [Jubilee Singers] timing played such an important part because of what the country was going through racially. It was. Vietnam was crazy. We were always running into ex-patriots that were over there, not so much military, as later when we made return trips over there, but we, let me get it right, the last couple of weeks, see this is Erwin's business. The first part of the tour was all commercial, which you're not supposed to call it in Spain, France, and Germany and then to get us home, we gave two weeks to the State Department and we did military bases. And that towards the end because April 4th, 1968 we're on a bus in Germany on a military base when we get the news that Martin Luther King had been shot. God, it makes me cry.

BRENDA MOHR. Wow. Powerful.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. It is. And to be part of that, and even now, I don't think that any of us really had any idea. None of us, we had no idea what were doing and what we were part of and unfortunately, some people say when something is meant to be, that it just happens. Well, I think that there are a couple of other things that could have happened

that, unfortunately, didn't and everybody always thinks they can make a better wheel. Let's go back to the way it was in the beginning. The group has changed as time went on. I think that the success of the groups that came after the first one could not have happened if had not been for the first one because like I said, the very first group, all we did was stand up and sing, no movement, no finger snaps, and Albert stood in front and conducted. But every group after that, we added a little movement, we added a little dance, we added a little [inaudible]. There was a song, that wasn't in '68, that's '72, where, and Irwin was still very much a part of it, but I remember I used to sing, put your hand in the hand of the man, okay? The group, it changed and it got more commercial in an effort to keep up with the times. You know, as other folks started to pay attention they took what Albert had been trying to pass on and came up with their own twist. One of the early times that we were working, was that there was always a gig to go and show people how to do Spirituals and how to sing Spirituals and there's a way. And even now people disagree, but I don't get that sometimes. They're basics. It is a happy music, but it's not a happy music.

BRENDA MOHR. Talk to me about "the way" to do Spirituals.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. You can't sing Spirituals and not move and when I say move, you can't and that doesn't mean snapping your fingers. There's a way in the church where they said you can dance in the church, but you stop, you don't cross your legs, which is why if you see a holy dance, the feet are apart. It's a holy dance and you can clap your hands, but you don't snap your fingers and of course, the strong beats like in jazz are two and four, not one and three. And rhythm is so important and folks get that wrong because it's something that you feel and then you go into it and if you feel it wrong, you can catch yourself. Oh no, that's not it! Here's where it's supposed to be. And folks do that and when a lot of white choirs were trying to do Spirituals, they'd get it all wrong. They would. And it had not the art of teaching the Spiritual had not really been translated and mainstreamed through academic circles and universities, so it was still an art. You now have people that are all over with doctorates and master's degrees and like Eva Jessye. Whereas before, there were people like Hall Johnson, who was a learned academic, but where did he have to practice?

So it was still with these small communities and Jester. Funny story about Jester. I don't care where we were, Jester had been there first. [laughter] It's interesting and like I said, when I first met Jester, I was like 13, 14, and I sort of knew he was but not really and all he knew me was as a kid that was in Al's group and one of the people in the choir was Jackie, was a good friend of Gini's, but Jackie was like my mother figure in the group because she was youthful in her attitude and she had kids that were around my age and Jester always mistook me for Jackie's. Oh, you're Jackie's boy. I said, no. That's right, that's right. But I used to see Jester all the time because we lived in the same neighborhood, so I'd see him at the bank and I'd always speak to him, but Jester, because he walked with Hugo Montenegro and worked in the film industry, I got in AFTRA in 1965, 1966.

BRENDA MOHR. What's AFTRA?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. American Federation of Television and Radio Artists because the, and you see, Jester was good for this, too. He got Albert, everybody's always looking for a black choir, so he, Hugo Montenegro was a film scorer and we sang the theme song for a movie called Hurry Sundown, but to sing that movie, we had to be union. And that's what got me my AFTRA card. And I'll never forget, AFTRA at that time, was \$110 to join. Try to get into AFTRA now is like \$3500. It's crazy and it served me well, at the time because if you do any kind of recording or any jingles or, it's like like SAG. Now, SAG and AFTRA are one. Screen Actors Guild and AFTRA. There you have it.

I love Albert. He's given me everything that I know, to be inspired by the music of my people. He has helped me in school, helped raise my children. He's my daughter's Godfather. Did you ever meet Helen his wife?

BRENDA MOHR. No. I remember seeing her.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Okay, well, they [Albert and Helen McNeil] were my parents. I was raised by my mother and my aunt. I loved Saturday rehearsals because after every rehearsal, we would go out and eat. And we'd always go to a restaurant somewhere and it was very, very different. My first road trip to San Francisco, my mom and my aunt let me go because I was going to be with Hazel and Hazel was an older lady that sang at my grandmother's funeral in 1951. Fanny was going to be there. But you know, that's where I grew up, I grew up musically and it served me well. I left the group because I wanted to do rock and roll.

BRENDA MOHR. Really?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yeah, I wanted to do rock and roll and R&B music and my first road gig outside of Jubilee Singers, I went on the road with Lou Rawls for a little stint. I didn't last too long, but that was my first thing up in Vegas. And since then, I sang behind Frankie Vallee in Four Seasons and. Because I wanted to do the pop thing, you know? I wanted to finger pop. I started singing, well, I got married and starting singing with a group called the Friends of Distinction that had some records out and I was doing what I wanted to do and it was great. I was doing a different kind of music, still choral music and everything that I kind of got together with that excuse me, I'm going back, and you can piece it together. I went to college right after high school. The only reason I went to college right after high school was that I didn't want to go to Vietnam. And I had friends that were being killed. I went to too many funerals. So I stayed in college, but I always wanted to sing.

BRENDA MOHR. What did you study?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Music. I got scholarships. Oh, little funny story, God rest his soul, I don't mean it in a bad way. I was the only black kid in the choir at Cal State Long Beach and when I was at Cal State Long Beach, Karen and Richard Carpenter were in the choir, and they were, at that time, the magical mystery tour, The Beatles, and we used to do, and I loved it 'cause I'm half way cute, and I could sing and all that, and they gave me a solo. And I was so excited and I rushed back and told Al and he just looked at me, what

Spiritual did they give you? He knew.

BRENDA MOHR. I actually heard that story before or maybe I read it.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. And it's interesting. The guy who was doing the music, the conductor of the choir, was Frank Pooler, who is a tremendous conductor and a really nice guy. I remember Mr. Pooler primarily because he was a cutting edge conductor that was trying to bring new music to the choral world. Now, as wonderful as Frank was, and as good as he was, do you know the spiritual "Ain't Got Time to Die?"

BRENDA MOHR. Mhm. William Dawson.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yes. How would you do it? [*singing*] The way that they were hearing it, [*singing very slowly*] "Looooord, I keep so busy praising my Jesus," Wrong! But I'm a freshman in college and I know it's wrong.

BRENDA MOHR. When you're busy, it's not slow. Things aren't slow when you're busy.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Right. I know it's wrong, but who am I to tell? Him? So people hadn't been educated yet, you know? We spent a lot of time with Jubilee Singers because we would tour across the country. We played every nook and cranny of junior college and university doing Spirituals. And there were always kids that would want to sing for us.

BRENDA MOHR. I love your stories so much. Maybe a little bit more about rehearsals? What was important to Al in a rehearsal, musically? What was important to him?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Nuance. It had to grow. There had to be a contrast. There had to be a climax, come down. And you had to pay attention to him. He was more of a conductor at the beginning, but a lot of people didn't really, I don't think, paid attention to what it was he was doing, but he, now, he's an older cat now, but he knew when it was minor or diminished and that wasn't right. He was a musician and just because you're singing Spirituals, don't short change. You know, sing it right and get it. What I think that the first group was so good at what he did is because I did say we rehearsed every Saturday, every Saturday. And we would rehearse. And he took it apart, put it together, put it together, took it apart, and we did that like that.

BRENDA MOHR. Most of those voices were soloists, right?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Well, all of them were soloists.

BRENDA MOHR. How did he get the blend? How did he get that?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. We were musicians. Everybody sang in church.

BRENDA MOHR. So they knew when to be a soloist and when not to be?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. We were all church singers and I don't mean it in a bad way, but it was a mom and pop organization. It was not a professional organization in the truest sense of the word. When I say not a professional. In a professional organization, you go and audition, thank you, next! There wasn't any of that.

BRENDA MOHR. I was wondering about auditions.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Well, Albert's always been a teacher, first and an educator. He's always been an educator. There are some of us that, you know, here's something that's a little touchy and I'll put it like this, I didn't think there should have been white folks in the group.

BRENDA MOHR. That's understandable.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Well, you know, and I really had to be careful in saying that. Here's my point-- Al's an educator. When you educate, you don't see color, right? So he was inclusive. Not at the beginning. And I will say not at the beginning because it was not musically pleasing or did not have an appetite to be a part of something like that. There was no one standing in line to be a Jubilee Singer. Even now I think it's less apparent, but it depends on what you're hearing and what you're doing. If you have four white singers that sing the same thing as four black singers, most of the time, you can close your eyes and you can pick and choose.

BRENDA MOHR. Absolutely.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. And it has to do with tone color and diction and feel and timbre and all of those things. Well, as time has gone on, I would say those things are like this. Now, back then, there was the great divide. And my only comment, and I said this not from a racial standpoint 'cause that was never part of it, but if you put girls in the Vienna Boy's Choir, it's no longer the Vienna Boy's Choir. That was the argument that I made, anyway.

BRENDA MOHR. As a listener of the Jubilee Singers, as a fan, I really feel like the glory days were the '70's and the '80's. And there were only a couple of white people in the '90's, but now we're seeing more and the sound has changed.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Oh yeah, the sound definitely changed. It was different. We had a couple of Asian folks. We had a guy name Ian Tan who was a good singer.

BRENDA MOHR. How long were your performances?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Two hours with an intermission.

BRENDA MOHR. From memory?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yeah.

BRENDA MOHR. That was incredible.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. And when we'd work for [inaudible], oh God, and that Gini would always complain about that because we were working six nights a week. Bus ride. Or if we had three concerts in a row.

BRENDA MOHR. He was one of your impresarios?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yeah, we had three, we'd have, on paper it didn't look bad because we had three concerts in a row and we'd have a day off and then two concerts and then a day off. It didn't tell you that on that day off you were going to be taking a nine-hour bus ride. Okay? And that got to be...that was crazy. But you know what, it either made you or broke you and for the most part, it made us and none of that could not have happened had not all of us been willing to lay our life down for Albert. That aside from his musical talent is his biggest claim to fame with the group.

BRENDA MOHR. Tell me more about that.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. It's just him. He inspired you. He was black and he was proud and he was knowledgeable. He was intelligent. He was sharp. He was charismatic and he had your best interest at heart. And in a time when your people is in the middle of a struggle, you need people like that and, unfortunately, what has never really happened, this is a good thing you're doing here. Albert has never really got his due and I don't think he's gonna get it in his lifetime.

BRENDA MOHR. He should. He needs to.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. He should have been honored and the group should have been honored at the White House.

BRENDA MOHR. Absolutely.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. They missed the boat on that. But Albert is very strong willed with some things and does not, did not want to relinquish any kind of power to anyone and he was set in his ways with some things, so it's not that he didn't want it. I know he wanted it, but I don't think that he had the expertise to go down that road. He didn't know how to go down that road and how to get it started.

BRENDA MOHR. I understand that because Gini would make references to him not being like knowing how to negotiate things.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. He's a musician first and foremost. We were all hoping and there should have been some kind of documentary on the group, like this, because there was, like you said it when I walked in here, there was no other group that had done this. None.

And there hasn't been one since and there have been other groups that have musically been excellent, you know, and comparable with the excellence that they perform their craft, but we did it all.

BRENDA MOHR. I agree.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. We did it all and throughout Africa and the Middle East and Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, the countries that are no longer even there.

BRENDA MOHR. Which brings me to this article, 1980, "McNeil, Limited Recognition at Home."

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yeah, nobody knew who the hell the Jubilee Singers were in the US. The very first concert, and I know Ginny told you about this. We were late going to the concert 'cause we arrived late and we were on a bus and we said they're not going to be waiting for us to do a concert, but we're in the desert and we're on a bus and we're going to a fort that's in the middle of the frickin' desert, alright? And we got there late you know they were waiting for us? And when we pulled, all you could hear was, "WOOO!" that undulating noise they make.

BRENDA MOHR. What country was this?

MICHAEL WRIGHT. It was in Africa, ya know, Morocco, or somewhere on the Northern coast. Those kinds of things and we were with the state department, that was in the '70's, I believe. Russ was the captain and the government, I don't think Trump is going to do any of this, but the government, when the democrats were in power were trying to do, like Eisenhower did in the '50s with Satchmo and Dizz [Dizzy Gillespie], trying to get our black music, there's that black music thing again, as ambassadors to those countries that were trying to cultivate some kind of cultural link with, which is why we were in Tunisia and Afghanistan and Morocco and then Libya and Iran.

BRENDA MOHR. Incredible.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Yeah. And that said a lot for what it was that we did. Story. So we're in Northern Africa and for a little black kid that lives in Los Angeles, my idea of Africa was Johnny Weissmuller swinging through the trees [*makes Tarzan yell*].

We go there and we're all blown away with Africa as a whole. I mean I spent. We were in Cairo. I still remember four days I'm in the museum 'cause I couldn't get enough. I saw King Tut before it came over here and I couldn't get enough of that stuff, but you know, it was a time of black power and all that and of course, we, they were wearing the caftans all through Morocco and Arabia and all that, so everybody is buying them, we all bought one. And we all get on the plane and we go down to Sierra Leone and all of us are wearing our African garb that we have on, and the people, not knowing we're coming from white Africa and we are going to black Africa and when we get there, I will never forget the woman that was with part of the people that we were with, I see you have adopted the dress of our brothers to the North. We will have to show you how we dress.

That's kind of like egg on your face a little bit. But there were other moments where we were somewhere and in some instances, if they didn't speak English, they would say, "Cousin?" I can't explain the, there was a kinship being in Africa. There was a beauty being in Africa. There was a feeling of going to Africa, but we were not African. We belonged there, but we did not belong there, but they opened up their hearts to us and it was wonderful and I was reminded of Jester and this is a funny story that Jester said, I never met an African who clapped on two and four. They always clap on one and three. All the Africans, they do this. And in listening to our music and how our music has come into what it is because we are multi-rhythmic, most of that music comes from West Africa. When you start listening to music of West Africa and you start listening to music in Northern Africa and when you start listening to the Moors that were even in Spain, you could hear it come together, but in part, you can hear it all separately. You know, you can hear it all differently, which is what the group in the latter years more recently than before, he was looking at the music of the diaspora of what has happened and the music of Brazil and how African it is and R&B music. It's incredible. So, I'm saying all that to say what he started, is still going on.

I left the group several years ago. I had to go a different route and they're going through a different thing. Their director, at the moment, is excellent.

BRENDA MOHR. Yes, I met her.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. She's excellent. She is incredible, but that's not the Jubilee Singers and I'm opinionated. It's not the Jubilee Singers. And it's still good, but in my estimation, it's gonna be a little more gospel and I didn't say this at the beginning, Albert was never gospel. Never gospel. And his academic senses would not allow him to be gospel. That, in the '60's, was set in concrete and set in stone. As time went on, it loosened up a little bit. And for lack of a better term, he got a little more hip and a little less academic. The group in an effort to be more commercial went that route as well. It's great, but that was a breath of fresh air that he was beginning to kind of loosen up because he's an intelligent musician. Now, it's gonna go in a different direction, as it should because someone else is at the reigns. The things that she has done are excellent, but it's not the Jubilee Singers.

BRENDA MOHR. I agree with you.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. Unfortunately, I think the art of Jubilee music is not a commercial entity like it was when we were able to take advantage of it in coming up because the venues are a lot more modern and for lack of a better way of putting it, it's more of a relic now. But it's important if you want to study choral music, it's another, it's a whole genre that deserves to be understood.

BRENDA MOHR. I agree.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. I talk to Albert still. And he's my mentor, so he's influenced me with things. He has a love that he shares with you, but he is not willing to short change what it is because he loves you and you respect that, so you'll make it work. And you know what, I think it is important. I think this should have been done a long time ago.

BRENDA MOHR. I agree.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. I thought a documentary should have been done just on Albert, but you know, I think he's proud. There's something a wing, part of the music school up in Davis that was dedicated to he and Helen or something.

BRENDA MOHR. You know; I think you're right. I think I read something about that.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. He's very proud of that. And you know, one thing, he's always tried to give back to the community and school has always been important to him, but reiterating again, that's the educator.

BRENDA MOHR. Well, thank you again so much, Michael, for meeting with me this afternoon.

MICHAEL WRIGHT. It was my pleasure.

[End of Interview]

APPENDIX N

INTERVIEW WITH BYRON SMITH

BYRON SMITH

November 23, 2016

2:00 p.m.

In-person Interview, home of Byron Smith

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

BRENDA MOHR. Thank you for meeting with me, Byron. How long were you a member of the Jubilee Singers?

BYRON SMITH. Well, I started in '85. I was in, as we call it the class of '85, because after Albert got back off the tour, a lot of people left the group. So you know, it was a hard tour. He brought in nine or ten singers in '85. I started in '85 and there is no official date when I left the group because when I actually started my own group, I was still working with him, and I kind of got a hit when I stopped getting letters about when rehearsal was, but then I got a call to go on a tour. I guess, officially, I have never really left the group. But I just got busy doing a lot of things and if Albert called today and needed me to do something I would go on for him. But it's been a few years, probably, let's see, about ten years, maybe twelve years since I started with them.

BRENDA MOHR. Were you the assistant conductor that whole time?

BYRON SMITH. I was never assistant conductor; I was the accompanist. In fact, when I got into the group because one of the young ladies was in my undergrad at Long Beach, Kay Nickerson, she was a member of the group because she went to Albert's church, Church of Christian Fellowship, where he directed. And we were both under Frank Pooler at Long Beach State and so we had both sung in the university choir and so she always says, "Well, I want you to meet Albert. I want you to meet him." So she took me to her church to meet Albert and then she invited me to the auditions in '85 when he was looking to get people in. And so, you know, I sang, but it was just interesting. I got a great ear, and so I had no trouble in the audition. My voice was pretty established then and it was funny sitting in rehearsal. I was just joining as a singer. Albert came to me and said, "You know you have the chance of becoming the accompanist of this group?" And I looked at him like, well, I didn't audition for that, but what does that entail? And it's very, very interesting, but I got into the group in '85. That October I had to go on tour. So I guess being the accompanist turned out to be something that was to the advantage to move me on the fast track because there's a lot of members who had been members of that group who have gone to rehearsal for years and they've never performed, so, ya know, it was an honor. On that tour I was initiated properly by Gini, Paula and Michael. It was a great, you know, grown up experience, coming right out of the undergrad type of thing.

BRENDA MOHR. Right, studying with Frank Pooler?

BYRON SMITH. Yes, I did my degree in choral conducting at Cal State Long Beach. I'm a 'Poolerite.' Yes, I was 'Poolerized' in the early years. Well, you know, Frank and his sound, there was just music in everything. You know, Frank was very instrumental in getting some of my arrangement and styles. I took arranging and conducting from Frank and I say I'm a Pooler because I have a lot of the styles, you know. They say a lot of students who went to Long Beach come out sounding like a Carpenter and there's some Carpenters in my music. But you know, Frank gave me a well-rounded education, gave me opportunities. He published my first piece, there at Long Beach. But one of the things we were missing, where Jubilee Singers filled in the blank, you know, at a state school, we don't have HBC's here in Los Angeles. We don't have historical black colleges, and so that African American experience is missing. And, you know, I knew how to sing Rossini very well. I can do Mozart and Schubert very well, but I didn't know who Hall Johnson and Jester Harrison were. I had some slight exposure through my church that I was playing at, but I was just not made aware of all of this literature. So Jubilee Singers was very important in terms of being a vehicle for rounding out my musical experiences and getting me exposure into the African American field, in terms of composers and music and certain styles and things like that. So it really turned out it came at the right time, having that opportunity. Also, along with Jubilee Singers, another professor, that I had gotten connected with, exposed me to the National Association of Negro Music auditions, which is an organization that is getting ready to celebrate their hundredth anniversary, which is an organization of musicians all over the country.

BRENDA MOHR. Albert was president, wasn't he?

BYRON SMITH. Al was not president. He was actually president of one of the branches, one of the local branches, is the Georgia Laster branch, and Albert was one of the founding members. He was very instrumental in getting branches here and in Los Angeles in that organization. He never served as national president. In fact, I'm the first national president. I've been national president since 2013, from the western region. It's something that has been an important part of my life. Between Jubilee Singers and them, it's just been important in terms of balancing out my exposure and it taught me how to be well-versed in African American literature and vocal songs that aren't songs and spirituals and gospel and all of that. The Jubilee experience was really instrumental in that.

BRENDA MOHR. Right, because you were in it when you were in undergrad?

BYRON SMITH. No, I graduated. I finished my undergrad in '82. I joined Jubilee in '85. I actually started working as full-time accompanist at Harbor College in '84 and so that's where I met Jay Wilson, who is involved with National Association [Negro Musicians]. But I didn't join Jubilee Singers until '85. And then, you know, I toured all over with them.

BRENDA MOHR. When you talk about being in the Jubilee Singers and auditioning, what was that process like?

BYRON SMITH. Well, the interesting thing about it was, I had not seen the Jubilee Singers perform and so I really didn't know who they were. And I didn't know what I was getting myself into. The auditioning process was, they had to sing a solo piece, they had to sight read, and then they also had us move because there was a choreography type of thing and they had us doing some staging and movement in that audition. I will never forget, we had to do excerpts of their Ellington medley, that they had us learn. You know, I had done musicals in college, you know, so I could always move. I've always been a big person, but I've been flexible in terms of being able to move, so I really didn't have any trouble with the auditions.

BRENDA MOHR. And it was Albert and maybe a couple others?

BYRON SMITH. Albert, Paul Smith; there weren't really members. Paul Smith was the assistant conductor that they had. Charlotte Neville was the choreographer then. It was her, Albert, Paul, and I think Gini was actually there too because she was also working at a ministry there. But there weren't that many people that were on the committee who decided.

BRENDA MOHR. So by that time you were in, in '85, he was already starting to incorporate gospel music and not just a cappella Spirituals?

BYRON SMITH. Well, I understand they had done gospels from the beginning. I mean, it was a cappella spiritual because that's what they were getting the calls for during their state department tours. But there were certain types of gospels they did. One of his students, Larry Farrow, you know, he did some arrangements and he had to arrange us some music theatre. He was a great arranger, great accompanist and everything and great at writing spirituals and different things and a heavy jazz background. Well, ya know, Larry would always have some gospel things they were doing too. He had an arrangement of "Oh Happy Day" that he did that was pretty popular. It was a good showstopper.

BRENDA MOHR. Is that the one that Virginia always sang?

BYRON SMITH. Yeah. Some of those songs were arranged by Larry Farrow. It was multi-faceted; it wasn't just a cappella spirituals, as I understand. Because before me, before I was the accompanist, there was Michael O. Jackson. Michael Jackson was the arranger for a lot of the "Soulful Celebration" and he worked with Quincy Jones and Take 6. So he was a great pianist. They kind of had a parting of ways right when I got in, so you know, I was able to step into the void. So he got real lucky because I happened to come. They got back off tour something like March and that's when Michael left the group and then I joined.

BRENDA MOHR. When was Michael's brother Richard in the Jubilee Singers?

BYRON SMITH. Richard Jackson. He joined 2-3 years after '85, like '87.

BRENDA MOHR. Tell me what rehearsals were like. What was Albert's teaching method or pedagogy? If you could tell anything like that being a part of the ensemble, if he had a specific set type of a pedagogy, what was important to him? What did he emphasize?

BYRON SMITH. That's a loaded question. Well, you'll have to take some of the answers you got from the other members. From my perspective, rehearsals were too long. They were three hours.

BRENDA MOHR. Every Saturday?

BYRON SMITH. No, it wasn't every Saturday. It was like every other Saturday, but it was like 2-5, 2-5:30. As I recall, we would look through music, and we'd read through music and he would just go through repetition. In terms of nuances, or anything like that, it kind of developed in the performance. Some of those songs really didn't gel until you got them on tour. We'd go out there and kind of just sing them and learn them and work our way through it because we wouldn't use scores, because of course everything had to be memorized. Sometimes they didn't get their personality until we were singing them every night.

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah, when you live with it, day after day.

BYRON SMITH. Exactly. I mean his focus is, ya know, I'm just trying to think of it. One of the things I've learned from Albert, because, you know, I've learned a lot from Albert because, you know, I started my own group, the Spirit Chorale. And I learned some of his administrative skills and then I learned some of the preparation of music. I've learned how much you can get away with and that's not necessarily a good thing, but I recognize a certain environments and certain things and people just have an appreciation for great music and great voices. Sometimes songs wrap together, but sometimes they were done with such great heart that that message was just more important than the technical aspects.

