

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

April 11, 1978

TO: Associate Dean Paul Boylan and <sup>CDB</sup>FCDS Members

FROM: Willis Patterson, Chairman, Voice Department

SUBJECT: Minority Music Students Association Proposal for Course in Vocal Literature of Black American Composers

The Voice Department discussed this proposal at its meeting on Monday, April 3. I have been designated to report a summary of the department's reaction to this proposal. It is as follows:

- a. There is general support for the need to which this proposal addresses itself, namely the teaching of this particular body of vocal literature in our School of Music.
- b. There is general lack of support for designing a course which would teach the vocal literature of Black American Composers, omitting the vocal literature of other American Composers.
- c. The department further feels that the need for a course dealing with vocal literature which is more basic in its handling of the concert repertoire of French, and Italian literature is of equal and perhaps even greater need for our majors.
- d. The general consensus of opinion in the department is, therefore, that action on this proposal should be delayed until such time as a more comprehensive proposal can be drawn up. Such a proposal would likely take the form of a two-semester course in vocal literature. The first semester dealing with the above mentioned literature of French and Italian composers, the second semester dealing with the vocal literature of American composers, including the compositions of Black American writers.

Since I have been asked to report the department's sentiments to this proposal, and since the subject of the Vocal Literature of Black American Composers is one in which I can claim special knowledge and expertise in, and since the proposal of the Minority Music Students requests that I be the instructor of this proposed course, I shall take the liberty to express my individual reaction to it.

- a. I feel this proposal to be deserving of special attention by our entire faculty and the FCDS for several reasons.
  - (1) It is one of the few proposals for course additions which I have known about during my ten years on this faculty which was entirely student-generated. This is not a suggestion from me channeled through this student organization. The original idea for such came from them, and

they expressed their concern for the neglect of such literature, and wished me to do what I could to change this. I suggested to them that the path of action which has resulted in this proposal be taken. I, therefore feel that the ~~FODS~~ <sup>EDS</sup> reaction to this proposal should be one which will have the net effect of commending this expression by them, and encouraging the development of further curricular ideas and innovations by students.

- (2) The development of this specific course proposal seems the only avenue which could be expected from the students since there has been no proposal for such alternate ways of handling the subject matter forthcoming from either faculty or students in the past, nor at the present except for that which is conjectured by the Voice Faculty in response to this proposal. Thus, the student proposal has already become a catalyst for some innovative and creative action by the faculty on course design. Again, for this they are to be commended.
- (3) I do not feel that this course implementation should be delayed until all facets of the details for the suggested two-term course as described in d. above have been resolved, particularly if such a delay would be compounded by the question of personnel and cost for the first semester offering. I rather think it might be wise to respond to the student request as quickly as is financially, and otherwise feasible since the personnel to handle their portion of the subject matter is here now, and most willing to begin to work out the means to include this offering as soon as possible. Actually, given the large body of vocal literature by such well-known American composers as Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, Ned Roren, Leslie Bassett, and John Duke, just to mention a few, combined with the equally large output of relatively unknown Black American composers, such as William Grant Still, David Baker, Howard Swanson, Robert Owen, Leslie Adams, Dorothy Rudd Moore, Hale Smith, (a sampling of a few highly skilled Black American composers of vocal literature whose output alone is well over 200 songs) there is ample justification for the designing of a two-semester course on the vocal literature of American composers alone. Such a course could give our students appreciably more than the smattering of information on expertise they now receive in this important area of American musical composition.
- (4) At present, this course would need to be offered to our students (incidentally, the interest in such a proposed course is not limited to Minority students. A paper with the signatures of a large number of music students, most of whom are "majority" students accompanied their proposal) one semester per year. Release time equal to that which is accorded other comparable courses would need to be accommodated by the administration. This generally would amount to two hours release from studio teaching. Since I now coordinate the teaching of the Voice Department Vocal Pedagogy without release time, I would agree to include this course in my teaching activity along with the pedagogy course in exchange for two hours release from studio teaching per term, or half the customary release time.