Brief description: This is a paper we wrote about musical nationalism as it specifically related to Antonin Dvorak and his African American student Harry T. Burleigh. This assignment allowed for us to expand our knowledge about composers in the time period we were looking at. This assignment date was March 21, 2019.

Musical Nationalism

Antonin Dvorak and Harry T. Burleigh

By: Jace Frank

Antonin Dvorak was a notable composer from the now Czech Republic whose musical capabilities spread far and wide. He ended up becoming the artistic director of the National Conservatory in New York. There is where he met his assistant Harry T. Burleigh. Dvorak had a very strong interest in musical nationalism, which is where composers created music with a specific national identity in mind. He did this for his native land of the Czech Republic and also with America.

Dvorak created his music to echo the tunes of his country. He created works that utilize Bohemian folk dances of his country. Some of his most notable works were his Slavonic Dances, which were based off the Bohemian folk dances and were made composed for the piano. Even his symphonies he created were composed with the essence of the Bohemian countryside in mind.(*Nationalism in Music*)

With his attention to his ethnic background he picked up a lot of attention from America. This is how he ended up obtaining the position he had the National Conservatory in New York. There, through the help of Harry T. Burleigh, he discovered the American sound, specifically Native American and African American melodies. These sounds he experienced eventually led him to create his Symphony No.9 in E Minor, titled “From the New World”. In this we can note the influence of the Native American music. Dvorak actually studied this music up close and personal by spending a great deal of time with Native American people. ([*www.mutualinspirations.org*](http://www.mutualinspirations.org))

The influential of African American melodies can be contributed to Harry T. Burleigh. He ended up attending the conservatory on a scholarship where he formed his bond with Antonin Dvorak. Burleigh served as the orchestra librarian and copyist and on occasion filled in on a few instruments.

Burleigh through his childhood had learned a number of plantation songs thanks to his grandfather. He was surrounding by music growing up which he would later transfer to Dvorak. On multiple occasions Burleigh would sing these songs and negro spirituals to Dvorak. Later Dvorak would compile parts of the melodies and harmonies that he heard from the different spirituals and songs into his Symphony No. 9 in E Minor as discussed earlier. Dvorak became a huge champion of these indigenous songs and fought for American composers to incorporate different elements of them into their orchestral compositions. (*Notable Black American Men*)

Burleigh would hold many prestigious positions in his life time especially for an African American. He was able to be the first African American baritone soloist at St. George’s Episcopal Church in Manhattan where he ended up staying in the position for most of his life. He continued on to be an excellent composer as well and is seen in history as a trail blazer for the African American community.

The Negro Spiritual as mentioned earlier were songs created by the Africans who were sold into slavery. As they traveled to the new world they started to believe in Christianity and they expressed their beliefs into their songs to deal with the constant hardships faced by them. They also served a purpose as a secret way of communication without the slave owners figuring out what they were discussing. This music when adapted into songs by both Dvorak and Burleigh became very popular with the American community. This music also eventually gave birth to a multitude of genre such as blues, jazz, and opera.

Both Antonin Dvorak and Harry T. Burleigh were highly influenced by each other. Their work together led to a strong sense of musical nationalism in each of their respective works. The use of the Negro Spiritual in particular allowed for the changing landscape of American music and allowing the historic past to become the evolving future. The American music landscape will forever be changed by these composers in particular as well as many others who contributed to this musical change.

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