BRENDA MOHR. I've heard that.

BYRON SMITH. Yeah, and I've learned that from him and I recognize that you can get all upset. In fact, that kind of led towards my thesis in my graduate work. My thesis was the discovery of issues and tuning in the legit African American chorus. It hasn't been published, but it basically, when you study European sounds, you know, and things like that, you have a lot of things that you would do to try to keep the pitch, but when you're dealing with a certain tone and a certain music, that has a minor set-up in terms of tonal, is in the minor key and you're expressing it. The weight of it, to make it sound authentic, makes it very difficult for the intonation to stay. A brighter tone is easier to tune to, but when you're trying to give that feeling, the depth, of a Spiritual, you can't sing a Spiritual with a straight tone. You can't sing a Spiritual with a European straight tone. It doesn't

work and fit into the idiom. So the funny thing about the whole discovery, and I actually did interviews with Albert, Roland Carter, David Morrow and Donny White, and the four of them provided information in terms of the tricks they try to do to achieve it. But one of the things that I found is, it doesn't fit into the idiom and so there have been times we've been on stage and intonation would fall just because the acoustics, we couldn't hear each other. But we'd still get standing ovations because it was just all in the heart and how it was being presented and the experience of that Spiritual that comes across. That has a lot to do with it. It's just very, I guess in terms of your initial questioning, what have I learned, and in terms of his development.

Over the years, I had some frustrations because I felt like it could be better, but as Albert started to age, a lot of that. You know, there was a period where Albert was not even recognizing that he was losing his hearing. And then he finally got over it because you know, Albert has always been a young looking person, never looked his age, so you know, wearing a hearing aid, something to that extent, never has really been something, and the best thing could have happened is he finally got over his vainness and started wearing one. But there were times where things were really bad and you would look at Albert and say, Albert, do you hear that? Or you know? But he was still making money. And so that, you know, I use the statement, and this is kind of bold, but I love Albert, but sometimes it seemed like it was more important to make money, instead of making music, but I understand and I don't know if anybody has that type of candor, but I can understand that because when you got people, it's very difficult running a professional African American ensemble. And my group [Byron Smith Chorale] has been around for over 20 years and if it wasn't for my checkbook, you know, a lot of them still wouldn't be going on and so I have that respect for him being able to do that. There are not many places African American singers can go and get paid to sing. Unfortunately, the opportunities with the professional chorales and then doing Hollywood gigs and soundtracks are very limited. And it's a very closed market and it's the type of thing where a talented person doesn't necessarily have places to go where they can get paid to do that. Jubilee Singers is one of the very limited ensembles that gives a singer who is coming out of college, an opportunity to get a check for singing, and I think that's very, very important. And I think that's one of the great things that he's been able to do that for a long time.

BRENDA MOHR. Correct me, if I'm wrong, it seems like the Jubilee Singers has been in existence for the longest out of all the professional black choirs in the United States.

BYRON SMITH. Let's see...there's 2 or 3 of them. The Brazeal Dennard Chorale in Detroit. There's the Harlem Singers in New York, it's a smaller ensemble, but I think the Jubilee Singers have been around the longest. It's the longest ensemble.

BRENDA MOHR. I'm trying to compare professional ensembles.

BYRON SMITH. Yeah, professional ensembles. God rest his soul, when Moses Hogan was around, his group started out as a community choir and then he broke it off into two ensembles because it was very difficult in terms of being able to pay everybody. Then it becomes very difficult to get people to come to rehearsal and that kind of stuff. My whole

thing is, one of the things that Albert would always do, in terms of Jubilee Singers, and I made mention of this earlier, is that he would always have a buffer of people and sometimes people would be in the group and they would never work. They would come to rehearsal all the time, but they would never work and sometimes he'd have 25-30 people in the choir and he'd only sing with 12-15 and that's because when he gets in a bind and needs to go out, he needs to have some buffer to go against. Every other year, he would do a big concert where he would use everybody, but there were limited times for people to get a chance to work. I don't know if things have changed here recently. That was always something that I always never wanted to have a group where everybody couldn't sing if they wanted. It's been to my demise because sometimes people are not available and have trouble trying to pull together voices and everything. It's hard getting people to work, hard getting people to rehearse. They're not getting paid for their rehearsals and that's a little difficult. But you know, that's just some of the experience, I know members of the group who just got tired of waiting for their turn. Only reason why I got pushed up in the pecking order is that he needed me to play. I would still be sitting around waiting for my opportunity. That's the only reason why I got pushed up.

BRENDA MOHR. Back to his rehearsals...Jubilee Singers had a sound. It had a certain sound, especially in the 80's and 90's, how did he get that sound if there was a technique or was it just because they were such amazing singers, or was it both?

BYRON SMITH. Jubilee Singers sound suffered when they got a lot of turnover. When I got in Jubilee Singers, even though there was a large group that came in, there were people that beat us into Jubilee Singers, beat us into what we needed to sound like. It was, ya know, when I got in Jimmy, in the tenor section, Richard White and Paul Smith, and they trained you. Yeah, so a lot of it was emulation of who was there because you didn't want. They were very, holding onto their spot because they didn't want all these singers. And there was a group of singers who came, class of '85 was a talented group. We learned how to be Jubilee Singers from Jubilee Singers. We learned how to have a certain air on stage and a lot of that came from the membership, not as much from Albert saying, you have to do this. And it's just something that developed in terms of the quality that was there and the little tricks that you learned. Maybe you don't need to do it this way, and you learned a lot from those veterans that came in. And then new people that came in with you, you taught them. Where it started to suffer, was when the turnover started to get too extensive and there was nobody. A lot of people were in and they didn't have anybody to train them to be a Jubilee Singer. It's a very interesting type of thing. That sound, back then, was just developed because you had those big voices. Victor was one of those. Victor taught you how to tour and what was so interesting, Victor was a very quiet person, but he would say something under his breath that told you the direction that you needed to go in and how to handle it. And it was just very intriguing. My mother worked at the post office with Victor and so she said, "Yeah, this guy, he takes off work because he goes sings somewhere and then he comes back." And then when she found out I was singing in a group with him, she said, oh, I guess you hit the big time now? That was the biggest thing in terms of how did the sound develop. The sound developed because you fit into that Jubilee sound. You didn't step in. Muriel Bennett, who has been in and out, she was a class of '85. Big voice, huge voice, but you know, they broke her

down to make her fit in and you know, when new people came in, she taught them how to do it, so it was just kind of like that and I don't think a lot of people recognized what was going on. You know, Gini being there from the beginning, you know, she probably knows that she told people how to do things. No, we don't do this. No, we don't do that. And as I heard them throughout the years, that's really what established the sound. That's what really made it because people were taught. You were taught from the beginning. And then Albert, Albert would really work notes, but a lot of interpretations and things came from inside. It was amazing being on tour. We called it "Jubilizing" because songs would change.

BRENDA MOHR. I think Gini used that term.

BYRON SMITH. Yeah, we used that term a lot. Songs would change. Because you're singing the same songs. "Oh, Happy Day," if you looked at the score, and heard all the extra notes that were on it, that people did, because we would close every show with it and we started doing different things. It's so funny because I tell my students, I teach a business of music class, and I tell them, it's very interesting how we sit back and wonder how so many entertainers and artists can get on chemical alterants to get through the club, get through the show. And I said, you know through my touring, it's very difficult to do the same show every night. While I'm playing and gigging, I'd try to finger differently just to keep myself intrigued. Can I play that passage using different fingering or something like that? Or if I'm singing something, can I do it in a different way and still stay within the realms of everything. And you do that to keep it fresh, to keep it going. And it's very difficult, so it's so funny, in Jubilee Singers, we'd change those arrangements and do something. "Happy Day," became so syncopated, some of the spirituals became so involved that it was just amazing how they developed, how the song sounded at the beginning of a three-month tour than at the ending of a three-month tour because they had grown and developed. And a lot of nuances come within it. Albert was the ringleader, the cheerleader and he would just get us started but a lot of it was just developed from the creativity and musicality. A lot of that stopped when the musicality really. You know, a lot of people, some people enjoyed the group, some people thought it was difficult in the group because they felt they weren't getting seen. There was always that spirit of competition. And Albert was very good at keeping that spirit of competition going. He'd get a bunch of divas around, ya know, that spirit of competition can be really hard. I used to get tickled to sit back and some of it was evil, there were some of the original Jubilees would and they would some things, when someone had a solo, they would just change the intonation, and they'd do it on purpose, or they'd sing a quarter step down, evil stuff, or not come in. A lot of the Jubilee Singers, when their solos would come up, they wouldn't sing the song before that. And they'd sit up there saving themselves for their solos and I'd say well, you know, there's only three tenors here; you gonna save yourself, you better come on. But those are some of the little tricks that go on.

I think the biggest, that Albert's really been blessed by being able to pull in some talented people and pulling in some talented voices to establish and make that what it is, and there was a day when they really had a unique sound and now the sound has transferred and suffered over the years for various reasons, but that's a whole other dissertation. But you know, a lot of it still has the same heart and that's what most

important. It's a music that I have found all over the world. People have an appreciation for and it's great and I give great mad respect to the Jubilee Singers for being able to keep it alive.

BRENDA MOHR. Did he ever talk about blending the vowel, or more 'oo' or more 'e' in your 'oo'? Did he get technical like that, more like what he learned from Joseph Flummerfelt and Father Finley Williamson when he studied in Switzerland for a year and was doing classical choral, did he ever use that in his rehearsals?

BYRON SMITH. I'm just trying to rewind the tape in my photographic memory and see if that was ever a part of rehearsal. He'd probably say, come on, sopranos, sing it again, but it was never a technical stuff like that. You know, he might say, you need to blend better, but the African American experience is the singer comes from a different foundation. African American voices are something that, and culturally, I think it's just from the experiences of being able to call the kids in from the Serengeti.

I'll tell you a story, it was so funny, we were on tour, the Spirit Chorale. We were on tour and Frankfurt, Germany and we were in a small industrial area where the hotel we stayed in had a lot of people that worked. Well, you know, singers are very vocal people. And apparently, there were a lot of people from the neighborhood that stayed in that hotel that worked and you know, we'd come in from a concert, all warmed up and everything is loud and everything is resonant, and we talking, and we laughing, and all this stuff and it was so funny, the next morning, in the breakfast, one of the singers was down there and the servers said, Your people, they're so opulent. And, you know, in her translation into English. And I said to myself, and it really is an opulence. You can take 12 African American singers and put them in front of a group of non-African American singers. We did Porgy and Bess with the San Diego Symphony and had 12 singers and there was a chorus of 40 and the 12 singers, in their opulence, was able to over-sing the 40 singers behind. And it's just a cultural experience, so in terms of, unless we were doing something very small or doing something very sensitive, unification of vowels, and some of those different type of techniques really don't, they just weren't a part of it because a lot of it was done with opulence.

BRENDA MOHR. Got it.

BYRON SMITH. So you see what I mean?

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah.

BYRON SMITH. You know what I'm saying in terms of that.

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah, that's a lot what Michael was talking about yesterday.

BYRON SMITH. Yeah, you know it's just a little format in terms of that. It's interesting, but it all blends together. It's not wobbling all over everywhere. It has to have a center to it and that type of that thing, but it's just coming from a different format.

BRENDA MOHR. And most of the singers, if not all of them, in their own right, were wonderful soloists, right?

BYRON SMITH. Yes.

BRENDA MOHR. And correct me if I'm wrong, but it seemed like they knew when to be a soloist and when not to be.

BYRON SMITH. Exactly, you had to know when to pull it in and be a choral singer. And that's very difficult to do, to take a soloist and make them into a choral singer. Soloists don't work very well in the realm of trying to blend. "It's about me. You blend with me."

BRENDA MOHR. Right. But you know that says a lot that they were willing to do that to.

BYRON SMITH. Yeah, and you know, and being willing is all part of being part of an ensemble, but I think what made it good was all of them also had their opportunity to be soloists. And he spread it around. And he gave people chances to step out and that type of thing. They knew they had their moment. They had their moment in the show, you know. I was an accompanist, but I always had a solo, you know.

BRENDA MOHR. I saw them in workshops and concerts and I remember now just many different people having different solos and being showcased. Do you feel like there was ever an underlying philosophy that he never ever said, here's what I believe in and here's what we're doing and here's my goal, but it was just kind of underlying and everybody just kind of knew it?

BYRON SMITH. In regards to the choral sound or in regards to?

BRENDA MOHR. No, just what it took to keep the, we're past 50 years now, and they're still, they still want to go. There are still people who want to go and be a part of it and sing. How did he keep them just?

BYRON SMITH. Well, you know, you keep them because being a part of.

BRENDA MOHR. Besides the pay.

BYRON SMITH. That's how you keep 'em. I mean, I started my group with friends. They're still my friends, but they're friends that are employees. They're friends that I send them 1099's at the end of the year, so would they still be my friends after it's all said and done? Yeah, but they like me more when I take them on trips. They like me more when, and that's one of the things about Jubilee Singers, you had opportunities to go places in the world. I went places in the world. I would have never gone to Israel if I weren't in Jubilee Singers. And I'm lying on the beach in Tele Aviv with the little kids and the gardens. Because you know, they join the army at 16. And so those opportunities, I wouldn't have, so having something like that is having something that the average person

would not have. I think that's what keeps it together and that's what's intriguing for people, but and that and the pay. And then once you have that experience of being in a European opera house, and performing and experiencing a European audience where they'll give you encores, encores, just for your singing. That's a big head trip too. You get caught up in that. I think that's the focus in terms of what's really kept it going, but on the other side of that, he's had quite a few of flow-throughs. There are not many Gini's and Michael's and people who have been involved with the group for 50 years, because a lot of people float through and they get frustrated or they find other things to do. It's still been going a long time and it says a lot.

BRENDA MOHR. Speaking of those encores, Jubilees were, they were rock stars in Europe and here, like, this newspaper article from 1980. 'McNeil, limited recognition at home.' And in Europe, you know, you guys are rock stars, but he can even say, it grieves me when I read Los Angeles asks him how he feels about his lack of wide recognition. "I'm not bitter," the genial chorale conductor smiles, "after all, there's plenty to do."

BYRON SMITH. Where was that at?

BRENDA MOHR. 1980, Daniel Cariaga, Los Angeles Times.

BYRON SMITH. LA Times?

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah, 'Limited recognition at home.'

BYRON SMITH. Interesting. Limited recognition. I don't know if I agree with that, but you have to also look at a lot of people don't recognize that Albert McNeil has African American blood in him.

BRENDA MOHR. Right, he was adopted.

BYRON SMITH. And he's got Puerto-Rican background and all that stuff, so there's some African blood that flows through there, but he doesn't and so I think a lot of that has to do with recognizing Albert because it's an African American group that looks like it has a white conductor. If it was Brazeal Dennard's Chorale, or the Moses Hogan Chorale, there's not that question. Because when I first met him, I looked at him and said, who's this little white man? I think a lot that has to do with because there were a lot of conductors in the city that got recognition, but he was not getting the recognition because there were always some questions. That's why Albert talks a lot in his concerts, ya know. He tells the story every concert and he talks and talks and talks, there's plenty of story, that type of thing. It's interesting. That's why I made the face when you were reading that article because nobody gets recognition more than Albert because nobody can tell Albert's story better than Albert. And when Albert walks into a room, he's going to make sure you know who he is and that's what's very intriguing about him and I've learned that for years and I've watched him do it. And I've watched him fit into different types of social or cultural environments. He'll walk into a certain environment and start speaking in Spanish. And then he'll walk into another environment and start speaking in German.

So he's very international and I think that's what has helped him, but if there's lack of recognition, the lack of recognition is recognition of what and who he really is, that type of thing. So that's intriguing, and why I'm smiling.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you know Irwin Parnes?

BYRON SMITH. Mhm.

BRENDA MOHR. Was he the impresario for the group when you were in there?

BYRON SMITH. Mhm. He's a crook.

BRENDA MOHR. Gini and Parnes are not best friends. She felt, well especially early on, especially the early tours, really felt like he wasn't making an effort to treat the Jubilees well, like checking into a hotel, oh they don't need rooms with a shower. They'll be fine. The singers will just like sleep on a couch or whatever. And she always kept tabs on him and stuff. Was he still that way in the 80's when you were in there?

BYRON SMITH. Well, because during the transition in the 80's, they went from Irwin Parnes and then became a Columbia-artist group. Well, I mean, he would take advantage of a lot of things and when the group first started, you know, they really didn't have some of the amenities that it had when I got there in '85 in terms of, they had to pay for their own hotel rooms, and that type of thing, as I understand. One of Irwin's gigs was a Japanese tour. We did Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan. It was like a two-week tour type of thing. When we got to Japan and our contract just said that our food was going to be covered. In fact, they had an opening dinner, and we went to this Japanese restaurant. Food in Japan is very expensive and so everybody was all excited because our food was going to be covered. Well, this was a breakdown of communication and Albert put in his contracts, that our food was going to be covered, per Irwin, but the contract with the impresario was not final with that type of thing. So we got there and all of a sudden, we were told, no, the food is not covered. And it was a coup. And unfortunately, this tour we had all the original Jubilees. You had Gini, you had myself, Paul Smith, Michael Wright, Carver, you had all the big wigs that were you know, people who had been in the group for awhile. And we had a coup. We said, no we're not performing. It was like a little strike in Japan. And it was the funniest bullet train ride in history when Albert and the impresario were in one train and the Jubilee Singers are back in another train and we're saying, no we're not singing. It was actually kind of funny.

BRENDA MOHR. Wow.

BYRON SMITH. And how it all came down to, was the fact that they decided they was going to give us extra money to cover our food. And so everybody was running and had to have a secret meeting with, I call him the Godfather. He had this room and we all had to go there and sign to get this extra money. And everybody signed but me, and I just let him sweat just a little bit longer. And I said, "Albert, one thing you have to recognize, is that I'm a businessman, too and this is not my problem. This is your problem because I

didn't sign a contract with Irwin Parnes, I signed a contract with you." And he was just sitting there sweating in his boots and I got tickled because I was just making him sweat. But I said, "See, but nobody thought, how are you going to report this extra cash. Are you reporting it as pay? Or are you going to give me a 1099? Oh, I hadn't thought about that. Nobody has thought about that, Albert." And it was just a funny type of thing, and I went ahead and signed it and I was being the last one because everybody was being so busy, oh, we got this extra money. But I said, "Hold on a second, no." Because, the thing is, and he was just so mad because apparently, Irwin Parnes was the breakdown in all that and he was just so mad at all that stuff that happened, but it was a little second class citizen thing going over there with Irwin--that type of thing. You know, it was more than what I was doing, so I wasn't complaining, great opportunities, but that's hard and trying to find people.

Jubilee Singers is an interesting entity because we're not a gospel group, same problem I have with Spirit Chorale, we're not a gospel group. We're legit singers that sing classical music of African Americans, so do you get classical management? When you get classical management, the only time they going to call you is if you're doing Porgy and Bess. They're not going to call you for anything. They're not going to call you for anything but Porgy and Bess and Aida. Or if they're trying to terminate your lease. You don't get no calls because they figure we don't need African Americans to do that because other groups can do that, so it's very difficult to contract. It's very difficult to contract those kinds of groups. Now, Europe has always been excited about the spiritual and excited about having the groups come over and that type of thing. But now Europe is to the point where they have enough African Americans over there, they take 2-3 over there to teach the Europeans how to do it and they don't need us to fly over there. So the opportunities over there are limited. It's even the same way in Japan. You know, they've got great gospel choirs in Japan now.

BRENDA MOHR. Wow, Interesting.

BYRON SMITH. For a convention we had a group of a hundred and fifty Japanese, came from Tokyo, singing for an AME conference, a church conference, and they came in there and tore the place up singing gospel music. It was very intriguing. It was intriguing how they've taken the whole idiom and they're doing their own thing with it.

BRENDA MOHR. Wow.

BYRON SMITH. And so it's a different time. And it's been a difficult time, but you know, that business aspect of it has always been very interesting. And Irwin Parnes, when you say the name, it's been very interesting because I block it out.

BRENDA MOHR. What about performance practice of the concert spiritual? Anton Armstrong definitely has opinions. I read a chapter that he wrote in Teaching Music Through Performance in Choir. I have one or two articles where Albert's been interviewed about performance practice. I would love to know if you have your own personal set of guidelines of things you've gleaned through the years, working with other choral musicians, kind of collecting your own performance practice.

BYRON SMITH. Spirituals are such an engaging music. It's music from the heart and soul, so it cannot be sung without any type of expression. And then it's also stories of the Bible. One of the things about Jubilee Singers which was interesting, in contrast, and I hate to do complement comparisons between that and my group, but you know, Jubilee Singers were many denominations and then persons of no faith and you know, it wasn't.

BRENDA MOHR. Oh, I was wondering.

BYRON SMITH. It wasn't required that you had a religious practice and then a lot of them were Seventh-day Adventist who worshiped on different days and had different, like Michael O. Jackson was a Seventh-day Adventist.

BRENDA MOHR. Jesse Martin, Lisa Gray-Ashley?

BYRON SMITH. Yes.

BRENDA MOHR. Veronica?

BYRON SMITH. Veronica Howell. Yes, and so you had that in spite and as you know, Seventh-day Adventists are such great musicians. It's like in the rulebook that you have to be or they'll kick you out of the church. And so, you know, you had a lot of, there wasn't necessarily a spiritual base of that and that came across the Broadway, Hollywood feeling, came across in a lot of performances. And sometimes that kind of struck me as spirituals should not be this. It should not be that because it's built from a different place and everything. And sometimes Jubilee Singers would get on that page. It's all about the engagement of it. Sometimes it became a little more theatrical than Spiritual, but you still had to put on a good show. In terms of the performance practice, you would always have to readjust to the hall. Albert was always keen for readjusting tempos to the acoustics. That's one of the things that he would do a lot. A lot of those opera choruses had a lot of velour and velvet and the seats and everything. And you'd walk on stage and...

BRENDA MOHR. It felt like you were being choked?

BYRON SMITH. Exactly!

BRENDA MOHR. I would imagine, and correct me if I'm wrong, were all of you pretty committed to what the arranger put on the page. If he/she put piano, did you abide by that, or did you sometimes change it? Tempo markings, if he/she had a certain tempo marking, were you pretty good about sticking to that?

BYRON SMITH. No, you know, it's so funny in Spirituals. Moses Hogan, he would get so upset about people not abiding by his marking and his music and things like that and sometimes it would just change because of the feeling of what was going on and it's a shame because we really not necessarily would follow.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you accompany from memory or did you have a notebook with you?

BYRON SMITH. Oh, yeah I had scores, in fact you can see my music there. [Cell phone photo] Most of it was Porgy and Bess. The gospel ones were either Larry Farrow's stuff or...

BRENDA MOHR. Robert Ray?

BYRON SMITH. Yeah. Robert Ray. He Never Failed Me Yet. Usually I had scores.

BRENDA MOHR. Were you in there during the 'Ellingtonia Medley' years?

BYRON SMITH. Mhm. I played it a million times, Ellingtonia and all that stuff, yeah.

BRENDA MOHR. Do you carry any of Albert's philosophies, whether they are musical or otherwise, whether they're life lessons or things like that, with you today?

BYRON SMITH. Well, you know, when you first get into Jubilee Singers, it was a shake up because Albert would call everybody 'baby' and it was so Hollywood. Baby, oh baby, we need to do this and baby that and I'm like, baby? And then we used to make fun because we could always tell when Albert was trying to skate around the real truth, the baby would get real slower. Baaaby. And now I find myself calling people baby, here lately, so that's why I'm laughing with it.

In terms of Albert's philosophies, I don't know, I've had so many people who kind of shaped it that I think what I've learned mostly, in terms of especially doing my own group, is being sensitive to the mood because sometimes everybody's just not on the right page and that's one of the things that Albert was able to do is to, well, come on baby, we need to do this, or I'm not feeling this. And he was really sensitive to making sure we had a certain level of consistency and form and making sure we had a certain level of intensity, in terms of our excitement and that type of thing. I think that's the biggest thing. Some of his business aspects, in terms of I've kind of taken and moved ahead and done some different things, but trying to stay consistent in terms of making sure that everybody gets paid, making sure the people are respected. Because I think singers are the most disrespected performers in the world. Everybody thinks that if you don't have a horn to carry around, you shouldn't be paid.

BRENDA MOHR. There are singers and then there are musicians.

BYRON SMITH. Exactly. So that's probably the biggest thing I've taken from him.

BRENDA MOHR. What things were unique to him that you really didn't see in other conductors, if any?

BYRON SMITH. I mean, sometimes, Albert wouldn't even do a pattern. Some things weren't even based on a 4-pattern. Sometimes you would see him and he would just feel

the groove, but it wouldn't be a pattern in terms of that.

BRENDA MOHR. So as an accompanist you realized you weren't going to see down beats a lot of the time.

BYRON SMITH. Well, you know, a lot of the things that I accompanied, he didn't direct. Most of the time when I accompanied, I was directing from the keyboard because the "Ellingtonia" stuff was stuff that Larry wrote and we were doing staging and choreography, so he wasn't in front. The "Porgy and Bess" stuff was usually staged too, so I was just doing that stuff from the side. He would start things out and then just go stand to the side. I really wasn't an accompanist in terms of trying to find tempi. It was usually pretty staged. I had to lock in myself.

BRENDA MOHR. I have felt, for many years, that I should open the Choral Journal, and at some point, see something about Albert, or the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, some kind of article, not an ad that they're doing a performance, but a legit article. Have you ever felt that way?

BYRON SMITH. Well, yeah, of course I've felt that way, but I know ACDA, see this is not going the way I think it should go. But I'm going to be truthfully honest with you. Some of my problems with ACDA is they give you your fifteen minutes of fame, but you can't step out of your realm. You know, Albert can be great for doing Spirituals, but don't hire him to do Mendelssohn because...[Pause]

BRENDA MOHR. He's not a one trick pony, but they're treating him that way.

BYRON SMITH. Of course they're going to treat you as a one trick pony. Okay, this is my brutally honest, and I'm being recorded, and you can quote me as saying this, but as president of the National Association of Negro Musicians, I feel obligated to say it. One of the biggest problems with the choral world is it's a very tight knit group of people that really don't want to let you in unless you can do something they can't.

BRENDA MOHR. I've seen that.

BYRON SMITH. And it's very true around, it's not just a cultural or a racial thing, but it's just, and so Spirituals are the type of thing where Spirituals and gospels are the type of thing where a lot of conductors don't feel comfortable doing it because they don't feel like they have validations for doing it. And that's not necessarily it. I'm a composer of lots of music, and I know you're probably aware of that. I have been very lucky to make a lot of money selling my Baptist experience to non-Baptist African Americans by putting it in European notation and letting them pick it up and do it. One of my biggest kicks of doing, is going on YouTube and watching choirs from all over the world sing my music and sing them in an interpretation that is, you would never hear in the Baptist church, but they're having a good time doing it. And that's what's fun for me and I think there should be no lines in terms of that. It became very interesting to me as I experienced it in ACDA and looking at music, and looking at how they look at these specialized groups. They

look at them because they're intrigued by what they're able to do, but they never get the recognition because it's not something they can do--the standard conductor can do. It's unfortunate. Gospel music and Spirituals is American music. It didn't come from Africa. It came from here. And it's something that is totally American. It's something that all Americans can do and just the proof is that the Japanese choir came over here singing James Cleveland and singing Kurt Carr authentically. You should have heard them. They had all the tones and everything, didn't understand a word they were singing. They all spoke Japanese, but they knew the sounds in English and even the expressions and some of the riffs.

BRENDA MOHR. I'm going to have to go on YouTube now.

BYRON SMITH. Yeah, you'll have to go and look at them. They really are doing very well. And that just goes to show there are no barriers. I would be at ACDA conventions and gentlemen would walk up to me and say, "Byron, you're "He'll Make a Way" on page 7, bar 3 did you really mean a C flat there?" And I look at them like, "Really? Yeah, because I really wanted to know if you wanted a C." And I'm saying to myself, you know, this really isn't music for analysis. It's music for expression. If you sing a C flat and a C natural at the same time, it makes it even better, but you know we get so caught up in this education that we're given as choral conductors because we have to go and research and find three different versions that we use. I said, "Take my notes and do whatever you want with them." Use that as a focus and an outline, and sometimes I hear performances that give me ideas and I'm gonna steal that, that's a good idea. I'm not a stickler that if you don't do a sforzando—in fact in 'Worthy to be Praised' there's a sforzando that is so wrong and it's a praise the Lord in the highest. I didn't want that, but when I was first starting out, that's what I put. And I didn't realize that everyone was going to take that staccato and cut it off. I just want it to live. And all over the world, like the last 20 years I've said, that's not what I meant. But I cashed the check! That type of environment is just very interesting, culturally. So I guess the point I'm trying to make is, Albert has not received the recognition because in a lot of books it's not special for a lot of people it's really not. We'd rather do an article on the 200th anniversary of Bach.

BRENDA MOHR. It makes me sad because the first name of our organization is American. And this is such a huge part of American choral history.

BYRON SMITH. It's very interesting how, now, gospels and Spirituals have been moved out of ethnic multicultural music and get put into music of worship. I used to be the ethnic multicultural chair of the ACDA Western Division.

BRENDA MOHR. I didn't notice that, but you're right.

BYRON SMITH. I was and all of a sudden, they let me go. They recognized that they're making this transition and I was never told why I was let go and they went and tried to get, what's the young man's name from Chanticleer?

BRENDA MOHR. Joseph Jennings?

BYRON SMITH. Joseph Jennings. They tried to get him to replace it because they wanted to do more Native American music, so all of a sudden, Spirituals and gospels are no longer multicultural music, now it's music of worship; which is cool, but and then it was so funny, this is a political statement that I'm going to say, but when we received our first African American president, my sales went down. My sales of gospel music to the schools went down and it went down to the fact that African Americans have arrived and so they're not somebody we're trying to help. And so a lot of schools stopped doing the music. It's very interesting. That was back in 2009, 2008, 2010. Things kind of slowed down, it was very funny. And I said, "Wow, I'll be glad when his term is up." Now look what I got! Now I'm going to need to pray a whole lot more, because we don't know what we're getting ourselves into. You know, it's not something based on hate. It's just observation.

Chris Gamble, who was a member of the Jubilee Singers just recently passed away. At his memorial service, they had the [Los Angeles] Master Chorale there because Chris sang with them for years, and just sitting there, and then the Spirit Chorale and Jubilee Singers were combined to do a Spiritual, which was actually a monumental point. It was really, really beautiful. But as I sat there and I looked at the energy of the Master Chorale, who had a certain amount of hierarchy, and they asked us to sing the little hallelujah in the second chorus part, and I just got so tickled by the whole energy. It was the big 'I' and the little 'you,' but when the Jubilee Singers got up to sing, and this is something I learned from Albert, you always put yourself in the forefront. We were at All Saints in Beverly Hills, it's the choir chancel behind, in the back, so you just hear them. For the service, I brought Spirit Chorale and Jubilee Singers down to the front of the altar and we stood in front of that, because that music is something that you need to see and experience and so Albert, he was sitting out there. I conducted, but Albert was there and it was just interesting. You just felt the whole energy of the room just change. And the family posted that that's when they felt Chris the most because that kind of experience is something that you feel. It was just intriguing to me in that contrast with that and the other song. They did Brahms' "How Lovely is thy Dwelling Place" and other things. It was just interesting, that contrast. And that's just kind of like the underwhelming aspect between groups Jubilee Singers and the [Los Angeles] Master Chorale and different things like that because it's just the way it is and it's always been that because that is something that everybody can't do, that type of thing.

To get back to your original question, because we're all over the map, I think there's so many reasons why there's lack of respect for what Albert does, a lack of respect of the idiom, a lack of respect of how special it is, and lack of respect to musicality of those who do it. It's a reason why it hasn't been deemed as much. Now, I know they did an article on Brazeal [Dennard] one year, but there really has not been a good article, but then there's also that, "What is he?" There's also that factor too, you know?

BRENDA MOHR. Is he black? Is he Puerto Rican?

BYRON SMITH. Yes, that type of thing.

BRENDA MOHR. Very interesting. Well, I've really enjoyed this conversation a lot.

Thank you so much, Byron.

BYRON SMITH. It's great, my pleasure. Good luck with all of this.

[End of Interview]

APPENDIX O

INTERVIEW WITH LLOYD MALLORY JR.

LLOYD MALLORY JR.

January 2, 2017

7:00 p.m.

Face Time Interview

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

BRENDA MOHR. Please state your name, so I can hear your voice.

LLOYD MALLORY. My name is Lloyd Mallory Jr.

BRENDA MOHR. In what capacity did you know Dr. Albert McNeil?

LLOYD MALLORY. I know Dr. McNeil as my mentoring professor. He served on my doctoral committee for UCLA, as I defended my doctorate back in 2006. And I also sang in the Jubilee Singers for about 6 years, while doing my doctorate from 2001 to 2006.

BRENDA MOHR. Not only did you sing, but were you the accompanist at some point?

LLOYD MALLORY. Yes, I served, too, as the accompanist during that time, as well.

BRENDA MOHR. What about any assistant conducting? Did you do any?

LLOYD MALLORY. He wanted me to, but I shied away from that because I really wanted to develop my ability to sing and so I auditioned for the group as a tenor and eventually, I became one of the first tenors, I sang in the first tenor section and also I was his first choice whenever picking trips. I worked my way up so that I had the opportunity to travel based on his roster of tenors, even to the point of him bringing me across country from the east coast to the west coast, based on need.

BRENDA MOHR. I'm not surprised. I've been understanding from other interviews that he definitely had a priority in roster for the touring group, for the touring ensemble because he, it, correct me if I'm wrong, the roster had between 20 and 30 singers, but then he would take between 18 and 24, maybe, for touring, or was it not that specific?

LLOYD MALLORY. When I toured with him, it was less than that. It was about 14. My first tour that I went, I traveled and there were 14 of us and there were three tenors. I sang first tenor and there were two seconds. The other thing with that is stamina. Even though there were tenors that sang with him that had doctorate degrees and operatic training, that would not last a tour of the kind of vigorousness in which we had demand in that we would be gone three weeks, and in that three weeks, 21 days we may have 17 concerts.

And so with that, learning to pace myself and use my instrument properly, I dare say that touring with Dr. McNeil was just as vigorous, if not more, than doing a major opera.

BRENDA MOHR. Of course, because your concerts were typically two hours with a fifteen-minute intermission.

LLOYD MALLORY. Very much two hours. We were not allowed to use microphones, especially over in the European countries. They did not want us to use microphones, nor did he. We're singing to sold out houses and then in Europe, the unique thing about sold out houses there, a lot of them had audiences behind us, as well as in front of us, and on the sides of us. So 14 singers trying to fill up that big space without microphones for two solid hours is definitely demanding, and of course if you sing first of anything, you know high notes are constantly something that is of demand for you.

BRENDA MOHR. Why did you join the Jubilee Singers? Did he look for you? Did you inquire?

LLOYD MALLORY. I inquired and what it was is that while I was at Oakwood College, as a student, Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers came to Oakwood to give a lyceum concert. I heard this group. I also met the accompanist, back then. His name was Michael O. Jackson and was phenomenal. And I turned pages for Michael, so I remember Dr. McNeil and I remember Michael O. Jackson and then having taught at Oakwood, I then learned Michael O. Jackson had a brother, Richard Jackson, a composer, so I did several of Richard's Spiritual arrangements. So in that, I used those ties to refresh Dr. McNeil's memory that I was at his alma mater working on my doctorate. It interested him and of course I said I would like to come and audition for the group and I also told him I was a former, or I was the director of the Oakwood College Aeolians, in which he had heard about, as well, so he gave me an audition right away and then because of my ability to sight-sing and also learn repertoire because they had performed a couple of times prior to the first out of country trips, for me, which was going to be Christmas 2001, going to Brazil for three weeks, so we had done some performances in September and October and I had mastered the music and done whatever it was that was necessary. Then he discovered I could play too, so I played for the group, so he immediately gave me the opportunity to travel with him my first real gig out of the country, which was to Brazil, in which we toured three of the major cities of Brazil-- Las Palmas, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasilia.

BRENDA MOHR. We'll get to some tour questions in a while. So you auditioned, and what was that process like?

LLOYD MALLORY. The process was he had me vocalize and I basically just did what he asked me to do, so he vocalized my range to hear the tessitura. Then he gave me something to sight sing, so I sight sang for him. Then he asked me to sing a solo or a lead to some piece that he just particularly picked and I sang it, and that was it.

BRENDA MOHR. Remind me what years you were in the Jubilee Singers?

LLOYD MALLORY. I began fall 2001 to about 2006-7. About 2007 was my last trip.

BRENDA MOHR. Good, this will be interesting because, you know, I talked to Michael Wright already and Virginia White.

LLOYD MALLORY. Oh, they've been with him since the inception.

BRENDA MOHR. Exactly, so their description, you know, I have their description of the early years, of rehearsing and pedagogy, so it'll be good to get your description, your take on it. I've got some specific categories, just as prompts, but if those don't ring a bell with you, we can go onto something else, but I'll just throw out some stuff and if that is something to get the ball rolling in our conversation, great. If not, I'll go to the next topic.

What about his rehearsal technique? What can you remember about his rehearsal technique?

LLOYD MALLORY. Well, his rehearsal technique. First of all, he liked for everyone to sit a certain way, so he wanted his sopranos to be a certain place, tenors behind them, then he wanted his altos to be opposite, and then the basses behind them. And then he would put you according to your voice type and firsts with firsts, and seconds with seconds, then after that, he ran his rehearsals as such that he would play for his rehearsals, as well as he would teach. And he taught based on, basically, pretty much like would think he taught in his collegiate type of rehearsals where it's with somewhat of a rote type of situation that I discovered to be, although some of us had the ability to sight-sing, a lot of the singers that I encountered when getting into the group, were not strong sight readers, so he would take the time to do some part banging and his wish was that we would always come prepared. We would get the scores and he would want us to come ready to sing the piece. Because me being a chorale director myself, I knew what that meant, so I would come prepared to do so. Also he had in his mind, his interpretation, so you're getting the interpretation, as well as you're getting the notes and you're getting all of that at the same time, so as he is playing. He's not a singer, so he doesn't sing, but as he plays the part, you're getting his tempo. You're getting his interpretation of how he would like that and then eventually he would put it together and we always sang a cappella Spirituals.

When he felt that we should have a fairly comfort of mastery, then he would begin to shape further by allowing to see us how he was going to conduct it. His conducting, for the most part, I found to be very clear. As he gets up into his years, the singers were more forgiving of things that may not have appeared to be clear, but that's to be expected of anyone that's approaching the 90's. And a lot of that, too, has to do with his ability to hear us because we also were discovering that his hearing was getting more challenged, much like Beethoven. You know, as he got older, he's not hearing all the nuances that he is requesting. Even in that dynamics are not as much of, I won't say a detail, because there are a detail, but because he doesn't hear us, our softs were not as soft as they once were when I was a student at Oakwood where they could really sing at a hushed soft and it be very impacting. But he's not demanding that because he's not hearing us. I want to be clear about that. It's not that he's not musical it's just that he's not

hearing that, so we might be at a mezzo-piano fortissimo versus earlier, when you interviewed Michael and Virginia, they might have said something totally different. I speak to the fact that I was not really a faultfinder. I did not join the group to, more or less, fault find or to observe him in a critical way. My desire was to learn from him. My desire was to learn history from him. My desire was also to be in that group to absorb the great singers around me and to be a better singer and Brenda, I have sung on major stages, as a result. I didn't sing opera with him, but I've sung at the Davies [Symphony] Hall. I've sung at, you know, the LA [Los Angeles] Opera Hall. I've been to the Vienna Stage. I've been all over Europe and Spain and Venezuela and, I told you, Brazil, and the list just goes on. I've been to Beethoven's house and Handel's house and Mozart's house. Because of the Albert McNeil Singers and I know arias, but I did not have to sing that to travel, to be a part of that group.

BRENDA MOHR. Yes, incredible, amazing experience and wonderful that you had that opportunity and I think they were very lucky to have you a part of their ensemble. What do you think was his emphasis during a rehearsal? What do you think was the most important to him? Beyond singing the right notes.

LLOYD MALLORY. He would always let us know that the Spiritual came out of a people of great travail. That is something that he always said, that great travail, was a great word that he liked to say to us when I was in the group. These melodies came from people of great travail and you can't just sing it all. You must sing with some passion and you must sing from a depth of soul and of experience. The other thing, too that is somewhat of a sensitive nature is that he began integrating the group. The group was not always diverse like it has become, but as the educator he was, he accepted Caucasians. He accepted a Brazilian person. He accepted a Puerto Rican person. There were diverse people in there, which posed some challenges, in a sense, because when you're doing movement, when you are trying to obtain this kind of sound from the Spiritual, which is a constant of mix of chest voice and head voice and the balance of the two, somewhat also tailoring on gospel tones and that we don't want a straight chest sound, but we do want you to be able to blend and mix that and then have that experience of the African American church worship which is a part of all that.

So in that, that became something that was missing in the group that we would have to be intentional to make sure we totally didn't abscond ourselves in personnel when traveling because if not careful, Al would almost do us in by forgetting you're carrying people that don't come from that tradition and yet are able to hit the notes on the page, but can't give you that experience because they come from a different experience. It was constantly something that he had to always think of, in balancing, and so I watched that because in my tenor section, at one time, it was myself, there was a Caucasian tenor and then there was Michael Wright who was black and we had challenges. Because, you know, blending that, creating a depth that is not too operatic, but then there's colors and so, in that, that particular tour, Michael came to my defense, in the sense that I held my own, but he and I sang second that tour and the tenor sang first and it was a problem because the first tenor ran out of gas. And then I had to switch hit and learn all first tenor right on the tour, in the middle of the tour and from then on, that person absconded himself from the group and then I became a first tenor in that section because I told him I would

sing second to insure that that part was covered because second tenor was always, and is always that is a part like second soprano, that you need an intelligent singer that can read and sing because they're generally singing the third or an intricate harmony that's important with that.

So in answering your questions, I believe it started out one way, and as Dr. McNeil evolved, it takes on to Dr. McNeil's credit, I did more diverse personnel, in that he felt others were embracing the Spiritual, which was not always the case.

BRENDA MOHR. The first time I heard the Jubilees, I believe was in the '90's and I think it was already becoming culturally diverse, but I do remember thinking, wow, they're still maintaining that sound, that tone, from the recordings I heard from the '70's when all of the members were African American. So he's still, just to my ears, it sounds like he still worked hard at making sure that they understand what you talked about, you know, the depth, the meaning, and where the melodies came from. And it sounds like they embraced that.

LLOYD MALLORY. Yeah, he did a lot of preaching to us. He went off on his tangent and give us a little sermon to help us, you know, find that place because it lacked it at times, so he had to be more intentional.

BRENDA MOHR. What about breath management? Did he ever do exercises about breath management or because you all were such experienced singers, maybe he didn't have to talk about it that much?

LLOYD MALLORY. There was some talk about it, but in my mind, in my six years, his assistant now, Walker, would be even more musical to address that. Sometimes we would ask, I know I would, and I would it approach it as though I am singing a solo, so I would mark my score and I'd say, I'm going to take my breath here, and if I take my breath here, and I would do it as such, especially if you're the only first tenor. I would be the only one singing first, whereas there were two seconds, and if there weren't two seconds, that means one of the tenors was the soloist, so there would be a first and a second tenor, so like on "Oh, Happy Day," we all have our own part. In fact, there were times we had three parts. So in that, we all have to manage our breath and also sing our part in triad, when it's called for.

BRENDA MOHR. What about diction and resonance?

LLOYD MALLORY. Yes, he addressed all voice types. In particular, we were working on an Undine Smith Moore piece and his concern for the diction was articulated, but here again, when I joined, I think a lot of the singers had been with him for years, so they knew what he wanted without him having to ask for it, so I kind of just fell in line. They also had the term where they would say "Jubilicize" it. It's been "Jubilicized." I don't know if Michael or Virginia said that?

BRENDA MOHR. They both said that to me.

LLOYD MALLORY. In other words, that's when they would do only something that the Jubilee Singers would do and they called it "Jubilicize," we "Jubilicized" it. We changed the rhythm or we changed the, how we say the word, or whatever it was, but we "Jubilicized" it because coming in, I would raise my hand, you all just did such and such and I don't see that here. We just "Jubilicize," so just go with us, and so I would just go. And eventually, I wouldn't stop rehearsal to ask, he would just look at me, we "Jubilicized" that. I would say, "Got it." Then I would make a note. Because I wanted to fit in I wasn't looking to be like, hey, what's going on? Or ask too many questions, so I would just make note on my music and so forth and then as I've done my own research with other Jubilee Singers, and so forth, every group has its own culture, in which they do certain things. Even with my own group, we do certain things because we can. It's a culture within the group and it makes it unique to itself.

BRENDA MOHR. Did he vocalize the choir at the beginning of each rehearsal?

LLOYD MALLORY. Yes, he did. His vocalises, I found them, interesting because you're singing in classical groups, you know, you do the a-e-ah-oo? And you'll do these little half steps here and all these clean exercises. He would take something like, how are you today? Or "bumble bee, bumble bee." And to me, bumble bee, you are moving your articulators, you're getting the breath to go. "How are you today" is 1-3-5-8, so you're. He had a way that may seem elementary, but at the same time, it's covering the same needs that all of those other exercises, that other classicists do, without it being so classical!

BRENDA MOHR. I remember observing a couple of rehearsals and thinking these vocal exercises are pretty basic and pretty common, like for high school choirs.

LLOYD MALLORY. Exactly. Let me tell you this, Brenda. He, we were hired as professionals, so the courtesy I took was, okay, well, you didn't come in here warmed up, so let me just do a couple things based on what I do, but you know, as I saw it, he began compensating us for rehearsals, so for me, I would come more warmed up. I would come having warmed myself up. Even in concert, I raised the question, you know, we've been to his assistant, now that often times they would fatigue us, trying to rehearse before or trying to warm us up before a concert. I was like, if you're paying us, and we're professionals, then I'd like for you to give us the opportunity to rise to that level, so that we can be more fresh for the performance, as opposed to we've done a full walk through 90 minutes before we go on stage, for real, for real. [inaudible sentence] I think I gained some brownie points with that in respect because they did try to meet us half way with that, that we would warm ourselves up. And I know, as a first tenor, "bumble bee" wasn't going to cut it. I'm going to have to do my little sirens and do my lip trill to make sure I had at least a high B flat on demand. The same thing with the first soprano. I mean some of our first sopranos had high E flats, a high D, so in that, you know, night after night, we needed to just be certain, it's there, and it's a technique. It's not hit and miss. It's like, this is what we do and we'll get the result. So I believe he had singers that he knew were capable and if there were weak links, then he would take the necessary steps to, at least, request that they raise the bar themselves. Because he was very much an educator [inaudible phrase]. If he felt you were a good person, and you didn't give him any

problems, sometimes he would overlook some bad singing or flat singing because the educator in him still was you're doing what you're supposed to do, or at least you're here.

BRENDA MOHR. Could you name a philosophy that was underlying in the teaching of the concert Spirituals? Did he have a philosophy? If so, what was that?

LLOYD MALLORY. If I were to say, his philosophy was the Negro Spiritual is just as valid as the classical art song. You bring your A-game to the Negro Spiritual, to the concert spiritual, just like you would bring it to the German Lied, to the French song, or the Italian aria. It demands just as much vocally and it demands just as much emotionally. That would be my philosophy that I felt and he felt, because when we sang, Brenda, there were people weeping and I knew they didn't understand what we were saying, but they could feel something. And I had a duet with Nell that we would always sing that Al wrote, "My Long White Robe." We'd get a thunderous ovation on that because of our approach and the first time I ever did it with Nell, the people lunged out of their seats. It scared me because I wasn't a soloist until I got into the Jubilee Singers.

That's the other thing, Al would give everybody opportunity to do a lead little something, if they were in the group. And he educated in that way, that we were getting stronger, that we were building our presence. At least, I like to look at that way, so for me, I got stronger to the point that, you know, Nell looked at me one time like, okay, we're going to have try something different because you came with something different today! And he, too, would yell out, everybody is baby to him. So in that, that gospel response, even from that as encouragement, as a sign to say, great job, continue, or keep doing what you're doing. And so I felt very supported to grow in the group. I felt very appreciated and I even felt like I was needed. People would smile, so I did my part to earn my place in the group, but they also welcomed me too, so it was a great exchange and I'm not saying that was always the case because I'm sure you heard some stories from the others. But for me, as I said, my coming into the group was not to fault find, or to say, well, if I were the director, I'd do this, but to say, I'm here as a singer. I want to learn how to sing better. I want to learn from Dr. McNeil and I want to learn from all these great singers around me. To be a better singer and to make me a better conduit of the Negro Spiritual and its performance practice.

BRENDA MOHR. You just said it, two key words that I was going to ask next-- performance practice [of the concert Spiritual]. Did Albert have his personal performance practice guidelines for performing a concert Spiritual?

LLOYD MALLORY. He didn't articulate it as much. He would select certain voices to sing certain pieces. He just wouldn't let anybody sing anything, so depending on the mood of the Spiritual depending on the tessitura of the Spiritual he would select certain voice types to sing it. And in that, he might have a coaching session to say, I want you to be more contemplative or I want you to be more sad here or I need more of a dynamic here, etcetera. And then the other thing is every performance gave us an opportunity to just try some things, so I remember, one time, I was subbing for a soloist and it was "Fix Me Jesus" and I'm a lyric tenor, and I did mine a little different perhaps than the soprano soloist would do it and he liked it. The group liked it because it was just so iconic. Took

the spin off and said, "What if I try it this way?" Because I think my voice likes to try it this way, and so, in that, the thing with performance practice in a Spiritual, if you can sell it, you can almost give it a different color.

Versus in opera, you might give it a different color, but you gotta stay in the context of the acting or the script, if you will. Versus with the Spiritual, you got a little wiggle room there because it's more personal than it is opera. You're sticking to the character script. It has to stay within a certain box.

So the performance practice of the Spiritual, it gives you some more wiggle room, and then my dissertation dealt with the fact that I want people to respect, like I said earlier, that with the Spiritual, it still demands the same vocal needs as the art song, as the French song, and as the German Lied. It needs that quality. There are choirs that have sung Spirituals, but they just sing the notes. They don't give you the colors that our people or they don't give you that depth that is necessary versus when you go to opera, it doesn't matter your ethnicity, where you're from, you approach that operatic aria, so if it's Mozart, you're going to give me a Mozart sound. If it's Handel, you're going to give me a Handelian Baroque sound. If it's Puccini, you're gonna give me some more depth or Wagner, bigger sound. So for the spiritual, because our ancestors have broader noses, thicker lips, thicker cheekbones, broader chest cavity, all of that is suggesting some depth and color that must, at least, be attempted to achieve beyond just the singing notes.

BRENDA MOHR. Thank you for sharing that.

LLOYD MALLORY. Even the Italian, it's just different, so we [African American] can approach our chest cavity in such a way that we're not hurting ourselves. Whereas, an Italian might hurt themselves because they're doing vowel to vowel, there's no real harsh consonants like German or Russian. So in that, I wish to be respectful and careful to other ethnicities, but at the same time, when I go to sing an Italian aria and I'm being judged, they like your Italian is either good or bad. You're either in the right style of tone production, or you're not. Well, I feel the same to the African American Spiritual, which Dr. McNeil was exhibiting in his singers. This is how you sing it. This is one of the authentic performance practices. This is one of the educated performance practices, there's another word I'm looking for, but not just authentic, but definitive. I want to say definitive. When you go to a source, be it a book someone wrote, that's a source, with a bibliography based on their experience, based on who they interviewed or what they, just like you're going to document this. I believe he was trying to let his audiences also be aware, especially when we would go to university campuses. This is how you do it. This is how, even to the conductors. Conductors, this is how you do it.

BRENDA MOHR. When he would say, "This is how you do it." Did he say, "Now let's talk about dialect, text, tempo, rhythm, etc?" Would he go through those categories?

LLOYD MALLORY. He often times would just allow the performance to speak for itself. At times, he would have conversations with the audience in his expressing whatever he wanted the audience to feel from that. We would, at the end, have an opportunity to where we would get to sway hands and clap and "Down By the Riverside" but there was another piece that he would give so that they could participate,

if you will, and allow them to be a little bit more spontaneous in clapping on the off-beats, you know, the other beats. And so with that, that was the opportunity for the audience to participate, but we would create rhythms based on work songs, based on Spirituals that maybe had a jazz-like influence where we would create some percussive things going on or depending on the arrangement, we would have some 'dooms' and 'doos,' and things like that where we would create various types of percussion in addition to the harmonies and the melodies that you heard. It was his way of saying this is how you do it versus. [inaudible] but it doesn't have any of the colors and voices have colors. I don't care if it is a light color coloratura voice but they all have color, you just gotta work to find where they are and get them and put them to good use. He didn't verbalize that, but I learned from him who he picked to sing what, which created the color, what suggests he knows about colors, he just didn't talk to me about it, but when you heard it, that's a color.

BRENDA MOHR. What about dialect? Did you stick with what was exactly written on page, such as if you were doing a Jester Hairston arrangement, like instead of pronouncing t-h-e, *the*, did you pronounce it, *duh*?

LLOYD MALLORY. Yes. Absolutely. He was friends with Jester Hairston, so definitely we would do that. We also had master classes with Moses Hogan and even with Hogan, very specific about performance practice. In that sometimes conductors take liberties that are not written in the performance practice because we feel it a different way, but Moses Hogan would always politely bring us back to why he wrote what he did. Interesting thing about it, is he had a reason why he wrote what he did. Rosephanye Powell was another one that Dr. McNeil was friends with, Jacqueline Hairston, who is related to Jester Hairston, another great arranger. He knew Undine Smith Moore. He knew Margaret Bonds, told me all kinds of stuff about Margaret Bonds. Knows Hail Stork. I mean Dr. McNeil knew Hall Johnson, so he met, Hall Johnson, they had lunch together, so you know, when you sing a Hall Johnson, Spiritual, he has had conversations with Hall, so you know you're getting the generation of something passed down from person to person to person. I want "Ain't Got Time to Die" to be sung versus how we sometimes hear other people doing it, so in that, it just brings more authenticity to it because we knew he actually had relationship with these icons of composers and arrangers, so it made you respect Dr. McNeil's request of you to do it a certain way because of his relationships, one on one with these composers who have gone on and left their music for us to recreate.

BRENDA MOHR. Did he ever instruct or demonstrate in presentations how you determine the tempo of a Spiritual?

LLOYD MALLORY. We went to Princeton University, and yes, he did speak to that. But we were such a group, again, he would establish a tempo and we would just lock into it. And we would lock into it because we felt it. Now, I would dare say that as he climbed the years of age, some of his tempos weren't always good ideas. We would go with him, but then Nell would have to pull him aside, be like you need to take this a little faster, this one you might not want to take so fast. And so, in that, because he was climbing the age,

you know, we might have to assist him.

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah, I've heard that from several people.

LLOYD MALLORY. Yeah, he would start us we had it locked in how fast we were going to go, so we would never make him look bad. We knew what to do and went ahead and did it.

BRENDA MOHR. Did he allow the text to determine the tempo?

LLOYD MALLORY. Absolutely, because a lot of pieces had these little ostinatos. Rosephanye Powell wrote, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God," but I've heard people sing it way too fast! But Albert felt like if you were to, you could feel those syncopations a little bit and then Rosephanye kind of established, with him, as well. So again, when he could have opportunity to, what I want to say, get the authority, how do you want this done, he'd do some. And often times, because I've sung with Al at least two times, at the ACDA and those concerts are packed to the hilt, but every Dr. is sitting in there, you know, watching us sing and do our thing and Dr. McNeil would carry the best of the best. Of course, we knew we better bring, we better have it all together, so even in that, we made sure tempo, diction, pitch, tone quality, all of that, was at it's ultimate height because we knew people that were counting on us to give them an authentic performance that would be something that they could define as authority, or at least a stab at it. In that, those were definite, what I want to say, moments of greatness for the group, greatness for me, and they were stellar moments where he was lauded because of the presentation.

BRENDA MOHR. I can remember a couple of ACDA's where I heard the Jubilees and remember exactly what you're describing-- standing room only and directors just immediately leaping to their feet before you release the last note of the song.

LLOYD MALLORY. It's just a wonderful music making moment and we seized the moment and relished in it. We really took advantage of it because we knew we were making a statement, it was an honor because that wasn't always the case to do a whole concert of the Spiritual and it be received and respected.

BRENDA MOHR. I think a large part of the Jubilee's success were the talented professional singers and the ensemble, and tell me if you agree or disagree, I also think that the repertoire that you sang lead to your success, also because you can you hear a whole concert of Mozart, but it just doesn't affect you like the Spiritual because it's so personal and it really reaches into your soul and into your heart. I feel like because you did a whole concert of personal, heart-felt music, that was another reason for the Jubilee's success. Does that make sense?

LLOYD MALLORY. It does.

BRENDA MOHR. How did Albert influence you as a conductor and leader?

LLOYD MALLORY. Al's a people person. He's knowledgeable, always reading, always seeking knowledge. He's a walking encyclopedia. On the bus, I would just tell him, "Just talk, I don't care what you talk about, just talk, I'll listen." He'd be like, "Baby, what do you want to talk about?" I'd say, "Just tell me stories." So he told me about he was at Leontyne Price and William Moorefield's wedding, and I was like, "What?!" He told me that whole story and how that happened and how it went down and why they got married.

When I think about Albert McNeil, I think about a consummate music educator that is a people person because he would also take care of his people. He took care of me. He never took advantage of me. He says you're in school, or he's flying you across the country to help him and then he would take care of me and he would bless me and he was fair with me, so I learned to be fair. I learned not to use people, you know, to my advantage, but to [Inaudible] people for blessing me. And in my blessing them, I am blessed back and I'm not just a person that's just taking or using. I learned that from him. I watched how he conducted his business and his affairs. He's a business man, so he would tell you, this is what I'm going to give you, and he'd give you what he say he's going to give you. He wouldn't cut you. He wouldn't do this. He would give you what he said he was going to give you and he'd do it. I learned that. That's outside of the musical realm. Organized, he's very organized and detailed. You know, so he plans out what he's going to do, so it doesn't have this, you know, spontaneity kind of feel to it, but it's more exact and to the point and it has also benefited me in operations of my choral activities. And so that's how I would respond to that question.

BRENDA MOHR. Because you have such a personal connection with Albert, not just as a conductor, but as a mentor, are there are any other stories I should know about that will help others who don't who he is or don't know him very well? This man, this as an LA Times article referred to him as, Professor Spiritual, what stories or story needs to be told or needs to be documented, if you have any that you can think of?

LLOYD MALLORY. I don't know that I have a story, but I would say my experience with this icon of a man, is that he is not only worthy of our honor and praise and respect, but he's a human walking encyclopedia of all of those that have gone on before that I read about, that I play, as I've already mentioned to you, that Hall Johnson knew him, Jester Hairston knew him, Moses Hogan knew him, Rosephanye Powell knows her, Margaret Bonds knew her. And the list goes on of all the great people and all the people that he has mentored that have written and arranged and conduct and sing, so this man has given opportunities to singers over the course of decades where he has filled their coffers with sustenance to put food on their table and clothes on their back or for me, extra money for me to go to school. For me, I have experiences that I would never have gotten if I had totally just relied on a classical background where I would have to vie for others that are just as strong as I, in a classical aria world that I was chosen to do something with the Negro Spiritual and the African American Spiritual that is connected to me, that I got to stand on these great stages I've mentioned to you, the Vienna stage where the Vienna Orchestra plays on that. Who gets to sing there? You don't get to get there unless you're some great concert person. I sang in Davies [Symphony] Hall, stage where the great Leontyne Price and Grace Bumbry, and Renée Fleming and Thomas Hampson and the

names just go on. They all sang on that stage! And then you got the LA [Los Angeles] Opera of the Walt Disney Hall, I've sung on that stage. It's an honor and he has made that so that people like me, who would never have had the opportunity otherwise, have that opportunity. That's an educator. And because he educates, I too educate. And because takes chances and risks on normal talent, that he sees potential, such that he saw it in mine, as a singer, that has talent, but had not had the experience, I'll give you the experience, I'll give you the chance and so he gave me the chance and I rose to that and I became better at it because of his ability to educate and his ability to inspire, that I have that experience that I pass on to my current students, even now. His ability to believe in you, his ability to encourage you and nurture you, gives you that confidence that you might not get from other conductors because it's about you coming in on the downbeat, and it's about you doing what you're supposed to do, and sticking with the orchestra, and tempo versus he'll give you that latitude that you can break tempo and go into a rubato and it still works, you know. And so, in that, I feel that were it not for Albert McNeil, many of us would not have been afforded the rich, and I mean rich, opportunities that he has, his vision has, his hard work has afforded us and it is his vision and it is his hard work that he made possible that we could rise to the occasion because he's an educator and he's a conductor.

BRENDA MOHR. Did the Jubilee Singers experience any racial prejudice on tour?

LLOYD MALLORY. Yes, we did.

BRENDA MOHR. Wow.

LLOYD MALLORY. AI was no nonsense with that. In the years that I was in the group, we were in Europe, and we had some stuff to happen and AI, I saw a side of him that he was almost like a lioness or a lion. You will not hurt my cubs. You will not hurt my children. You will do what you're supposed to do, you know or else. And so things were handled in a professional kind of way. Don't know all the details, but do know that there was a tour that we got paid and didn't sing cause of this very issue.

We experienced attitudes, some hotels you know, the provisions in the hotel and some attitude, slurs on the bus, and so forth. So here again, the impresario had to come and address us and we were apologized to and compensated based on the actions that were taking place and so this was during, I would dare say, during 2003.

BRENDA MOHR. Once you were on the stage, performing all of these places that you mentioned previously, did you feel like the singing of the spirituals broke down racial barriers?

LLOYD MALLORY. I would like to think so. I would absolutely like to think so because as I recall, just people sitting in the audience, they were never rude to us, they would always come to a hush. And they would always respond with an applause or some kind of ooh or ahh, you know, because we were taking them, we were transporting them somewhere and so depending on our willingness to be used as the vessel to pour into the performance, you know, I particularly, would say we made some connections, you know,

and of course, some performances were just absolutely magical versus other performances are like, okay, we got through that, you know, praise God, and keep it movin', but the goal was to really have these magical moments, where we're like, wow, that was glorious or that was phenomenal.

BRENDA MOHR. And you would get more than one standing ovation, right?

LLOYD MALLORY. Oh yes, there were songs that we would get ovations and like I said, the duet that Nell and I did, always got an ovation. I mean, it just, you know, we look forward to that, but we had fun doing that and the audience could tell. We would work that thing together and sing and then we would go take a bow and then Al would push us, go take another bow! And we'd come back, go take another bow! Take another bow, so you know, at times, you could take as many as 3-5, you know, that one number because people just enjoyed it so. The simplest song, but the way we interpreted it, the crowd would just roar. And so many selections received ovations.

Albert would pick pieces that he knew would please the audience or make the audience think or do various things to the audience that would get them in touch with various emotions. And so he'd program it in such a way that you would have a high moment, but then he'd give you an opportunity to come down, and then take you back up there again or make you cry or make you laugh or, you know. He had a myriad of emotions and so I've learned that from him that I program so that I can engage an audience to take them on a journey of emotion because that's what we're losing today at a lot of our concerts, especially with classical music. It does not take them anywhere. You just execute it. The same thing with Dr. McNeil, his education is such that you sing this with such energy that it takes people somewhere and they see something as opposed to it's just a recital.

BRENDA MOHR. I remember experiencing all those feelings you just mentioned, as a listener during a Jubilee performance, so I know exactly what you're talking about. You mentioned the word 'showstopper.' How do we educate choral conductors and just keep reminding them to be careful? And if you're going to program it, here's how or here's why. Do you want to speak to that?

LLOYD MALLORY. Most times, conductors will put the spiritual at the end, and I remember a mentee of mine, he brought something up. Part of that is to, even in recitals will do that, one-two, I will say, to show the chronology from Baroque to twentieth century, but I would say, too, it's often times too, an opportunity where the conductor says, oh, you can let your hair down. This does not have to be as exacting as the classical music that you sang. I don't know that I would want to subscribe to that and I don't know if that is such, but from listening, when I go and look at YouTube and I listen to concerts and I hear a spiritual at the end, that's kind of what I take from that, that they're saying, oh, we're at the end, let's let our hair down. Let's just do whatever we want to do. And anything can go or anything can happen and I don't mean it so verbatim like that, if you will, I don't mean that they can sing any note that they want, but it just feels like we're at the end of the concert now, let's put this hear as opposed to when I put the Spirituals at the beginning. If we're really going for an authentic, if we're trying to get colors or energy

that we're seeking or anything such as that. [Inaudible] And it's worth exploring because I have done programming where I've done early Spirituals as with the "Five Early Spirituals," I can't think, they're from Detroit, but anyway, the early Spirituals, and then I'll break it down to doing Hall Johnson and then I'll come even more up to date to doing more contemporary spirituals to show people the evolution of the spiritual versus let's do a Moses Hogan, you know. They have evolved, you know, Wings Over Jordan is what I wanted to say. You know, simple four-part Spiritual that the Wings Over Jordan used to sing, like the Fisk Jubilee Singers used to do and then we've evolved those, you know. Even from William Dawson's Spirituals, very prolific how he writes, but then you come up to Moses Hogan, but now you have, you know, other great writers that have done all of these chords and a divisi, etc. Like Stacey Gibbs and Mark Butler that's got some tough stuff out there. And then there's Morrison. His name is escaping me, but he was in the Midwest. He writes some challenging chordal and so I just, I think the work that you're doing will cause certain minds to think and rethink how they program and how they decide to execute. I told Donald Nuen, one time, I said, "You know, African American composers have written more than just Spirituals." They will give you a fit to how they have written and how they have put text to these rhythm or to these motifs are not easy, you know, and will challenge the Britten War Requiem or challenge the Verdi Requiem, they're masterpieces. I take nothing away from that, but African Americans have composed some pretty hard stuff too, that will make you think! And make you have to rehearse, just like you have to rehearse, just like you have to count, just like you have to do those little matters in the fugal matters of the Verdi or fugal matters of the War Requiem or whatever or Chichester Psalms. They have those out there and so I like what you're doing and I like what others are doing because I think it's starting to say, we all have value, we all have music that is worthy of being performed and we should appreciate it all.

BRENDA MOHR. That's what is starting to happen now with the Jubilee Singers. A year ago, I observed a rehearsal in January 2016, and I don't know if you've met Diane Clayton White, but she's now interim. Yeah, that was really great watching her work with them and then also do her pieces and then compositions by other black composers, so it's kind of exciting that maybe this will rejuvenate the exposure of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers to maybe get them popular again. I don't know if that's even the word I want, but you know, I think people think, oh, now Al, he's 96, maybe we don't need to call on the Jubilee Singers anymore, but hopefully, now, they'll still call on them with Diane and the exciting things she's doing with the repertoire. Well, I am very grateful for your time and your contribution to this project.

LLOYD MALLORY. I am grateful and honored that you would find anything that I have to say worthy, so thank you!

[Subsequent commentary unrelated to the interview was omitted at the discretion of the interviewer.]

[End of Interview]

APPENDIX P

INTERVIEW WITH DOUGLAS GRIFFIN

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN

January 4, 2017

10:00 a.m.

In-person Interview, office of Douglas Griffin

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

BRENDA MOHR. Good morning, here I am with Doug Griffin. It is January 4th, 2017. Please state your name for me.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. My name is Doug Griffin and I first started Jubilee Singers in 1995. Well, actually it was fall of '94 and the first tour I went on took place in spring of '95. I actually had actually never heard of the Al McNeil Jubilee Singers, a friend had, a friend from high school, who is always auditioning for everything. She always calls me, I'm about to go audition for this, do you want to go? And so she said, oh, the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, they're fantastic. And I hadn't heard about them, as you were saying earlier, it's funny how you can travel all around the world and be known all over the world and in then in your own hometown, people are not aware of you, partly because LA is so big and there's so many groups and so many gospel choirs, even though the Jubilee Singers are not a gospel choir. So I went to this audition, I just thought, okay, and she had just called me that morning. And I said, oh okay, I'm not doing anything, so I guess so. And I went and auditioned. You were supposed to prepare a classical song because they wanted to know that you're classically trained. It's not just let's have singers from church because his repertoire was quite varied, but they also wanted you to sing a spiritual because you had to have an affinity for that since that was the basis for the group, this connection to these African, or slave spirituals, so he wanted to know that you had a heart for that sort of music, but also could sing a variety of things. I wasn't really prepared as I should have been. I didn't really know that much about it. But I auditioned and I think when I'm nervous, I become funny. I joke around a lot, not in an annoying way. I was sitting next to people outside the audition hall waiting for my turn. These people brought their resumes and photo albums and oh, I'm singing this in Italian, and I'm singing this in French and I thought, I will never make this group. There's no way I'm going to make this group because I just grabbed Ave Maria, or something, some simple thing. So I'd already made up my mind, I'm not going to make this group, so I'll just be relaxed. I'll go in and audition as long as I'm here, but I'll just have fun. I had a lot of personality, I can assume, when I walked in the door, which also attracted him. I do love spirituals and I have a nice voice and all that. It was incredible what I was hearing outside the door. And I thought I would never make this group, so I was just funny.

Now, interestingly enough, I mentioned, because where have you studied? And people were saying, oh, I studied at Cambridge, and I hadn't studied anywhere. I said, well I studied under Robert Wood, my high school music teacher. Well, Albert and

Robert were best friends, but I didn't know that, so Robert Wood and Albert McNeil knew each other for years, so he went oh! And I'll just call up Robert Wood and ask him about this guy and my music teacher from high school adored me and said, it would be such a plus if you got this kid in your group because he has this skill and that skill and he'll organize this. And so even though I didn't have the resume of the other singers, he was convinced that I'd be a bonus to the group. So it was, we'll get back to you later and we'll contact you later to let you know whether or not you made it. And in my mind, it was they're not going to pick me. I was funny and fun and had personality, but I wasn't singing arias like these people. By coincidence, my music teacher, Robert Wood, was having a party at his house in Manhattan Beach that weekend and I didn't know that Albert was also invited, so he put some concerts by the sea and had invited some orchestra to play and so I went to Robert's, my music teacher's concert, and as I'm sitting there, Albert McNeil walks up to me and says, "here's your letter of acceptance." I mean the two of them had planned it out, and I screamed. So that was my introduction into the group. I felt totally unequipped to be in it because I knew I was just going to be around great singers. And, unfortunately, the girl who had invited me, she didn't make it. And I knew that would happen, but anyway, so I'm in this group and I didn't know the history. I didn't know anything about it, except it's a fun group and I guess they travel. I got into the group that Fall. I remembered the very first...I hope you don't mind, I'm just going to ramble.

The very first rehearsal they passed out music, no one had seen it before. Well, first of all, Albert, we walk in and he says, here are the four people who have made it for this season and we're going to have them get up and sing, go! And he put you on the spot instantly, handed you a piece of music and we had to sight read it and sing it in front of everybody and they all applauded, so everyone was very friendly and very supportive and I thought wow, they just want you to start right away. So I sat down and they pass out new music and they say I know we're just sight reading it, but give me a little something. And I thought, you know, even through it's your first time singing this, you still have to sing it with passion, even though you've never seen it before. I thought wow, they really expect a lot of their singers, but that was the standard that he set. We expect more from you than the typical group because you have a big responsibility, there's a lot that you're representing and you're caring forth the dreams and hopes of people from a hundred years ago, these slaves and you're representing this style of music and we just expect a lot of you.

I was chosen to go on the tour. There were probably 40 people in the group, but only 16 of us were chosen to go, so I went in the spring of '95. We toured the United States for about six weeks. We got on a bus. The whole bus thing was hilarious because you're going to be living on this bus and people turned their seat into their apartment and they had a rack for their food and for their bedding and we obviously were going to get to hotels, but there'd be 3-4 hours or 6 or 8 hour rides on these buses getting to the next city. And we toured the United States we went to Colorado and New Mexico and all across the south. We sang in North Carolina. We sang all across the east coast. We visited Iowa. It was fantastic. And I was fortunate enough, because of my background in theatre, to be the one who was sent out to go and meet, to go to the venue first. Once we got off the bus, everyone would go to the hotel room. I never got to do that. Like if we'd get there at noon, I'll make that up, and the concert was at 7, and we had to get to the hall at 6. Well,

I had to go directly to the hall and I'd work with the lighting designer and design the lights for the show and work with the sound technician to make sure the mics were set up and if we needed risers or didn't need risers, do you need choral shells. And then I'd meet with the hospitality group that was meeting us. And yes, we need this sort of stuff backstage, which was actually fun. I'd get back in time to maybe have a quick dinner. I got to really meet the people backstage. I got to talk to the host. I loved it. And I felt like a goodwill ambassador because a lot of these towns, if we were in Indiana, if we were in Iowa, didn't have that many black choirs coming through, and weren't familiar with this music. This was in the 90's and there weren't YouTube videos, so us showing up was their only access to this sort of experience, so they were so welcoming and so warm and so wonderful and it didn't matter if it was a red state or blue, none of that. It was just, oh you're here, and we've got this in common. We were spreading our culture and connecting in beautiful ways with these other people who were so welcoming. I just can't tell you, so I thought I could do this forever. That's part of the reason that, and Albert, and they loved Albert McNeil. He had some sort of gift.

BRENDA MOHR. I know. He has it.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Yes, he does. And wherever he goes, people just adore him and swarm him and "Oh Al!" and they just love him because he loves everyone and he loves his music and he wants to teach and whatever you are just comes out of you. You can't hide who you are. People pick up on this person who just has this love for life and this passion and so the opportunity to be around him and to share in that, was just wonderful. I thought I could do this forever. That's part of the reason people are so dedicated to him. It's just because of the goodwill that he spreads, the love that he spreads, the joy that he spreads, his desire to spread the message that these songs were bringing about, especially the spirituals we were singing.

These people, these slaves who began these spirituals and this tradition that continued after slavery were about people who were oppressed and yet believed that deliverance was coming. They never lost hope. They believed that God still had his hand on them and that God was going to bless them and provide for them, so there was a beauty in these songs born out of honest struggle. Songs that were written to express a deep emotion, as opposed to songs that are written to make money, which is something that we're not familiar with today, as much because people are writing something so they can sell it. You can tell something that is born in the heart, touches the heart. Something that is just born in the mind only touches the mind. These songs were written to express their grief, or their joy, or their longing and you could hear it in the chords that they chose. You could hear it in the words and the rhythms and so when we transmit that, people feel it. And so the opportunity to share that with other people is just unmatched. So you're bringing hope to people because they can hear it in the music.

When we went overseas, I was lucky enough to also go overseas. So our tour started the first week of January and went through middle of February and then our second tour started the end of February and went through April, so I was basically gone from January to the end of April, maybe the beginning of May. So the longest tour I think they've ever done. So it was basically like a four or five-month tour with one week off where we came home, did laundry, and then we got back on the plane and we went. So

I'm kind of connecting the two tours because not only were we spreading culture around the United States. When we went overseas, we went to Germany, and France and Austria. A lot of times we went to small cities and we did not speak their language, but they understood, just listening to the music, people would start weeping. They didn't know what words we were saying, but they could tell what we were transmitting because these are the sounds that these slaves had produced to express their belief that God was real and that he was going to move in their lives. And so when we sang that, we're in these little, tiny poor towns in Germany or Austria, or I think we also went to, we were also in Czechoslovakia, or some Eastern place, for one concert. And we were in Eastern Germany where they were poor. They felt it. They heard it. They felt the music and it was so incredible to see them weeping. Because they could feel that same hope that we were transmitting, so the experience of being able to do that, bringing true hope to someone, bringing joy to someone, that experience that Albert provided for us, is just unmatched. Do you have questions for me?

BRENDA MOHR. That was beautiful. You are saying all the things that I want to hear. What were rehearsals like when you were with him?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. There was an assistant director, named Paul Smith, who is one of the most brilliant directors ever. He taught at Cal State Northridge, I think and his choirs at Northridge won awards all the time, won national contests. As far as technique, like I was saying, as soon as you walked in... One thing about Albert is if he noticed you had a gift, he needed to exploit it. He didn't have an ego. This person is good at this I'm going to use it in this. Oh, you're good at this I'm going to use you. Paul Smith had been one of his students from I think when he taught in junior high, something like that. So he had recognized Paul's gifts. Paul just had a gift at understanding how to phrase a song and how to really exploit what the composer had done and how to enhance it, so he allowed Paul to take over initially in order to really help us understand exactly the composer's intent. That was Paul's thing, like a technician, examining every measure, every breath. We had to all breath the same way. We had to shape our vowels the same way. We had to swell as one body. You had to know, because even if there was 40 of us, there's 20 men in the back row, and I'm a bass, a tenor sitting twelve seats away, I had to know how he was breathing and how he was moving, so that we could all just be this one unit.

So the rehearsals, I found to be really intense laboratories for really discovering how this music was supposed to be delivered to an audience. Once Paul had us examine it and mark our music and really understand how to move. If you don't have a pencil, what's wrong with you? Mark this music so that we really understand how we phrase, and tonality, and staying in pitch. Then Albert would take over for the feeling. Okay, now that we're going to do this, here's how I'm going to interpret it. Now that you understand the song, here's how, through his years of study, Albert's, because Albert was great friends with Jester Hairston and all these, Hall Johnson, and that whole group, so he knew the people who had written a lot of these songs, which I guess is an advantage of being born in the early 1900's. So he grew up with these songs. He heard them when they were originally done. He tells us a story where he was with Jester when he was writing some of his songs and Jester would ask his opinion, should we do this chord here, or this chord there? So he knew how the song was supposed to go. So now he's adding his expertise,

and saying here's how you have to feel the piece, here's how you need to move here. Here's the impact because he heard how the composer had originally did it and that composer had his choir do it, he knew what the composer was going for and he has this amazing memory, like you know, this is how its supposed to sound.

So once we got the technical part down from Paul, it was time to get the emotion right and understand how to deliver it. And again, there was no trial and error, like I know this is your first time singing this solo, but bring it! And it gave you, like his confidence in you, that you can do it, gave you the confidence that you could bring it. A lot of times, people sang in ways that they hadn't done before, hitting notes and singing with emotion that they didn't know that they had because Albert just believed, "Come on, baby! You can do it!" He'd encourage you and that would inspire and it would make you want to go beyond yourself and honor the intention of the composers. So rehearsals were intense and fun, but intense. Because we had a mission and we had to deliver these songs the way they were supposed to be done.

BRENDA MOHR. I'm so amazed. Everybody I have talked to is so consistent in their stories and everything they say about Albert and the rehearsals. I mean everybody says he calls everybody "baby." And about his, the emotional part, pulling that emotion out of the singers. So did he tell you, I mean there were a lot of classical singers in there also, right? Did he talk about, okay, now we're not singing Mozart, we're singing William Dawson, Jester Hairston, did he talk about here's how the rhythm, this one shouldn't be so fast because of this reason.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Exactly.

BRENDA MOHR. Or this is how we're going to sing the dialect because this isn't Mozart. We aren't going to sing *the*, we're gonna sing *duh* or *dat*, right?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Right.

BRENDA MOHR. Elaborate.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Yes, that's what I was trying to say earlier. His dedication to the detail of interpreting the song, the way the composer intended it. So he was very good at delineating, there were classical pieces that we would do. He'd try to find African American composers who had written in the style of the Mozart, certain styles because he wanted a program that had variety, but he's very clear, okay, we're not doing, Hallelujah right now. We're doing this particular song and so, yes, like you're saying, you can't hit the *the*, you can't say *thee* or *the*, you gotta say *de* or *duh*.

BRENDA MOHR. In dat great gettin' up mornin.!

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Right. And he knew when to do it and but he also knew when to not overdo it. And he was very particular about that because he grew up in an era when Hollywood had discovered African American music and spirituals and where they had

asked the singers to go too far sometimes. He was always very careful that it wasn't a mockery, that it wasn't too "black." Now again, the intention of the Hollywood producers was never to ridicule, but in their exuberance to try to present, oh, here's a whole different style, sometimes they would push the dial, like, too far. So he had seen both. He had seen when it was initially presented, oh, here's a different style of music than what you're used to hearing in African American music. He had seen the Hollywood producers take that and present it in certain films where they had gone too far and then he'd seen the resurgent and there was a backlash to it going too far. There was a backlash in the African American community where Amos and Andy, for example, had started out one way and then once I'll say Hollywood had taken those characters and kind of, almost pushed it to the point of buffoonery that African Americans, that's when they retreated from it. And so that's why the Spirituals and all of that had kind of faded out and disappeared being done in African American communities because they felt, oh well, they're just trying to embarrass us and make us look like we don't know how to speak, etcetera. And so he was reviving it and was careful to find that balance where, we're not sounding like we're speaking the King's English in this particular selection, but we're also not going to go too far, so that it sounds like buffoonery. Does that make sense?

BRENDA MOHR. Absolutely.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. So he had a great ear for that balance and so both things were important. To be true to how, to that dialect that was spoken then, but not to push it to the point and so that's what he was always careful when we'd go work with, because very well meaning, God bless them, thank God for them, a lot of Caucasian choral teachers wanted to expose their all white choirs to this music and so he was always careful when he went there to make sure they didn't go too far. Yes, you can't make sure that the rhythm feels more connected to African than to Europe, but make sure that the dialect doesn't go too far, but it has to go far enough that it feels authentic. So he was good at toeing that line and warning in both directions. But thank God, it's so wonderful of all these choir directors who wanted to make sure that their choirs got the authentic experience, you know, that that was part of, I want you to know Handel's *Messiah* and you also need to know Jester Hairston because it's all music. So yes, he always found that balance of understanding you classical singers who have been trained, you African American classical singers who have been trained by an opera for the past twenty years, you have to make sure you are not over enunciating. And it's a softer enunciation, basically, don't hit the T so hard, don't hit the *the* so hard, but don't over do it so you sound like you're trying too hard. So we would have many discussions about that, trying to find the balance.

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah, that's so interesting. It's still so interesting today because there are some white choirs who will have a Jester Hairston piece like "In That Great Gettin' up Mornin'" and I've heard them change it to complete King's English. I think if Jester, tell me if I'm wrong, but if Jester were alive today, he would say, "No, that's what I put right there, so sing it like that. Don't change it to King's English just because you feel uncomfortable or maybe you feel like you're going to offend."

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Exactly. And I understand they're afraid of going too far, but it's really, so he would teach just understanding, just relax the enunciation. It's not trying to be really Southern, but it's not trying to be really, it's just in that great gettin' up mornin'. It's gonna naturally be that. But you don't sing IN DAT GREAT, because then they over enunciate the *that*. It's in that energy in trying to enunciate that they go too far. It's in understanding the emotion of the song you're trying to get across. So just let those words pour out. Don't worry about trying to get each T, which you would in a different context.

BRENDA MOHR. So, sing it the way you would just say it?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Just say, in that great gettin' up mornin.' Just say it. Don't worry about it, over enunciating, worry about what you're saying. Worry about the meaning of the song and the emotion of the song as opposed to trying to get each word. And I've been in groups, another friend of Albert, his name was K. Jean Simmons, who was a music teacher who took his choir, and I was always in his choir, and he would travel, and his choir would travel overseas to Europe. It was called the Southern California Youth Chorale and it later became the Musical Americans and they were all friends. And I remember working on a German piece with them and we worked on it for a month because over enunciating is difficult. I mean you have to really work at it, so the whole point is, stop trying so hard, just talk like in that natural speech. Don't be thinking about each word just say it. The relaxation of how you're speaking it will be good enough.

BRENDA MOHR. What is your impression of the philosophy Albert held that underlay his teaching of the spiritual?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. I would to love hear him articulate his philosophy. I have an opinion about what I think his philosophy is as I'm sure everyone has their own interpretation of his philosophy.

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah, I'd love to hear it.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. It dealt with preserving the story. We needed to be telling the story. What story does this song tell? It's not just the piece of music to go, oh, what a beautiful piece of music. There's a story that each song entails that happened to, they used to music in order to transmit some message to an audience, but it could have been poetry. It could have been just spoken. It could have been danced, so it's important to find the message in the song. What is the story? And then what is the most convenient dramatic articulate way to get that story across the audience? What rhythm do we need to take this song at so that if you did not understand the words, you could just listen to the music and get the same story? So what rhythm do we need to take it at? What key is the right key? What emotion is the right one? Let's discover this song. Let's work this song 'til we get across the intent of the composer so that the story that he was trying to tell will have been told by the time we're done singing this particular piece.

Then he would put together a concert that told the story, so in this section, this section is about struggle. This section is about hope. This section is about victory. And that's how he'd group the songs. He didn't articulate it in that way necessarily to the

group, but as someone who worked closely with him in sometimes designing the program, that's what he was looking at. That, let's put these songs together because they get the message across and if we couple these songs together, they'll tell this story to the audience. So that's *my* interpretation of his philosophy. His philosophy is always find the story in the song. And then build from there.

BRENDA MOHR. You're not the first one who has said that, so that's great. Sounds like he was very intentional about his programming?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Yes he was. And just understanding the emotional ride he was taking the audience on and that's how he chose the order. Sometimes the programs would be built around, on purpose, we'll start with the earliest songs and go in order, or sometimes he would group them, you know, now we're going to go back, but more than historical, and grouping the songs, there was the emotional intent that the songs produced. And then he wouldn't have a problem talking in between to give you the history of the song. So he sometimes arranged them historically, but in the program, he would tell you the history of the songs. He would get up and say this is where the song comes from.

In later years he would allow me to do that on certain songs. I would get up and, because I remember when Jester Hairston came to my high school because I was fortunate enough that Jester was friends with my high school teacher, and he told us about, he did a whole couple of days with us, and Jester was wonderful and would go to many high schools, so I'm sure many of the kids in the group have this same story, Jester visiting them. So Jester told us how he wrote "I Want Jesus," and that he literally was telling a story, that he saw a woman who cried, "I want Jesus!" It starts out with a soprano soloist and she is being sold off and her family is being split up and then there's another section "walk with me" and he says that's them being chained together and they're not starting to walk, and at this point she gets whipped, and she goes, "Lord, I want Jesus!" and we had no idea. We're just singing these different sections, but he said, there's an actually theatrical story that he was telling and that's why he wrote the section the way he did. Then he said the same thing with "Elijah Rock," that he had interviewed a former slave when he was young, and she was trying to tell the story of a sermon that he had heard, but she was getting things mixed up and that she knew there was Elijah and Moses stood on the rock where Elijah stood, and that she was trying to explain the sermon that she had heard as a young girl, but all that she knew was that everybody got excited and that everybody started to shout, and so she would say, "Elijah, rock, shout, shout!" and so when he told the stories, oh this is what you were thinking when you wrote the songs! We changed instantly! My 80% white choir, and there was about 20% African American, mixed with others. We just sang the song differently because once we knew the story the emotion changed. We were all crying while we're singing. It was fantastic.

Albert wanted the audience to have that same experience. I want you to hear this song and understand the story behind it. And because I knew some of Jester's stories, he allowed me to tell some of those, in later years. He felt his mission was to transmit the history of the slaves. His mission, I'm supposed to carry on the same thing that the original Jubilee Singers had done and he felt, a hundred years later, that I'm supposed to continue that same mission. Here's our story and here's what we went through and here's

how we believe. Here's what we went through and here's how God delivered us from it. And so his concerts were going to take the audience on that journey, historically, and emotionally.

BRENDA MOHR. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers has been in existence the longest out of any professional black choir in the United States, correct?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Yes, since the '60's.

BRENDA MOHR. Right, longer than any other. And there aren't very many professional black choirs in the United States?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. No. I don't know how Albert was inspired. Actually, I probably heard. I probably asked him myself, so if you ever get ahold of the tapes, but I'm sure you can ask him and he, you better have some batteries on you because he will explain the whole thing.

BRENDA MOHR. I will.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Yes, somehow he was inspired even though that wasn't a thing. Black choirs for the most part just sang in church on Sunday, but because he had started in the '20's, he had some sort of other idea of the possibilities and so it occurred to him, this could be something that could sustain itself, not just a black choir that sings on Sunday, but we actually can travel and tour and so he was one of the very first, if not, the first African American directors to do that. And probably, to be honest, because of his connections in the white community because he was a person everybody loved and he didn't really see color lines and boundaries and so he had a lot of friends in all communities and I'm sure there were professional white choirs that were touring and because he was friends with those people, he probably thought, well, I should be doing the same thing. I can do the same thing. And that wasn't always the thought. A lot of African Americans during that time just did not see themselves doing the same things that, especially in the 60's before civil rights and all that. It never occurred to them that they could do the same things that other choirs were doing. But somehow he was inspired by God, obviously, and was even one of the first, or *the* first, this is something that could go all over the world and could sustain itself.

Now, Gini will be able to tell you the history of them asking, getting up the courage to ask for more money and to say, well, you should pay for our hotel rooms, you know. It grew because even though they thought we could tour; they still didn't have the mindset that we could demand too much money, we should just be grateful, which during the '60's is correct because blacks during that time were limited from doing so many things. It was kind of bold to think, well, you should pay for this for us, and pay for that for us! So even though he was one of the first to think we should travel, there was a transformation in his thinking, as far as saying we should get paid, like what was equal with white choirs all over the world.

BRENDA MOHR. Right. Yes, Gini has shared a lot of that with me. What are the non-musical ways Albert influenced you? Or you saw him influence others around you?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Wow, that's very interesting. What did I learn from Albert? Well, he inspired me. His fearlessness in talking to anybody, in speaking up and saying, hey, I think we should do this, or I want this, you know, or not being shy about, I don't want to say promoting yourself like it's a bad thing, but thinking, having confidence in who you are. But especially just his amazing, Albert would go up to President Obama right now and say, "Hey!" and just start talking. "You should hear my choir!" He'd just do that. I somehow was taught that there are celebrities and there are important people and then there are regular people. And Albert believes that there are just people, so he talks to anybody. He thinks that person is just a person. Which is obviously, of course, the truth, but it's hard to convince yourself that. You see them on television or they just look impressive and so he has no problem. He loves everybody. He remembers everybody. He remembers everybody's stories. If any of his former students walked up, he'd say, "Oh, now this is so and so and I taught her in 1982 or 1962." He knows everyone's stories which is what makes people feel good because he, this man knows me and likes me, personally. So he had a gift of making you think he knows you, he likes you, he knows all about you, but I think outside of choir, it's just his ability to talk to anybody at anytime and feel confident and comfortable.

BRENDA MOHR. Beautiful. And I've heard that from many people. What are things unique to him that you didn't see exist in any other conductors or music teachers that you worked with? And that can be musical or non-musical.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Probably unique to Albert, is his desire to connect with an audience, personally. I've worked with fantastic directors who really are intent on presenting the music. Their focus is on the choir. Their focus is on the performance because we've rehearsed for a long time, so let's show them what we've done. You know, we've spent all these months rehearsing this, so let's focus now, so that we can present, so that all that rehearsal will pay off. Albert almost lets that go. He believes that is going to take care of itself. And when he's on stage, he wants to connect with the audience. He wants to have a personal experience with the audience and eh wants the audience to have a personal experience with him. So unique to Albert, is his desire to get the audience to respond, enjoy themselves and say, "Amen!" at this point. He wants to create a communal experience. He doesn't just want to present something to the audience. He wants the audience to present something back to the choir. He needs it to be a conversation. And that's probably unique to him because of his desire for it to be a conversation between the performer and audience as opposed to just a one-way monologue.

BRENDA MOHR. What are some of your best Jubilee Singers memories or maybe even your worst memories, something on tour or rehearsals?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. This is fascinating that I'm stumped because this is the question that I've always wanted to ask and get all the former Jubilee Singers. When we were

going to do our own documentary.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. It's funny that I don't have one.

BRENDA MOHR. Any impressions while touring?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. I've been fortunate enough to travel with different groups, so I've had similar experiences, like I said. I traveled with Gene Simmons when I was 15, 16, 17, 18, before I met Albert, back in the '70's. And although, like I said Gene Simmons and Albert are friends, they probably got the idea about the same time about traveling and taking groups overseas. The other groups I travelled with were mostly white groups, maybe 10 or 20 percent of the group were African American or other or Latino or Asian. The other groups I travelled with, we really were bringing music that the audiences weren't familiar with to them. We went to South America. We went to Japan. We went all over. In traveling with Albert in a group that was 95% African American, which was the first time I'd ever done that, it was interesting to bring something different to people. Like I was saying, when we went to Iowa, or we went to Indiana and I remember those specifically because those are some of my most fun times. And the people's deep desire to connect with us, it's as though they, here's the weirdest thing I'm going to say, okay. It's like they wanted to make up for hundreds of years of misunderstanding between the races. They so wanted to connect, and it's just like what can we do to make you feel welcome, to make you feel loved? They were so amazingly generous and loving because, and you could just, you know. I'd gone and visited and seen people be hospitable. But I hadn't seen people just so desire to connect and want to make amends. They never said those words, but that was the feeling I got.

BRENDA MOHR. And this is the mid to late '90's you're describing.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Right but it had, certain things had happened, legally, in the United States in the '60's and '70's, but there was still a division. I didn't know that would happen when we showed up presenting the history that Albert was presenting. Like here's what the slaves went through. Here's what the civil rights meant. Here's the separation. Here's what the people were going through. Yet still believed that there was a God that would change things. The wonderful thing is that people wanted to connect with that story and say, "Yes, I understand what you went through. I understand the history that you're bringing. Even though you didn't go through that, you represent those people. On behalf of my ancestors, I want to represent them and embrace this culture and embrace this music and help the tradition to continue." It was an extremely emotional thing. I can't say, oh, I ate weird food or I performed in this church, because we performed in incredible places and churches, because I had that experience before in other groups. But the emotional connection, I had *never* had before, on that level because I had never before been bringing this particular story to people. So their desire to understand it and connect with us was powerful. We went, I think it was Indiana, they cooked, they had a barbeque. What are the best steaks you can have?

BRENDA MOHR. I'm not sure. I'm vegetarian.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Oh. They were the best cuts you can have. Filet mignon. They cooked this filet mignon and shark and they must have spent hundreds of dollars on each of us. When we went to Hawaii, they just fed us a feast, I mean it's like we were royalty. And it's like, if we could atone for everything, and just by how generous we are to you, we will do that. The way we were treated some places I'll just never forget it. It was their genuine desire to connect and say, "We understand your story and we empathize and we love you and here's our way of showing that we get it."

BRENDA MOHR. That's beautiful. Interesting because one of my questions is opposite - did the Jubilees experience racial prejudice?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Someone else will have to tell you that story. By the '90's, and here's why, something is wrong with me and I just don't think anyone's ever mad at me.

BRENDA MOHR. Good for you!

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. You could accidentally kick me, and notice I said accidentally. You could kick me and I would assume it was accidentally. If someone shook their fist, I'd think they must be having a bad day. I just don't think, so it's possible, but I would not be the one to give you that information. I would just assume, oh, no, I'm sure that was a mistake, so I don't know, so that question, I don't have an answer.

BRENDA MOHR. Or that you were told were not, we didn't say we'd feed you dinner. You're on your own for dinner, or...

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Right, so Gini may have those stories because they started in the '60's, '70's, so I'm sure they've got those stories. By the time I got in the group in the '90's, as far as I know, it didn't exist. And I wouldn't notice it anyway, if it did, it'd be much more subtle by the time I got in the group.

BRENDA MOHR. I think she told me while they were on the bus sometimes they would hear racial slurs.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Right, because she started in the group so early. So yeah, in the '60's, '70's, I'm sure it was going on, but by the time I got in the group in '95 it wasn't.

BRENDA MOHR. How long were you in the group?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. I'm still there. Twenty something years now.

BRENDA MOHR. When was your last overseas tour?

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. The last tour, I don't know, but I'd say it's been 8 or 9 years. We started touring California just basically doing things that were nearby. Around 2008, when there was a worldwide recession, European groups could no longer afford to just

bring us over because they were taking care of their own needs, so it kind of just stopped in 2008 and began to peter out. It started to be a lot more local concerts, which is fine because people needed to hear about us and there were schools in the area that needed, things that we would normally ignore, but now we would go to a lot of colleges that were in California. So as far as tour, my last was in 2009 or so. But as far as the last concert, it was just five months ago or something.

BRENDA MOHR. I'm just looking over these questions. It's interesting because one question helped answer another question. I don't have any other questions.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. Well, good. I'm used to talking and explaining things. Don't forget your first question was what was your name and then it took me 20 minutes to answer that! [laughter]

BRENDA MOHR. Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me, Doug. I really appreciate your contribution to my research.

DOUGLAS GRIFFIN. You're very welcome. I'm glad I could help.

[End of Interview]

APPENDIX Q

INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT J. MCNEIL

ALBERT J. MCNEIL

January 6, 2017

10:00 a.m.

In-person Interview, home of Albert J. McNeil

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

BRENDA MOHR. Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today, Dr. McNeil.

ALBERT MCNEIL. No, I'm very excited about what you're trying to do.

BRENDA MOHR. I'm thrilled, too. Let's just go ahead and start with the first question on my list here. First of all, our category will be the Jubilee Singers and what musical and non-musical elements determine the selection of singers for your ensemble?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I don't get it.

BRENDA MOHR. Oh, okay. What were you looking for? Was there a certain sound you wanted? Did you want a professional? Were you okay accepting amateurs?

ALBERT MCNEIL. You mean selecting people to be in the choir.

BRENDA MOHR. Yes.

ALBERT MCNEIL. First, musicality if they were very sensitive to it. And secondly, they were sensitive to what the spiritual is and what kind of organism it is and that they want to participate with that. Then they'd have to have a commitment to understanding and appreciating what God has done as far as inspiring people to sing music that comes from, I say, their heart. It's a very, well, to say spiritual, you have to...first of all, I won't judge people, but I say you have to have a commitment to what the music means and how it fits into their lives. You can't just sing it. Anybody can sing what's printed on the printed page. Anybody can imitate whatever, but can you sing with a commitment that reaches people? That's the point.

BRENDA MOHR. So you must have, during the auditions, you took some time to get to know them as a person.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Not really. That's taking living together. That takes seeing your in-and-out of all kinds of circumstances and you don't have that kind of luxury, except when you're on the road together and when you come to continuous rehearsals; then you see

how people are, their temperament, their attitude, how well they get along with each other, the congeniality. That's what I would say.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you have them sight-read anything?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yes. Oh, definitely.

BRENDA MOHR. Prepared solo perhaps?

ALBERT MCNEIL. They have to sight-read. They have to have a musicality; either play the piano or play something. If they can play an instrument, fine, but they have to have reading ability to be in the Jubilee Singers. It's impossible. You can't have a mountain of repertoire and expect people to learn it all by rote. I don't want that for the Jubilee Singers. That's why we have strict auditions, even now. Um, my, uh, my, whoever followed me...

BRENDA MOHR. Diane Clayton White

ALBERT MCNEIL. She just had a series of auditions where she heard everybody. She rejected some and applauded some. You can't turn over repertoire learning it all by rote. That's the old passé way. Jubilee singers are built on the fact of intellectually capable singers who are bent on going beyond where the music was founded. The music was founded by rote, of course, but we go beyond it. If you want to write arrangements, how can you do that unless you have the skill of reading or playing something?

BRENDA MOHR. Today the Jubilee Singers are ethnically diverse. When did you select the first non-African American into the ensemble?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I'd say about 20 years ago. Look at Robert Shaw. Have you ever seen the Robert Shaw chorale?

BRENDA MOHR. Mhm.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Have you seen it from the very beginning? Always have a black person in there some place. And I thought to myself, why are we segregating this and allowing only black people to be in it? The white people that were in the Robert Shaw Chorale, for example, were first of all musicians. If my choir is going to be of that quality, they have to be musicians; I don't care what color they are. And if they want to know about spirituals, they should be in the company of people who are making music called Spirituals.

BRENDA MOHR. And how did you go about selecting music for the Jubilee Singers?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, first of all, things that I'd heard, and music that had been sent to be my friends, the traditional people that I had learned to understand—Hall Johnson, you name 'em.

BRENDA MOHR. Jester Hairston?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Jester Hairston, and there's a whole panoply of people. Not just those two. There are others.

BRENDA MOHR. Rosephanye Powell?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, Rosephanye, those are contemporaries. I'm talking about the old-time people. All you gotta do is look at Eileen Southern's book and you'll see the names of people who were writing music in a spiritual format. And I would go after those. And then I was active in, even though, I was born and raised a Catholic. My mother was the maverick in the family and she took me to all kinds of churches, even though I told her, I said, "Mom, we're committing venal sin. You know that." And she said, "Oh Al, forget it." And I did, but that's the only way I was able to, because she had a craving for good preaching and she said, "I'm not getting it at the Catholic church." The homily is all watered down—pablum-type things at that time. They've improved a lot now. Now, they get really with it and some of the churches go beyond with it. That aggravates a lot of Catholics. So we were used to a more toned down approach to the homily. And the music was appalling. Even though they used the old Saint Basel hymnal, they would use compositions by Catholic composers. But to me, the success of it has been, for example, the new Catholic hymnal, which I have a copy of up there. It has taken a lot of hymns and responses right out of the Protestant hymnals; Methodist, Presbyterian, you name it. And it's included in their hymnals. That red book there is the book. And I'm saying, "Wow," because they've felt the need to be maybe a little free-er in their worship services and a little more pointed in the direction of what they wanted to do.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you ever listen to recordings of other black choirs?

ALBERT MCNEIL. No, you're going on your spirit. You're going on your own sense of what makes this work. Irwin Parnes used to manage the original Jubilee Singers. As a matter of fact, when they finished their last tour in 1956, we came on board in 1960. We picked up exactly the same itineraries that the original Jubilee Singers were doing and we inherited the impresarios. It was a built in thing for me, so we just walked into a hole, for years.

BRENDA MOHR. That was the Holy Spirit.

ALBERT MCNEIL. God was working in strange and mysterious ways.

BRENDA MOHR. That's awesome. When you would plan your concerts, were you historical in your planning of the program order, or were you going by themes of what kind of music it was, for example, message about heaven, or work songs? How did you program your concerts?

ALBERT MCNEIL. It depended. First of all, you have to perform for an audience. What energizes an audience? What gets them turned on to what you're doing? They wouldn't come to your concerts if they didn't appreciate Spirituals. And the European audiences loved Spirituals. They loved the sentiment of it. They loved the personal attitude. They loved the personal wording, the forming. Even though they didn't understand maybe English. They certainly understood the meaning by the emotion that was created. And some of them were very popular—years and years popular. Go Down Moses, Steal Away, a host of things. "Lord I Want to be a Christian," blah, blah, blah, there's just so many titles that ended up very popular. You've Got Shoes, I've Got Shoes. And they learned those. I remember, I have gone to Israel so many times, and one of our bus drivers, knew a whole stack of Spirituals. After a concert, on the way back, he would sing these things to us and we enjoyed listening to him. He had learned all of this. The Israelis are very, very, how should I say, knowledgeable about Spirituals. They compare them to their own problems. When Israel was in Egypt's land, let my people go. That type of thing. "Steal Away," "No One Knows the Trouble I've Seen." They identify with that very easily. That's why spirituals with Israeli people, or with people in Israel, were very successful.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you get the final say on what the program order would be or did Irwin?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, like in any program format, you're going to have a climax some place. You start at some point and you take people to some place. There are ups and downs and ups and downs and ups and downs and climatic finishes. You start at some point and I'd always start with something uplifting. That would give the, energize the audience so they would, oh, rhythm, melody, actual sentimentality of the material. Parnes taught me a lot about that. He taught me about where do you go from here to here to here. Because he was an impresario, so he knew what was going to move an audience. You can't just walk on the stage and sing a couple pieces. You gotta take that audience some place. Yeah, I learned a lot about pacing. If you have a very big piece, you're going to follow with something quiet. If you have hand clapping, we did very little of that. Because actually hand clapping and finger snapping were not customs that black people did. They really didn't. And finger snapping was considered secular and so you didn't finger snap.

BRENDA MOHR. I remember one time you adjudicated my choir, a long time ago at Cal State Northridge and we sang an arrangement of "Swing Slow, Sweet Chariot" and I had my kids snap. You said, "No, Brenda, snapping is for Saturday night at the jazz club. Clapping is Sunday morning at church." I will always remember that and I never did it again.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Despite the fact, Black people are very concerned about what is considered "right" and what is considered "wrong." Nowadays, however, a lot of the old rules don't apply. I noticed the movement that some of the choirs, some of the church choirs that call themselves church choirs, outlandish! Mount Rubidoux, the Church of God and Christ, for example. They're short of dancing. I mean, they are dancing,

literally, but what I mean, what do you do, secular or sacred? Or are you trying to mix both? What are you trying to do with this movement? Or are you just trying to attract attention? Or are you praising God that way? If you are, I hope you have a well-defined definition of why you have to do extremes.

The traditional Spiritual should be performed with some tradition. Absolutely tradition, which would not mean stand straight up and down. If you want to sway or move, whatever is natural to the presentation. I did a concert, just two years ago, with Kathleen Battle, with the Metropolitan Opera at UCLA, and she was fantastic. She was put out of the Metro, but she's back in there. Just a month ago, she just performed at the Metropolitan Opera, which was very good. And if she did the format that I did, which was the Underground Railroad, with her songs that had to do with signaling and praise and introspective meditating kind of material. And of course it was packed. The only thing she didn't let me do, she wouldn't let me choose the piece I wanted to do with my choir to show them off, so we ended up doing "I've been 'Buked," which is a quiet little piece.

BRENDA MOHR. She was in control wasn't she?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Absolutely.

BRENDA MOHR. Arrangers of Spirituals, did you prefer certain ones and why?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I'll tell you what I don't like. I don't like commercializing Spirituals. I'm gonna call names. Mark Hayes does a lot of very interesting things and he mixes jazz and he mixes secular material. He's grinding out tons of things he calls Spirituals. And it bothers me. I would say arrangements should be faithful to the melody. Secondly, if you're gonna do innovative things, that's why Moses Hogan is so successful. You could not condemn Moses for his arrangements of Spirituals. Because what he did was very, very clever harmonically, rhythmically. His sense of form was unbelievable and the use of various choirs, either women or men, or soloists. The man was near genius because what he could do. He really turned a form that was one way for many years into another kind of innovative, contemporary form. It met the need of contemporary performances. Singers loved it because it's reminiscent of what they're used to doing with any other media, as far as chorale music is concerned. It was a sad thing that he had to go. But he was the answer to where are we going to go with the Spiritual.

BRENDA MOHR. I love what you just said.

ALBERT MCNEIL. He wrote a song dedicated to me called "Ride the Chariot." But what did he do with that? He changed harmonic innovation, use of soloist. I mean, but he still had an eye on where this is supposed to end up, climatically.

BRENDA MOHR. Keeping the melody.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Keeping the melody sacred. Hall Johnson did the same thing. Hall said, “Ok, you can do anything you want with the Spiritual, but don’t mess with the melody. Be true to the form.”

BRENDA MOHR. Do you have any experiences of touring with the Jubilees that stand out as memorable—one or two experiences? I know you have hundreds, but maybe a story that won’t ever leave your memory?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Unfortunately, there are so many, but many times my singers and I would walk off the stage in tears. There would be something happening because I believed in tone quality. I believed in uniting the vowel sound. I believed in blending unified vowels for each of the sections. I think that’s very important. Sections become as one. We’re gonna sing a piece, but we’re gonna unify the vowel, so the section sounds like one voice. And then we’d manipulate it the way we want to, but in that process, we’ve destroyed the individuality of each person. They all become a part of a whole. To me, that’s extremely important. And that’s how I used to work for my tone quality. I didn’t want to hear this voice over here. I want to hear the altos, the lusciousness, and velvet quality. If it’s a soprano, in tune, but maybe way up two or three octaves higher than normal. And if you have a soloist, she has got to enunciate and pronounce even at higher levels, so that it makes sense, you see. But I worked on the unification of the vowel. And each section is the unification of the vowel that counts. But that’s a basic premise for choral music. And it doesn’t change. For example, if you’re going to, Jester did not like dialect. He used it many times on his own. “This Old Hammer Killed John Henry.” [singing] That’s a folk tune and he wanted to create that situation. There’s a difference between the folk aspect of African American music. I didn’t say Spiritual. I said African American music. When you inject in traditional African American music, it’s appropriate, I think. But you gotta know how to separate the two. I never played with dialect. In all my dealing and working and playing the piano for Jester, he said, “Albert, don’t play around with the dialect, unless you know what you are doing. The rules of general English apply to dialect as well as they do with English. And if you’re going to use the article, it should be used correctly.”

BRENDA MOHR. In ‘dat great gettin’ up morning.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yes, and you gotta be very careful that you don’t change the article to sound, how should I put it. Like *duh* book.

BRENDA MOHR. Like the King’s English? Don’t pronounce it in the King’s English?

ALBERT MCNEIL. That’s right. You gotta be sure that you keep it under control. Because a lot of people when they say D-I-S, dis, they put the emphasis accent on the article. If it’s the church, not *duh* church. The church, *duh* church. I don’t know why a lot of people emphasize the article and it makes it wrong. It really is crazy.

BRENDA MOHR. Let's go back to when you'd leave the stage with the Jubilees. You'd be in tears and that was a result of what you gave emotionally, physically and mentally to the audience, but they received it and they were in tears too, right?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I mean sometimes, first of all, if you believe that God is on the throne, if you believe that the power of God comes through the music, if you believe that, then you're transmitting a spiritual thing. I'm not putting this into words very well. All I'm saying is empathizing. I learned from John Finley Williamson, who was my teacher when I was at Westminster Choir College. He would say to me, "Al McNeil, you're not black." I'd say, "Well, you know I had a [Negro] mother who taught me to appreciate this even though we were Catholic. She would be in the kitchen, washing dishes or cooking or something, and she would be singing something like a Spiritual, anything that would move her. And I'd walk into the kitchen and she'd be crying, tears coming down. "Mom, why are you crying?" She'd say, "Because I feel this." And I learned many times, I would say, like I'm alone, I'm 96 years old. All my family is dead except my son, and 3 grandchildren, and some cousins that's it. But from my mom, who was in the show business with my father, black face, which was stupid, but that's the way it was. They were in a silent screen from New Orleans, the minstrel combination. Which to me, they black faced themselves, but they were already black, didn't make any sense, but that's the way it was. She used to tell me, if you're going to be effective, you have to approach the material humbly. Like the song, "Live a humble Lord, humble yourself." What does that mean? And it's so interesting that the slaves knew the difference between arrogance and humility. Humble. I mean you can find so many answers to so many psychodynamics among black people who were enslaved by the words of the songs that they changed. They addressed those songs. Like live a humble, what does that mean?

BRENDA MOHR. What else would J. Finley Williamson say to you? Was that what you remember him saying the most-- "Albert you're not black?"

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, my mother was a Creole from Louisiana. And to be a Creole, you had to have a French name. My mother was a Boyé, but she married a McNeil. He lived uptown. She lived downtown. Uptown, downtown, New Orleans was quite a thing. She took me there, she and my sister, but me basically, to show us off when I was 7 years old. I will never forget how I felt. We got off the train, Southern Pacific, where we had been segregated. We had a compartment, so the food was brought to us from the dining car and we ate it there. And I would ask the question, "Why are we eating in here?" "Because we can't go to the dining car." "Why? It makes no sense." "You'll see." We get off the train in New Orleans and get on the streetcar to go to my cousin's house in the Tremé, which is a location where an open market is, the Tremé Market. It's strictly European format. I look back at it now, and I can just see it in my mind. I jumped on the streetcar and of course ran down in front and sat down near the motorman. My mother stood in the aisle and said, "Albert, come back here with me." "No, I don't want to come back there with you. I want to be able to see." And she said, "We're not supposed to see from that position." "Why?" "Come here, I'll show you. There's a sign. It says for colored only." "What's colored?" I had no idea what that meant. All the people on the

street were looking and listening. She brought me up to where colored are. Am I colored? That's when it all really started. I didn't realize. I went to Saint Augustine church, which is in the center of the French quarter. The community said this part is only for colored people. That part is for white people. You didn't go to that side of the communion rail. It made no sense to me. My mother spoke French and she said, "I'll talk to about it. You're too young to understand. You will." I always think about, "Farther along, you'll know all about it..." That's how I found out the difference.

BRENDA MOHR. What year did the Jubilee Singers reach their 501(3)c status? Was that 2 years ago?

ALBERT MCNEIL. It was just last year. That's why we have the big turnover. 2015. Thanks to Greg Cheng and his friends in San Francisco, who are lawyers. It took us 3 years to get that status. It's not easy. And it's very costly. I didn't have to pay them what I would have had to pay had they charged. They did it pro-bono, but I had to pay all the government fees.

BRENDA MOHR. Is that the same year Diane Clayton White came on?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, the board of directors met and we invited her to membership and she became a member of the board and then we began thinking about me. I think it was Greg. Well, you got Diane Clayton White, who is PhD from University of California Santa Barbara and she directs at Faithful Central Bible Church in Inglewood and she knows the black community. She's basically a composer pianist. That's why her title is interim director right now.

BRENDA MOHR. Is your title Director Emeritus?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yes.

BRENDA MOHR. What about when you get called for performances? Is it 50/50 between you and Diane?

ALBERT MCNEIL. We don't conduct at the same time. If she's gonna conduct, then let her do the same thing. She's only been in that status for not quite two years so I have had to stand in for her a couple times for "Hour of Power" and a couple of other programs we've been doing since year one.

BRENDA MOHR. Let's go to topic number two, do you want to add anything to this topic, the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I was active with the National Association of Negro Musicians. I founded the local chapter.

BRENDA MOHR. What year?

ALBERT MCNEIL. It's about 45 or 50 years old. I was gung-ho. I was one of these gung-ho kids. I paid my own way and went back East. I caught the train, went to Detroit, Cincinnati, went to Columbus, Ohio. All those places have strong chapters and I met musicians. And you talk about listening to music and people sing. Wow! These people really know what they're doing vocally!

BRENDA MOHR. You founded the LA chapter?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I founded the LA chapter. There was nothing here and I got about 5 people on my side and we started out. And it's still going today.

BRENDA MOHR. Is there anything else you would like to mention?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Opportunities to hear other singers and other singers singing, black people really singing operatic material, concert material, choirs were well trained and knew what they were doing. I met Margaret Bonds that way in Chicago. I went to the Chicago convention. She handed me a manuscript, "Ballad of the Brown King." I came here to LA and I did it. I did it with the same program as the Magnificat of Bach. She was in tears. "Al, I never thought I'd be on the same program as Bach." I said, "Well you are." I did it at Holman Methodist Church and I did it with my little choir from Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship. I had left the People's Independent Church where I had been since year one, where I did "The Ordering of Moses" with the Hollywood Church Choir and the People's Independent Church Choir.

Charles Hirt was my professor at USC. He's a fantastic man. I admired him so. He stood 6 foot 5 and when he stood in front of that choir, he was fantastic. And his gestures were so pronounced and I just thought he was too much. I did the 40th anniversary of processional at Disneyland. Two nights in a row with a choir of 175 voices. I mean, orchestra of 175, choir of 1000. Two different choirs and I went around Southern California working with them. Sixteen different pieces they had to learn from memory. And they liked my conducting a lot because I'm very clean and I did exactly what's expected and they complained about the person before me because they never knew where he was. It was just a real challenge. That was the 40th anniversary of the processional. I remember Dr. Hirt was in a wheel chair and I remember I said "Why are you here?" And he said, "Al, go ahead and do it, you're going to do a good job." And it was wonderful, and I would have done it the next year, but I was in Japan. How do you like that? Disney—you turn 'em down once, and that's it. [laughter]

BRENDA MOHR. Top of number two, rehearsal techniques and pedagogy. You've mentioned a few things already, but just in case, let's go down through here. Rehearsal technique.

ALBERT MCNEIL. What do you mean?

BRENDA MOHR. Rehearsal technique. Was there a certain way you would outline your rehearsal? Did you start with the easier songs first? Did you start with the more demanding vocally?

ALBERT MCNEIL. First of all, you've gotta warm up some place. And what do you mean by warm up? Working on the unified vowel. Making sure you understand your explosive consonants. And what is D and T and K and M and N? How do you handle that? Devise exercises that fit the use and understanding of the vowels. Vowel sounds, consonant endings, voiced consonants. The whole panoply of what the word looks like. How do you sing mother? "Mother". Is it "Ah"? Or is it "er"? Or whatever. In other words, you gotta isolate some of that, but you put it in context of something.

BRENDA MOHR. Kind of like the Fred Waring style?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yeah, I learned a lot from Fred Waring, I thought he was driven. Because voice consonants and those of the m and n's and explosive consonants and the k's and the so on, so forth. To me, you try to put stuff in context. Working out of context is sometimes out of crazy. Why? Pick something out of the material you're working on and utilize it on your vocalizing. I think that makes more sense. [Sings] That's what I mean by unify vowel sounds. Explosive sounds, together and how do you handle that? [Sings] Well, you know what I mean.

BRENDA MOHR. Working on vowels and consonants and you've started out with your vocal warm-ups.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, sometimes the vocal warm-ups should include enough material that handles the octave. My favorite one is "Where shall I go today" because I know all of those vowel sounds fit into that arpeggio. And it's an arpeggio, so you can go by half steps. And believe it or not you can get good things happening. And don't just leave it there. Can you find things in things you're working on?

BRENDA MOHR. Did you do breathing exercises? Did you talk about breath? How to sustain the breath and use it for good vocal production? Do you use it very much?

ALBERT MCNEIL. No, I don't talk. I put things in context. You can't talk technique. You do it. If you're going to emphasize a particular technique of chorale singing—If it's an arpeggio—you find one. If it's a scale line, find one. If it's skipping, thirds, fourths and fifths. If you're doing something in harmony, you gotta make sure that all those vowel sounds are the same. That was my biggest thing with the Jubilee Singers. Let us get together on the vowel. How do you sing? What are you? What are you? And then I would begin to build a little thing here. Everybody on this chord and then I'd try everybody on another chord.

BRENDA MOHR. You had a lot of soloists in that group.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, I limit any vibrato. Of course I want some vibrato, otherwise, it destroys the [inaudible] But I don't refer to it often because I don't want "AHHH" [sings with lots of vibrato] type of singing. And I don't want a soprano that will kill me with too much vibrato.

BRENDA MOHR. Because there goes all the work you did to tune.

ALBERT MCNEIL. That's right. If you're going to be, if your amplitude is almost a second, a minor second is ridiculous. You just can't have that if you're going to have a unified vowel and a choir that sings in tune.

BRENDA MOHR. And your soloists?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Soloists can do whatever they want. I don't care.

BRENDA MOHR. I meant solo singers, they knew they were in a choir, so they knew to use their choir voice.

ALBERT MCNEIL. I never had to tell somebody, "Please don't sing" or, "If you're going to sing, sing softly." Because you're destroying the vowel unification here. You have it with women more than you do with men.

BRENDA MOHR. So initiation of vocal tone, did you have anything where, was there a special way you wanted them to breathe to prepare, prepare before they sang, or was it just a boom, they start singing? Because some conductors say breathe the vowel. I don't know if you had any special techniques you liked to use.

ALBERT MCNEIL. You have to be very careful that you don't make the production mechanical. You gotta be very careful that you don't put this whole thing into a series of exercises where people are confused – do they do this this and this? What comes first, the process or the actual singing? You have to think, why are you in a choir? Why? You're in a choir to enjoy the feeling that you get from being in this choir, the congeniality, and the togetherness, but you gotta be unified in your performance. I am careful with too much technique. Technique is fine, but you're not there to be in voice class. You are there to sing, so regardless of what you do, and you have to be subtle enough to turn that word into an exercise without them even knowing it. In other words, what I'm saying, what do you put first, the process or the singing? The joy of singing or the mechanics of singing? A lot of people get those things confused and then it takes away the joy because you're, am I doing this right? Am I sitting? Of course, sitting and standing are a very important process. But I'm saying emphasizing one of those over the actual performance is detrimental. Now some people disagree with that, you gotta be. I don't mind that. I think that's fine if there's a reason for being. If you know bad posture produces bad tone. If you know breathing is something that we have got to do together, then we work on let's sing that phrase again, and take a deep breath. Do you use your mouth or your nose? Breathe in and out. What kind of posture do you have? Is the left foot in the front? I mean, you gotta be really careful that you don't make this crazy, so that it destroys the joy of singing.

BRENDA MOHR. What did you do before rehearsal? Was there a lot of score study or were these all songs that you already knew the pieces and you didn't have to do a lot of score study? Did you make out lesson plans or rehearsal plans?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, you made a rehearsal plan, which would be, what's first, page 5, page 6, page 7, and then you put together 7, 8, 9, so however you're going to approach it. I always started with whatever is most difficult let's go there first.

BRENDA MOHR. Was it a two-hour rehearsal?

ALBERT MCNEIL. It depends on what we're doing. Two hours, you can do an awful lot of music. I would never stray. I learned this from Hall Johnson. Whenever he had a rehearsal, you can be sure he's gonna wear out one piece to death. He'll take a section. He was methodical. He was a cellist, so consequently the fingers would look at me and say this is the way it is. If you didn't get it right, he would go over that section until it was right for him. There is a mode of limitation I believe. You have to think in terms of a few things, physical stamina, motivation, interest, and excitement. And if you hit something too hard all the time, and bang bang bang, you destroy it for the people. In other words, if they didn't get this passage right, we'll try it again later. We'll try it again maybe an hour later. Let's go back and do, blah blah blah because it's just a natural thing. I never beat a dead horse. If it's exciting, I want it to be exciting. I want to keep it at that point and then drop it. Don't hang onto it. If they're getting it, fine. If not, we'll come back later.

BRENDA MOHR. So you would start the rehearsals with the difficult stuff?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Not necessarily. I might start with something unfamiliar, something they haven't sung in weeks, just to see where they are and to get people alerted. It depends on the mindset of your group and how they react to you. Are they used to this? If you get too routine you destroy the joy of the rehearsal. Make it fun. Turn to page 5 and take a look at that measure there. Remember, we did that a few weeks ago and we had a lot of trouble with it. Let's try it. You have to be creative in dealing with vocal problems. If there's something that one section is not getting, I'd always say altos, sing this for them, or tenors, sing this for them. Let some other part sing it. Sight-read this, basses. Just be spontaneous. They never know what's going to happen, but then it puts them on the alert. Don't tell me you can't sing a tenor line. You can. Sing an octave lower. I don't care, so long as you've got the right notes. It makes everyone become aware of the fact that just because you're an alto or a soprano, you're susceptible to the whole. You're a part of the whole mechanism. So as a result, you're concerned about whether the sopranos sing right or wrong.

BRENDA MOHR. When you were talking about blending the vowel, did you seat your singers in a certain order? Weston Noble calls it voice matching. Did you do any voice matching?

ALBERT MCNEIL. If we had the problem of some people who just couldn't blend, I'd say, sing that note. And you hang onto it. You sing it. You sing it. Let me hear all 5 of you sing the same sound, in tune. They know. That way you get a blended sound and they become very much aware that they are one voice.

BRENDA MOHR. Would you maybe switch and move that one alto next to another alto?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Depending on if that alto needs help.

BRENDA MOHR. Oh ok. More for help. Not because their voices blend together?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, sometimes their voices don't blend together so well if that's a problem.

BRENDA MOHR. Then you would separate them, or put them together with someone who does blend?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Of course.

BRENDA MOHR. Do you have any go-to tricks or gimmicks?

ALBERT MCNEIL. No, I don't even know what that means.

BRENDA MOHR. Push your hand up in the air so we don't sing flat! –That's a gimmick. Some conductors have gimmicks.

ALBERT MCNEIL. That's their personality. If you're that type of person then it's unique to that individual.

BRENDA MOHR. What other elements beyond unifying the vowel were important to you? Dynamics?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Of course, dynamics, rhythm. It all comes back to how you've established that tone to start with. Generally, if you worked as a unit, the section, then you don't have to do any of those things because you've solved as you've gone along. I never had that problem

BRENDA MOHR. A lot of the Jubilees that I've had conversations with said that the meaning of the text was important to you.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Very much so. The spiritual has words. It has tone, but it has basically a focus and the focus is the words. If the focus is the words, then the overall activity of that is a feeling that if you say, "Oh Lord, have mercy on me," how are you going to sing that? That should have some definite meaning as far as the tone is concerned and where the accent falls.

BRENDA MOHR. That's good. If I talked to someone, the two most important things to Albert McNeil, unifying the vowel, the meaning of the text – to be able to express that meaning through the singing voice.

ALBERT MCNEIL. And then of course the conductor is the one who establishes how “oh lord have mercy” is going to be treated. Is it “oh *Lord* have mercy” or “oh lord have mercy on *me*”? You can have three different ways of treating that phrase. To me, one of the things that I hear often among black people, is they're always saying “oh, Lord have mercy.” If you're going to sing that, you have three different ways. Is mercy important? Is Lord important? Is Oh important? You got so many ways to go. So it makes it very challenging.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you have different formations that you would have the choir stand in during concerts? Or was it always two rows, women in front, men in back?

ALBERT MCNEIL. No, it depended on what we were doing. Basically we're an ensemble. If we're an ensemble, they have to stand in such a fashion, so they could hear each other. What does that mean? So they could hear their section is number one. Could they hear their section in relation to other aspects of the performance? If you're a soprano could you hear the tenors? If you're an alto, can you hear the basses? Can everyone hear the basses? Chords build on basses. And the basses from bottom up. You don't build a chord from the top down. You can see what happened to the blend there. If it's built on a firm foundation it's gonna work, but they have to know where it is. I say where it is, in the piece. We generally sang in a horseshoe, two lines. Sometimes, I'd do man, woman, man woman. Only if we have acoustical problem in the building, where they can't hear the other part. I don't just do it as a decorative thing. Some people think it's so fancy. They're all singing individually or in quartets. What's the advantage of singing in a quartet? What? Why? If you're going to sing in a quartet, you better make sure they sing as a quartet. If you're going to sing as choir, you have to make sure that each section is homogenized so they sing as a section. To me, if you're doing a contrapuntal piece, that is difficult. You gotta make sure that those parts are together. And that the vowel is projected the same way. Otherwise, you're not gonna have a good sound.

BRENDA MOHR. Do you feel like you have a philosophy that you have formed and developed over the years that is unique and important to you?

ALBERT MCNEIL. There's no one single event. There's no one single system. It's an eclecticism. It's all together. A lot of these elements are not divorceable. Pronunciation, diction, enunciation – they're inseparable. I wouldn't pull this out. You can't have one without having the other.

BRENDA MOHR. Regarding performance practice-- we've already discussed dialect and text, what about tempo? Some choirs sing Spirituals too fast. For example, I've heard choirs sing “Soon-a we'll be don-a wid' de troubles ob de world, troubles ob de world.” I just think that's way too fast! What would you tell them to do?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, first of all, that's a controversial bit to start with.

BRENDA MOHR. Actually it should be, [Sings] "Soon, we'll be done with the troubles of the world." That's the original. "Troubles of the world, troubles of the world." But the choir can't sing that way.

ALBERT MCNEIL. But can you sing, [Sings] "Soon we'll be done with the troubles of the world, troubles of the world" What's the word? Trouble! Choose a tempo that reflects what you think the words mean and where the emphasis should be. [Sings fast] It doesn't say anything. And that's a good tempo where people can chant or tap their foot in tempo. Or the singers will feel a relationship with that. If you want to pick a tempo. [Continues singing]. 'Trouble' and 'home' would be the things I would emphasize. In other words, choose a tempo that makes sense to the text and emphasize certain aspects of the text.

BRENDA MOHR. I've heard some choirs swing the rhythm of some spirituals and I don't think you're supposed to use a swing rhythm. Let me think of a spiritual where they swing instead of doing even eighth notes. How about [Sings] "Soon I will be done with the troubles" –Even sixteenth notes? Or swung?

ALBERT MCNEIL. It's not necessarily swinging it. It's the rhythm-y pattern. [Sings] "Soon I will be done..." But you're still emphasizing 'trouble' and I would say a lot of it depends on you and what you're trying to project with the voices. What is the thing that you're doing? What is the song all about? Going home to live with God. A lot of people have no idea what some of this means. They have a personal idea of why, what am I doing here? What am I going to do with this piece? How am I going to make sure that the problem that it represents is emphasized? And that would be 'trouble.' That's what I would say.

BRENDA MOHR. What about snapping or clapping?

ALBERT MCNEIL. In the performances of a spiritual, I wouldn't consider either one.

BRENDA MOHR. There's a lot of discussion in the choral world about the spiritual and how it's programmed. I've been to a lot of choir festivals and most of the time it is programmed as a closer or "showstopper."

ALBERT MCNEIL. Oh, I think that's awful.

BRENDA MOHR. And you've spent a lifetime trying to educate teachers.

ALBERT MCNEIL. A closer, what does that mean? An opener. What is that? You have forgotten the meaning of a spiritual. What is it? What is a spiritual? A spiritual is a reaction to a feeling one has for God. A feeling one has for an emotional relationship with God. What's that got to do with an opener? If you're saying I want to make my program to give it another kind of interest, opening and closing is a disastrous thing to say because you've missed the point. You missed the point of the spiritual, period.

BRENDA MOHR. I've heard, well I've taken required many festivals and nine out of ten times, let's just say for example a high school gets up there. They can only sing three songs and the third one they think okay we need to sing something exciting let's do a spiritual; you know? It's so frustrating.

ALBERT MCNEIL. To me, that is so ridiculous. That says I don't know anything about the Spiritual, what is it about-- the music of people who were in travail and enslaved for hundreds of years and treated like dogs and the music that they're singing about is about the pain and agony and their requests to God. How can you consider that with your program planning, and you're going to consider it only in the matter of how it works on an audience?

BRENDA MOHR. Right. Just because the rhythm is exciting.

ALBERT MCNEIL. I mean I say that first of all would you do that to a lieder? Would you do that to a piece of music? Would you do that with a piece of, what about a piece that has a repetitious kind of rhythm? [Speaks in Russian] a Russian prayer--Lord, have mercy is what you're saying. Lord, have mercy. Do you know that's what we're saying?

BRENDA MOHR. Right. No, but it sounds fun.

ALBERT MCNEIL. You're gonna do that because it's a good closer.

BRENDA MOHR. Right.

ALBERT MCNEIL. You've missed the point and your students don't understand it. They will always remember it a closer, not it was an anguished prayer to God. You missed the point. So don't use music superficially, put it in context as a piece of art a, piece of music, a piece to be handled carefully and a piece that your students will know why you know to me never and I would I would I would be very angry about that, you know.

BRENDA MOHR. Let's discuss influential musical mentors. Who are the choral conductors who influenced you the most? And if you could go chronologically starting with your years at UCLA.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, let's start with Raymond Moreman. Ray was a conductor at UCLA and there was something spiritual about Ray. He was in a Lutheran Church in West Los Angeles. I was a young freshman when I became an assistant conductor of the UCLA choir and I played the piano because I was able to play accompanied pieces and unaccompanied pieces. He did a lot. He went to Westminster for college, but he was also at UCLA. And there was just something about Ray that was admirable. He approached the music with tenderness and he would evaluate the text and, we were just a bunch of kids. I was a pre-med major, so this was only one of those things and I admired him tremendously. And then of course I was directing a choir at People's Independent Church of Los Angeles, and a big choir, a hundred voices and bright and I was about the

youngest thing there. I was a 17, 18, like that and I always admired the core music program at the Hollywood Presbyterian.

BRENDA MOHR. Yes, Charles Hirt.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Charles Hirt was fantastic. The repertoire! I would go when I got a chance to go. Every time I went the music he chose for services were just wonderful. I was so much into him. He was very strict and that, but he was 6 foot 5 and so he towered over the choir, a tall stately man, very pronounced. He chose what to me was some of the most fantastic music. Generally, with organ and and the organ embellished the choir so much. A lot of people don't know how to play for choir. The choir is supposed to be embellished and supported, not dominated by the organ. And the organists they had over a period of time; they had a woman who had been there for years and she was fantastic. I'd say Charles Hirt and then through the Los Angeles Church Federation, I got a chance to see John Finley Williamson and in meeting John Finley Williamson, I got a chance to go to Europe with him. John Finley Williamson was a projector of body language, facial language, conducting without hands, body movement.

BRENDA MOHR. Really?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yes we were taught how to use facial expression to do whatever we wanted to do. And as a result, I was a young kid, it was 17 or 18. And he said, I'm gonna arrange for you. I don't have any money. I said, how can I go to Europe? And so I was directing at the People's Independent Church, and the conductor at the place I was substituting for was in Philadelphia, so he told the congregation Albert needs money to go to Europe and they showered me with money. They paid my way there and paid my way back, but then paying my way while I was there because Dr. Williamson actually wanted to keep me there for a year.

Now what did we do there? We learned breath control. We learned pronunciation. We learned German, a little French, English of course, and how to conduct those pieces. Breathing, you're supposed to breathe with the choir. He taught me that. Enunciation and pronunciation in particular final consonants, voiced consonants, etc. Making clean signals, that are more easily read by anybody, orchestra or chorus. He was a wonderful man and, as a result, I have an honorary doctorate from Westminster College and got it at Princeton because it was right there in Princeton in New Jersey. It was overwhelming. And I remember, like Joe Miller is there at the right and Joe they did a concert the day before what I got the honorary degree, but I can't think of Anderson's first name, I mean Robinson, who is a conductor of the New Orleans - David Robertson. Yeah, he's an orchestral conductor, but he does a lot of work in New York and New Orleans Symphony. Joe, was so impressed with the symphony choir. It's so fantastic. It follows all the things that I'm sure that John (Finley Williamson) would have stood for you know, so I learned a lot from it. Conducting without hands.

BRENDA MOHR. Tell me more about that.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Only using your facial expressions.

BRENDA MOHR. Interesting, so the choir doesn't see a downbeat. You just look at them and just breathe with them?

ALBERT MCNEIL. That's right, you breathe in the phrases. Westminster College was very controversial for a long time because he believed in facial movements, body language that he thought was very important to the body language also expresses what you conduct. That doesn't mean dancing; it means the body language expresses the attitude that you create right, so I learned all that and to me that was very important.

Roger Wagner was noisy, loud and I got onboard with Roger when I was 12. I was with the men and boys choir at Saint Joseph's, along with Paul Salamunovich. I'm older than Paul and he picked up on the Catholic Church. Paul became a real pedagogue when it came to Gregorian chant and when it came to some of the aspects of John Finley Williamson, the combination of the two. Paul and I influenced each other, but I didn't know I knew Paul. When I became a member of the board of directors of the Los Angeles Master Chorale, we were sitting around one day and I said, "Where did you go to school?" He said St. Joseph's. I said, "Did you sing with Roger." He adored Roger. Nobody lived in the world, but Roger. And I said, I sang in that choir too. I mentioned date, time and place, What?! What did you see? You know my voice had changed so I became a falsetto alto. I was twelve, but my voice changed when I was not quite 12. And I was able to read notes. You sang with me? Yes. And so we confronted Roger. "Roger, look!" And then that was what happened.

I learned so much about Gregorian chant. I learned so much about Catholic Church music. And my parents were willing to bring me down to St. Joseph's in Los Angeles. This quasi-Catholic church burned to the ground while I was in Europe. I was just so hurt that I missed it. It's a beautiful church and we did the Mozart Requiem. The first time I'd ever seen, in a Catholic church in Los Angeles, an orchestra in the chancel and the choir behind, the men and boys choir. And we were something else! I can hear it in my mind. We were about 35 voices. The kids in the parochial school and the men that Roger had gotten from his professional context, so it sounded heavenly.

BRENDA MOHR. And Roger conducted?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yeah. Roger was an organist of the first magnitude. Roger would play the organ here, you know. He was just terrific, so I mean look what kind of situation that I find myself in with that. But I went to UCLA. Roger was there so I became very active in the core program, with Roger, as a young adult, see. And the very first thing Roger did at UCLA was the Bach St. Matthew Passion and he took the orchestra, chamber orchestra, and juxtaposed it by the voices. First violins, then second violins, and the violas were over here, and the celli were over here, and they were all sitting in the same area where the choir was because the parts are duplicated. And I was in heaven and you can imagine that [Sings] we're right there with the violins. That's what Roger did. I was in tears when it was over. Emotionally really, really fabulous. Of course, he yells and screams. Roger was very [Grunts] and when he invited me and the Jubilee Singers, when he was conductor of the Master Chorale, to perform on the same season with the LA Master Chorale, one of the things he wanted to do was "Dry Bones," and he wanted to do

it with all kinds of pots and pans. I said, "Roger I can't do that. Let me do anything else but that." "Why can't you?" "Roger I just can't do that, I'm sorry. First of all, my singers would resent it."

BRENDA MOHR. They would boycott.

ALBERT MCNEIL. And I would. Yeah okay, so I performed twice with Roger, twice with Paul Salamunovich on this series with the Master Chorale, but that was one thing I couldn't do with Roger.

BRENDA MOHR. And then with Grant Gershon?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Oh yes, I guess I've been with Grant twice. We did the Jazz Mass with them, but Dorothy-I've forgotten her last name-something that was a lot of fun and Grant let me do anything I want. The first thing that they set it up was wrong. I couldn't sing under those conditions. I wanted to be up at the microphones properly arranged and so it all worked out. At first rehearsal, we were in front of the orchestra and it was awful. I just could not do it, but then we got it adjusted.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you work with Howard Swan at all?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Oh yeah, I took a master class with Howard, at Occidental College. And one of the things he was doing...what was it?...anyway, I can't think of the Spiritual. The tempo was all wrong!

BRENDA MOHR. So you taught him?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, you know you I had to back away after all. Do you see my Howard Swan award?

BRENDA MOHR. I did see, yes.

ALBERT MCNEIL. That was fun, the "Stairway to the Stars" at Santa Monica High School. 500 kids, all three grade levels-- middle school, high school, and junior college. It was a really great experience. Howard--what was he doing? I can't remember, but anyway.

BRENDA MOHR. You were in a workshop with him or a master class?

ALBERT MCNEIL. A master class.

BRENDA MOHR. He was teaching?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yeah. There were a lot of conductors that were there. Howard offered a lot, but when it came to spirituals, I found a lot wanting tempo-wise, attitude-wise. I can't think of the pieces. One of the pieces, and I said Professor Swan, may I say

something that you may not like? And I said, "First of all, the tempo's wrong and the feeling that you're engendering here." Yeah, okay, okay, yeah. I said, "I hope I didn't insult you. You're such a fabulous conductor." I said, "You are and all of the other material we were doing." But here's something. It was a Hall Johnson piece, I remember. I said, "I know Hall, and I know how he would have felt about this piece and I hope you don't mind my saying." "Ah, it's OK." But you know...he was a master so I felt a bit embarrassed. I enjoyed Howard.

BRENDA MOHR. What else?

ALBERT MCNEIL. And of course Jester used to bring his arrangements and I'd play them to make sure that they were correct. That's fine. He didn't play, but he would write it. He called me from the phone, "Come and play this Albert, before I send it to the printers, to the publishers." And I said, "Well, this is how I'm playing what you have done." And he would say, "I want you to do it when you do this and to do this tempo, you do this." So I learned a lot of his stuff.

BRENDA MOHR. His arrangements?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Oh yeah.

BRENDA MOHR. Would he coach you on the tempo, dynamics, text?

ALBERT MCNEIL. And I want it pronounced like this- blah blah blah.

BRENDA MOHR. Emphasize the text in this way?

ALBERT MCNEIL. That's right. As a matter of fact, I used to work on motion pictures with him. I did *Land of the Pharaohs*. I did half a dozen films, synchronizing score to the film and it was quite an experience.

BRENDA MOHR. Was he concerned at all about what you were doing with choral tone?

ALBERT MCNEIL. We never talked about that. The only thing he'd say, "I'm so upset, Al, that there are not many African-American people I can use. They can't read notes." He said, "They have great ears and they sing wonderfully, but they can't read a note, Al. I can't use them because we get two hundred dollars a day and they can't pick out the part. We don't do that. We read notes." He told me he could only find a half a dozen Black people who could read notes. And so many of the choirs that he had were basically white choirs, with a sprinkling of Blacks, because the Blacks couldn't read. He said, "You're in the high school, you're directing high school music." I said, "I'm doing the very best I can and I tell my kids, you guys, come on, we gotta do this. We gotta read the notes. What key is this in? Where do we start?"

BRENDA MOHR. What are other musical ways that Jester influenced you?

ALBERT MCNEIL. The way he ran a rehearsal was a lot of fun. He'd be in and out of dialect you know, but he'd say, "Don't do what I do. You do what I tell you to do."

BRENDA MOHR. Do what I say, not what I do.

ALBERT MCNEIL. If the song had dialect in it that's okay, but here's how I want you to do it. He'd show you and he said, "You gotta follow the rules of English. English rules. It isn't *dee* apple, it's *de* apple." He'd definitely go on like that. He'd say, "I don't want to hear *dee* this and *dee* that. *Dis* with the emphasis on the article."

BRENDA MOHR. What else made his rehearsals fun?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, they were fast. He didn't waste time. And if he heard, well, that's the wrong note. You're singing the wrong note. He could tell right away. You couldn't play with Jester. He knew music. He was very talented. He went to Rutgers, not Rutgers, anyway, a school in Boston. And he was well trained. He was assistant conductor of the Hall Johnson Choir and that was a great choir. You see Hall was a cellist. He played extremely well and Hall could write. He wrote some of the nicest music. He wrote some serious pieces. There was a piece out I'm sure it must be in the Schoenberg collection or one of them. "The City of God," it's called. It's a compilation of a series of pieces, City of God. And, um, it's in somebody's archives. It might be in the Schoenberg collection. It might be, anyway, and he published with Bourne. Everything was with Bourne. Same thing with Margaret Bonds see everything was Bourne. Her "Ballad of the Brown King." It's a really wonderful piece. It's a little cantata, a small one with about four or five parts.

BRENDA MOHR. Am I missing other mentors off of this list that I made here?

ALBERT MCNEIL. No. You've got Ray Moreman, Charles Hirt, J. Finley Williamson, Roger Wagner, Howard Swan, Jester Hairston and my close association with Margaret Bonds. Margaret was a fantastic musician, absolutely fantastic, played the piano like an orchestra.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you meet her here in LA? Did she live here?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, she lived here in her final years. I met her in Chicago at one of the National Association of Negro Musicians conventions. Then she came and had the Inner-city Cultural Center in Los Angeles and I was teaching high school at Susan Miller Dorsey High School. I brought her over there and I was directing a choir at the Congregational church. We did the debut performance of "Ballad of the Brown King" on the same program I did with the Bach... what's the name of that piece?

BRENDA MOHR. Magnificat?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yes, Magnificat.

BRENDA MOHR. Is there anything you would like to add about influential mentors?

ALBERT MCNEIL. No, I would say that I'm very, very lucky to have been influenced by people like Margaret Bonds, Hall Johnson, and Jester Hairston and that I knew those people personally; knew them, and worked with them and they worked with my choirs. Margaret was so thrilled with the Jubilee Singers, but they weren't the Jubilee Singers then. They were just a church choir that I had assembled, good close friends, and we did the Bach "Magnificat" and her piece. It was a lot of fun.

BRENDA MOHR. Can you take me chronologically through your college degrees?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I graduated high school in 1938. In 1942 I graduated from UCLA with a bachelor's degree. I was a pre-med major, so I was 5 years at UCLA. I did all the work for the master's degree at UCLA. I transferred to USC because I had to survive.

BRENDA MOHR. What do you mean "I had to survive?"

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, I had to have a job. And they had, at that time, it was right after the war. I had to have a teaching credential.

BRENDA MOHR. So USC is where you got your credential?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, I got one credential at UCLA. I got a secondary teaching credential and then at... Well, I took the examination to do secondary music in the Los Angeles Unified School District. I passed second on the list out of a hundred people. They called me downtown and said they had no job for me, and I said, "Well, all my fraternity brothers got jobs because they're white." I could not get a job at all.

I became a switchboard operator for the Department of Water and Power; worked from eleven at night to seven in the morning. I was directing a choir at the People's Independent Church and working with Jester, same time. And it's so funny, the chairman of the Board of Directors of the People's Independent Church of Christ. They were so prejudiced at Water and Power. They didn't hire blacks in that kind of position. I was in charge of the operating division at the main desk, so people coming in could see me. So in comes the head of the Social Services who is chairman of the trustee board at Independent Church. "Al McNeil, are you working here?" Yeah. He goes right into the chair of the operating division to "Dr. whatever his name is" is manager. Look, my choir director is out there! I thought, "Thank God!" The following week I got a job working as a substitute in LA Unified elementary division.

Well, then when I was at LAUSD as an elementary music teacher I got my credentials k-12 and secondary and I was also going to USC working on a master's degree and all the preliminary works for the DMA. I got all of that done and then I was going to get an education degree and my friend said you don't want an education degree, Al. You want a performance degree, and I said that meant I'd done all these education courses--statistics, growth and development of the child, curriculum. I did the whole panoply and obviously but because I couldn't get a job, I was going to become principal. I was taking administration courses. All of a sudden, I get this. I was teaching high school

then. Oh, they called me up and they said Please take the examination again. Why? Why take it again? Al, we really want you to take it again. Why? They knew I had all these choirs. And so I took it again and I placed first on the list again. So where did they send me? Washington Carver Junior High. Five music teachers at the school. It was burgeoning, I mean the city was growing. That school had, can you imagine, a junior high with 3,700 kids? Five music teachers!

BRENDA MOHR. That's incredible.

ALBERT MCNEIL. And so my principal was Robert Purdy. I won't forget. He was fabulous guy. He was so happy. "I'm so happy to have you." So I had the men and boys glee club. I walked in there in January. I told my principal at the elementary school, that all Latino school, I speak Spanish, and I did Las Posadas, in Spanish, there. I did the whole bit. Well, Al, I don't want to let you go. Okay, I'll take a leave of absence from the elementary division and go teach junior high. That's the only way I can get in, so I get to Carver Junior High. Next thing I know, that school, they wiped out half of the school population and sent them to the high school, Jefferson High. My principal at that time, Dr. Purdy, went to open the new junior high called the Webster Junior High. He didn't take me with him. He left me at Carver and I was so mad. Anyway, the vice principal, she called me and asked, "Would you take a job in the valley?" I said, "Yes, anything to get out of here, it's only the seventh and eighth grade." So I went to Sun Valley Junior High. They had something like 4,000 kids going to junior high if you can imagine it. Yes, the city was growing like crazy and so I went to Sun Valley Junior high and while I was there, William Hardcharner was a supervisor of music, the one that told me that there was no job for me. He called me on the phone and he said, "We want you to come to Audubon, it's a training school for the University of Southern California." I said, "You gotta talk to my principal." My principal was an old sergeant. He cussed and he was a big man. He said I want you back in a year, back to the valley. I stayed at Audubon Junior High six years. It was the number one junior high in the city of LA and the training school for the University of Southern California. I was finishing up my DMA work and they transferred me to Susan Miller Dorsey High School. I had the time of my life. I'll show you some pictures before you leave. I had a choir of a hundred fifty, a high school choir.

BRENDA MOHR. And they all fit in one rehearsal room?

ALBERT MCNEIL. No, we had folding chairs. We did the whole bit. I'd call my principal and say, "Now look at this." I'd say, "Here's where we go." Choir will be dismissed and a whole bunch of people over here stood up folding chairs and cleared the way so that my hundred fifty kids could use that room and it was fantastic.

I mean, I had a ball there, a ball. I did everything in the repertoire with the high school choir. You name it, I did the 'Libeslieder Waltzes' in German and it was fabulous. I lived up in the hills at that time, before my house was destroyed in the mudslide and we lost everything, but anyway, long story short--I get a bang out of the clear blue sky after three or four years at Susan Dorsey High. That school was going through racial transition. Half, or maybe about three-quarters of my kids, I had whites, blacks, Japanese, the whole

bit, but we were a singing group of kids. I had a fantastic time.

A lot of my kids who are in Jubilee Singers now were students of mine in high school, and so in mid-year they wanted me to go to [University of California] Davis. I didn't want to tell my kids. I was in tears. I wanted to go and I didn't want to go. I knew that it would change my whole life completely. My wife was already a medical person at UCLA Medical School and she said Al, you gotta do that. Go, it will change your life.

In the meantime, simultaneous with that, I started writing textbooks. See, look at the copyright in there. [Points to the bookshelf] You can see when all that was and that was six books. We did five revisions and we had access to the Columbia record catalog and we wrote this series of textbooks for Silver-Burdett-Ginn. They were absolutely fantastic. I think a lot of my influence that I have with Bennett Reed and Mary Hoffman. Bennett was at Northwestern University and Mary Hoffman was at the University of Illinois. It's always in great company and you talk about brownie points. That pushed my brownie points to the ultimate.

I became a full professor in four years because I was turning out books. I was directing and I wrote the Master of Arts in teaching degree and it was great. God was in the plan. I learned so much from Bennett. Bennett was not a performing musician, but he was a philosopher of music education. I learned more about the philosophy of music education as a result, so my teaching of my choirs predicated on my ability to the philosophy of this; You learn about music by understanding how it works and you use the five elements of music: melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, and form. That's the whole basis for the textbook series and all of our lessons utilize those five components.

When I'm doing a choir, if we're going to do a piece, they should learn first what the piece is trying to do. How is it shaped? What do the sopranos do? What do the altos do? Is there a fugue in the middle of it? Does it have augmentation or diminution in there? How do you put it together? I believe too, I used to tell my singers, I said look, if you guys are gonna do this, sopranos, you've got this responsibility, and basses, you have this responsibility. We're going to change keys here, at this point. It all fit into my philosophy of music education. As music education is not just teaching songs, it's teaching how music works. How does music work? Fast, slow, augmentation, diminution, you name it and the use of different colorations, keys, modes. I mean it really. I had a hell of a good music ed. course, a really good one.

When I went to Davis in January I had 35 kids waiting to get their teaching credentials and they didn't want to go to Cal State Sacramento. They wanted to get their teaching credential at Davis, so I was the one that did it and I wrote the degree Master of Arts in teaching, so they could get that degree. In the meantime, I was working with D. Kern Holoman. A fantastic guy and he stood six foot six. Kern is a musicologist, ethnomusicologist, a really fantastic Berlioz scholar. We did everything Berlioz ever wrote and the first thing I did when I was at Davis was "L'Enfance du Christ." When I went there they had a choir of 60 people. Sixty people, about five guys, what kind of choir would that be?

BRENDA MOHR. Not very balanced.

ALBERT MCNEIL. And they were into music of the 20th century; aleatoric stuff. They didn't give it to me. I was so busy being an educator. Well, finally I had signed these

contracts [Jubilee Singers], so I went to Davis in January and I would not be there the following fall--I wasn't gonna be there. I was gonna be on tour in Europe with the Jubilee Singers. I told them If you want to hire me, this is what's gonna happen. Okay, okay. I said, "I know why. You have something called affirmative action, right? Have the black people burned down the administration building? No." They thought it was funny. I said, "No, I'm making a point. I don't have an afro and I don't look black. I look like whatever you want to call me. I could be now an Arab or Muslim or whatever, period." Long story short, I taught an overload every quarter because they didn't have a chamber choir so I taught it before classes, until finally I argued my point and got it into the curriculum.

I was doing the big choir. Kern was the orchestral conductor. He said, "Al, I'm so glad you're here because I want to do these big works." I said, "I want to do the big works." So anyway, long story short, we did everything that Berlioz ever wrote for big choir and orchestra. We did everything. You name it we did it. And but I also had to do, see, these quarters were ten week quarters, so I had to do a concert every quarter, but I took the kids to Europe and all these things to engender excitement about choral music, and a lot of it.

My best example, well, I have a couple of good examples. Donna Di Grazia; she's the director of chorale music at Pomona College. Her music, her choral performances are just fantastic. I said, "You'll never get any place unless you learn to conduct everything." She's been teaching at Pomona College now almost 15 years and that's a hard place to get to get into, you know, so I'm very proud of her. I'm proud of Danny. Danny is head of the chorale department. What's the school where the football players are?

BRENDA MOHR. Notre Dame?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Notre Dame. Anyway, that's where Danny is and he just turned the thing upside down. He is a really great guy. He's from Torrance here. And about six other kids are doing high school and college-- wonderful. I had wonderful response from the students. So, that's it!

BRENDA MOHR. Okay, let's see. And just make sure I have this correct. You have two honorary doctorates?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yes, I have a doctorate from Cal State Northridge and I have one from my favorite school in Princeton, New Jersey. [Westminster Choir College] And you talk about exciting. David Robertson and I were the two to receive the honorary doctorate and it was wonderful. Imagine 3,000 people. I'm standing there with my son, niece and nephew and Bill, my friend. I thought to myself I wish my parents could have seen this, beautiful gothic building, great organ music. Joe Miller conducted a fantastic piece. John Finley and I were very close and he said—out of the clear blue sky—we want to give you this degree. I said, "What?!"

But then of course I worked for Silver-Burdett for 15 years. We did three revisions of the book that you have there on the desk and I have a lot of stuff and publications. I did MENC material and I did stuff like that and I was on the board of directors for Chorus America, 20 years. And so that's why I have that up there, on the wall, the 1999 Michael Korn Chorus Award.

BRENDA MOHR. One thing I didn't get from Karen Patterson's interview with you back in 2007 is what year your father passed away. Was it before or after your mother passed away?

ALBERT MCNEIL. It was before my mother passed. My father died first.

BRENDA MOHR. Okay, great. Tell me about Helen. During Karen's interview you mentioned Helen, but there's no mention of how you met, when you got married, and how. What did for a career?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Oh, Helen was wonderful. She was at UCLA and she was the one that pushed me into making a decision to go to Davis.

BRENDA MOHR. How did you and Helen meet?

ALBERT MCNEIL. We met at a sunrise service on one Sunday morning, Easter. It was at People's Independent Church of Christ. My choir sang in the park, South Park, and she was getting out of a white Cadillac convertible, I'll never forget that, with her grandmother (who died a hundred and three) and I said to her, "You're not going to go to the eleven o'clock service, are you?" She said, "I'll fool you." I said, "I don't believe it." We didn't know each other. And sure enough after the eleven o'clock service, she was there. She came back backstage and we started going together.

BRENDA MOHR. Was she African-American?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Half Cherokee Indian.

BRENDA MOHR. So half and half?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Her grandmother was half Cherokee Indian and half Anglo-Saxon white. Yeah, she had this stately stance and she had hair that she constantly would put it in a big bun on top of her head to look like any other white woman, I'd say. She loved Ricky. He jumped all over the bed, so Ricky came along.

BRENDA MOHR. Do you remember what year you got married?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I can't remember. Anyway, we were married 50 years.

BRENDA MOHR. 50 years, okay. When was Ricky born?

ALBERT MCNEIL. '59.

BRENDA MOHR. What was Helen's occupation?

ALBERT MCNEIL. She was a statistician and she worked for UCLA in the department

of medicine and in family medicine those were her two things. She became head of the division of family medicine.

BRENDA MOHR. It sounds like she was very supportive of your career.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Oh, always. I used to be so angry with her because, I said Dear, you could do or this, and she read voraciously. Most of the books that we have around here are hers. And some I kept, and some are mine, but I had to give away tons of books because there was no place to keep them. She read like a crazy lady.

BRENDA MOHR. Right, and she didn't mind that you were commuting between Sacramento and L.A. She was very supportive.

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, that was it. Either I did that or I wouldn't have had a job. I could have stayed with L.A. Unified...

BRENDA MOHR. Right, but that was the best thing you could do for your future.

ALBERT MCNEIL. She [Helen] encouraged me. She was at the top of the statisticians' payroll and we loved the two salaries. We lived luxuriously. I mean it was really wonderful. We lost our home in Baldwin Hills because of a disaster, you know. We had a mudslide that took everything we owned, everything. Only the clothes I had at Davis and only the clothes that she could save. And we were without a house. And the house was in Baldwin Hills, with a 180-degree view of the whole city of Los Angeles, from roughly Santa Monica to Whittier. It was a beautiful experience. That's where my son grew up, in Baldwin Hills.

BRENDA MOHR. Just a little bit about when you were at Davis. You were also involved with community music, Sacramento Symphony Chorus, and Chorale. You founded one of those groups. Which one did you found? Was it the Symphony Chorale or the?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I was involved with the, well, I was involved with church choirs. That was my big thing.

BRENDA MOHR. But in Sacramento you started...

ALBERT MCNEIL. Oh, I had the Sacramento Chorale. I directed that for about 15 years.

BRENDA MOHR. Even after you left UC Davis?

ALBERT MCNEIL. No, all during my time there, they came after me. They said, "We have a vacancy, can you come and join?" And I said, "Wow, I'm not doing anything on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, so is your rehearsal on Wednesday?" Yes, so I was, yeah, I took them to Europe. This is from them. [Points to a poster]

BRENDA MOHR. Right, okay. Yeah that was in the 80's. And you prepared the chorus

to sing large works with the orchestra?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yeah, with the Sacramento Symphony, but we did a concert series on our own.

BRENDA MOHR. Separate?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Yeah.

BRENDA MOHR. Was it two choirs or just one that you had?

ALBERT MCNEIL. Well, I had the University Choir and then I had this Symphony Chorale.

BRENDA MOHR. I read an article somewhere that said there was a symphony chorus and there was a chorale, Sacramento Chorale. They were the same?

ALBERT MCNEIL. I don't know whether they are now, but we were both one and the same. As a matter of fact, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, what was it, anyway, 100th anniversary. We did, with David Brubeck, we did a premier performance of piece called 'Pange Lingua' with the Dave Brubeck quintet. We performed two nights in a row to a packed cathedral to raise money. It cost, what, four or five hundred dollars per ticket. Two nights in a row, it was a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the cathedral in Sacramento.

BRENDA MOHR. Tell me about teaching during the summers at U.S.C. How many summers was that?

ALBERT MCNEIL. A couple summers. I didn't like it. I didn't want to do it because I was doing enough, flying back and forth. I decided not to do anything. But that was fun.

BRENDA MOHR. Do you have anything else to add?

ALBERT MCNEIL. You know I was at the People's Independent Church of Christ. The Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship and Founders Church of Religious Science, so three churches. That's it.

BRENDA MOHR. Yeah, I got all those three churches from Karen's interview and from your bios.

ALBERT MCNEIL. I was at Founders for twenty years or something like that. My wife joined Founders.

BRENDA MOHR. Yes, I remember that.

ALBERT MCNEIL. I decided to go back to the Catholic Church. Helen taught me a lot a

whole bunch of books there, the science of mind. I learned a lot from the Science of Mind. It's a really a very fascinating philosophy, that all things come from God. If that's the case, if God is everywhere and God is in everything, then he's omnipotent. It makes a lot of sense to me. Evil exists, but evil only is a distraction, that God is all-powerful. So if that's the case then God is the one that motivates us to do it and I could not get over, well, I got over it obviously. When you go to the Founders Church of Religious Science you could do sacred or secular music. I think I told you that. I said you can do any of the secular music you want because if you believe that God is a creator and responsible for creativity, then that's also God, so why can't you do, "Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day." Who created that? And where does it come from? It makes sense. But she took all the classes and she used to feed me this stuff because I had questions. And Dr. Chang, he's a wonderful man, when I went there I said, "You know, I've had many conferences, but how can I plan the music for this church?" I said, "I want to do the right thing." He said, "You are. Do what you feel God will encourage you to do." And so that's another aspect of my life that I learned that if God is everywhere, then God is in everything, so what is the question? What are you, then, if you don't believe in God, if you don't believe that he's responsible for our existence and all those around us.

BRENDA MOHR. Beautiful. Thank you so very much for meeting with me, Albert. I've truly enjoyed our time together this morning.

ALBERT MCNEIL. You are so welcome. Can I take you to lunch?

[End of Interview]

APPENDIX R

INTERVIEW WITH DONNA DI GRAZIA

DONNA DI GRAZIA

February 5, 2017

Interview Responses Submitted via Email

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

BRENDA MOHR. Please state your name.

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Donna M. Di Grazia

BRENDA MOHR. How long have you known Albert?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. 37 years (Since my first year in college: Fall of 1979)

BRENDA MOHR. In what capacity?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. First as an undergraduate, then as a graduate student (including as his graduate teaching assistant). Since then as his mentee (including as a two-semester sabbatical replacement in 1989)

BRENDA MOHR. What years were you his student at UC Davis?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Undergrad: 1979-83; Graduate: 1983-86

BRENDA MOHR. What degree did you earn at UC Davis?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. BA in Music (1983); MA in Music (1986; this was the terminal grad degree at UCD at the time)

BRENDA MOHR. Which ensemble(s) did you sing in with Albert?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. University Chorus (4 years as an undergrad, 3 as a grad student); University Chamber Singers (3 years as an undergrad, 3 as a grad student)

BRENDA MOHR. Did you take any music education or ethnomusicology classes from him?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. No.

BRENDA MOHR. Do you still have any syllabi, handouts or papers from any of these classes? If so, would you mind allowing me to have copies of these materials?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. NO.

BRENDA MOHR. Did you study privately with him? Voice? Conducting? Other?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Choral Conducting; he did not teach voice at UCD.

BRENDA MOHR. What types of rehearsal methods do you remember Albert using to motivate his students? Or what did a typical rehearsal look like? What was his rehearsal process?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. We would learn fast melismatic passages using nonsense syllables, which was always fun, but also was an easy way to give them definition. One of his favorite warm-ups (which I regularly use myself) was "bumblebee," a series of interlocking thirds that ascend through an octave before descending back to the initial note.

Normally, we would rehearse in sections, but sometimes he would have us mix up in the room, which was great fun, but it also made us listen differently and stand on our own two feet more. He was great at keeping everyone engaged, even when he was working with one section, he moved quickly, so there wasn't time to tune out.

We regularly rehearsed a piece starting somewhere other than the beginning. The importance of memorization!

BRENDA MOHR. What was his philosophy of teaching (in the classroom and/or choral rehearsal)? Ensemble selection process, Choral techniques- intonation (seating order), diction, blend, choral Sound/Tone, standing Formation, text, programming.

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Albert taught a single 10-week course in Choral Conducting. I took that as a college junior; it was so long ago, that I have trouble remembering details. If I was to summarize his philosophy, I would say that he believed in getting students involved and giving them an opportunity. He didn't care whether one had previous experience or not; he would work with anyone who was eager and willing to work. He would give us opportunities; those who seized them were given more. Perhaps the best example of this is how he frequently sent me off with the alto section (my section) to run sectionals. My piano skills were poor, so rather than simply say that I couldn't do it, he sent our accompanist with me so I would get experience. He just kept giving me (and others) opportunities, and it is because of them (and him) that I came to discover not only that I liked choral conducting, I was kind of good at it. There was no way I would have even dreamed of becoming a choral conductor without having had those opportunities, and without his belief in me.

In a concert, he taught us that the performance begins the second our toes crossed the threshold to the stage, and continued until we were completely off of it. How we carried ourselves on stage even when we weren't singing affected the audience's perception of how we sounded.

Of course, he made sure we learned a wide variety of music from all over the world. Nothing was off the table as long as it was strong literature, and we treated each musical style with the same respect: Bach, Mozart, Spirituals, music from the Philippines, and so on. He was ahead of his time in this respect. And he was a master interpreter of Spirituals.

In terms of sound, he believed that having a strong bass was fundamental to a good choral sound.

BRENDA MOHR. What did you find most enjoyable about singing under Albert?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. His endless enthusiasm and his unshakable belief in the ability of his students. I really think he believed that every student was capable; all he had to do was give them a chance and offer encouragement.

BRENDA MOHR. What aspects of your musicianship improved from his instruction?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. My awareness of the expressive markings in the score, listening broadly, and sight-reading. He insisted that we slog through new music because he knew that *practicing* sight-reading was the only way to get better at it.

BRENDA MOHR. What do you remember Albert doing in order to achieve the highest standards from his students?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Albert taught at a time when students more naturally respected their teachers. His own gifts were so apparent and so inspiring that we all wanted to do our best. He used a positive, encouraging approach as well. Even when we messed up, he would use humor so his corrections did not seem onerous. It was just fun to be there. We always did good, engaging literature. Most students were not music majors, but he *never* dumbed down what we did because of it.

BRENDA MOHR. How did he influence you as a teacher (if applicable) or otherwise?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Everything I've said so far falls in the category of influence. I strive to give students the same kinds of chances he gave me. If I can find a way to include a student, I will even if it means thinking out of the box to keep them going. He did that all the time. He also believed in the importance of taking the choir off campus to recruit but also to be ambassadors in the world. Since 2006, my chamber choir (the Pomona College Glee Club) has included three international tours, the first in the 120+ history of the choral program. I was able to accomplish this thanks to the generosity and vision of my institution's administration, but behind it all was the compelling case I made to them based on my experiences with Albert at UCD. (I traveled to Europe and Russia with him as an undergraduate, and to Tahiti and Australia as his sabbatical replacement.)

My repertoire choices also reflect Albert's approach. I am so grateful to have learned about Spirituals from him, and about presenting music from contemporary composers as well as historical giants. I program similarly. Additionally, he did not shy

away from projects with our university orchestra, and I learned a tremendous amount of choral-orchestral music from those collaborations.

In my two full-time teaching positions (Davidson College, Pomona College), performances of some of the great masterworks of choral-orchestral music became a regular part of the choral/orchestral student experience; this is directly because of what I was able to do myself under Albert (and UCD's orchestra director at the time: D. Kern Holoman—collaborations like that don't happen if the two principal conductor involved can't agree on repertoire and the importance of working together).

BRENDA MOHR. What do you consider his greatest strengths as an educator?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. His charisma and enthusiasm, his musical instincts, the joy with which he made music with young people, his unbelievable keyboard skills—absolutely incredible!—his musicianship, his belief in his students and his unwavering support of them.

BRENDA MOHR. Would you say Albert is one of the most influential teachers you have had and why?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Absolutely! Without a doubt. Students were extremely loyal to him because we could all sense his belief in us. I had sung in choir in high school, but I had no other significant formal experience in music prior to arriving at UC Davis. So, as I mentioned earlier, there was no possible way I could have even dreamed of becoming a choral conductor were it not for the initial chance and subsequent opportunities Albert gave me.

BRENDA MOHR. What is one thing for which Albert should be remembered?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Can't reduce it to one! Here are three: His unending belief in his singers regardless of their previous experience, his infectious enthusiasm for music and its power to move people, and his stalwart efforts to promote the Spiritual as a choral art throughout the world through his founding and directing of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers of Los Angeles.

BRENDA MOHR. Do you have any further information in which you feel would be useful to this study?

DONNA DI GRAZIA. Not that I can think of.

BRENDA MOHR. Thank you for your time. I greatly appreciate your willingness to participate. I may contact you again if I have any further questions.

[End of email interview]

APPENDIX S

INTERVIEW WITH D. KERN HOLOMAN

D. KERN HOLOMAN

February 19, 2017

Interview Response Submitted via Email

[Commentary unrelated to the topic of this research or deemed as confidential has been omitted at the discretion of the interviewer]

Al McNeil joined the UC Davis faculty in 1969 and retired in 1990, the last UCD faculty member (it was said at the time) to leave owing to the “mandatory retirement” age of 70. I conducted the festival concert honoring him on retirement:

2 June 1990 Freeborn Hall, UCDavis. Albert J. McNeil retirement concert. Brahms: *Ein deutsches Requiem*, with Kathleen McCoy, soprano, and Douglas Lawrence, baritone; UCD Choruses and Choral Union, Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. Also selections from Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* with the UCD Symphony and the Jubilee Singers.

There are lovely color pictures from that night.

After I joined the faculty in 1973, and especially after I inherited the UCD Symphony in 1978, we worked together closely and well, and we continue to keep in touch. Together we presented the major orchestra-chorus repertoire, including the Requiems of Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, and Brahms; the B-Minor Mass, Haydn and Schubert masses, Beethoven's Ninth, *Elijah*, *Symphony of Psalms*, scenes from *Les Troyens* and *Boris Godunov*, and multiple performances of Berlioz's third symphony, *Roméo et Juliette*, with a chorus of 300. Our daring tour of Tahiti and Australia included a Berlioz *concert monstre* at the National Tennis Centre in Melbourne, with massed military bands and choruses—the biggest concert, we believe, that had ever been heard in that country.

During his tenure with the University Chorus, Room 115 Music was always filled to capacity (c. 150) with its members, and were they to be lacking, say, sufficient tenors, he would simply walk across the quad to the Coffee House collaring folks he knew (or not) and generally return with sufficient numbers to carry on. Owing to the sight lines in 115 and to his small stature, he would lead rehearsals standing on a tabletop, heels clicking on and eventually wearing down its surface. And always with the door open: down the hall you would hear, for the first two or three weeks of the quarter, an Ivesian mix of note-by-note drilling, finger snaps, and the drumming of his feet on that crazy table. A firm believer that choir was for everyone he would teach those who needed it by rote until they could read the music.

What might be called the “jubilee” repertoire figured prominently in each year's concerts, often in arrangements by McNeil himself. It was not uncommon to see Jester Hairston or

William Warfield in the halls as concert time approached: we got to know them well. Also the University Chorus was the only campus group at the time routinely doing music from Central and South America, thanks to McNeil's interest in what was then called "World Music"—but what amounted, in his case, to music of his own heritage. Because he said he didn't like to conduct orchestras, I got to do all the joint ventures—with the exception of a couple of Mozart Requiems, where he seemed pretty good at it after all. I could count on greeting a large, often giant, chorus with the notes down solid and palpably excited about meeting the symphony and polishing off the work together. The big orchestra-chorus concerts were always sold out in a venue of about 1,800 seats, and securing a ticket to the annual Christmas concert was harder still. Two of the images that linger in my mind's eye and ear are the dress rehearsal of the Verdi Requiem, where McNeil and Bill Warfield quietly pushed a practice piano onstage and did "Ol' Man River" for the orchestra and chorus—pretty much all of us weeping by the end; and a moment on the Tahiti/Australia tour, coming back by boat from a luau in Moorea for the the UCD orchestra and chorus. Al and Helen and I (and the great Belgian basso, Jules Bastin, and the wonderful California mezzo Stephanie Friedman) sat together on a bench full of life preservers, gazed out on the young people, and agreed that life couldn't get much better.

McNeil's duties at UCD included leadership of two choirs: the University Chorus and the Chamber Choir. Every two years he took the "little choir" on a foreign tour, journeys remembered with special pleasure by our alumni. Additionally he supervised the curriculum in Music Education and its student teachers, and was an important figure in the early days of the nascent the African-American Studies program, serving for a time as Director of Black Studies (one of the first). Later he took a leadership role in developing the MAT degree at UC Davis and in courses in African, African-American, Caribbean, and South American music.

McNeil generally arrived in Davis on Monday afternoon in time to lead rehearsals of the Sacramento Chorale and eventually the Sacramento Symphony Chorus. He would teach on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and go back to LA after chorus practice Thursday afternoons. Not many people knew he actually commuted from LA.

I hope your biography will include warm mention of Al's wife Helen, without whom he could never have accomplished all he did. We saw her infrequently but talked with her often, and loved it when she travelled with him. She and I became good friends, too. Her funeral in LA, with the Jubilees, Lawrence Welk's organist, and eventually the LA Philharmonic Chorus (I think) singing the Hallelujah Chorus is engraved in my memory. Also Al McNeil lived the most color-blind life I've ever encountered. That taught me a lot, too.

[End of email correspondence]