

REPORT ON APPLICANTS FOR FELLOWSHIPS IN COMPOSITION

By William Grant Still

Walter F. Anderson. This man I would consider to be not only the best of the current year's applicants, but the best candidate to have appeared during my several years of judging for the Rosenwald. I would like to ask the members of the Committee to listen to the recordings he has sent, to see if they will agree with my judgment as to his ability. In his music as well as in his project he has sound, clear ideas. He has something that is lacking in so many young musicians today (I don't know him personally, but take it for granted that he is young), and that is balance. He keeps a sane outlook rather than leaning too far to one side or the other. He has a grasp of himself and of his own resources, and seems to know exactly what he is doing. His technical equipment is good. He is consistent: he orchestrates well and writes well. There is a richness in his music and an intelligent handling of folk material. By this I mean that he has kept the essential element of folk music and has added something which lifts it out of the ordinary. I might add also that I feel that his work has much more than a musical value. In his position, which he has won by merit, he can do a great deal to further good inter-racial relationships in this country and in this, also, I feel that he is going about things intelligently and constructively.

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Erma I. Hayden. I consider her worthy of assistance, because she does have a basic creative feeling in music and it is obvious that she has worked hard and well. She is reaching out for things worthwhile. I note that she employs both the traditional and modern musical idioms capably, but without descending to actual limitation. When she writes in a contrapuntal style she handles it well.



Joseph R. Johnson. This man has had experience enough to enable him to handle his project and to do it well. He is more musical than many present-day so-called "composers", and apparently has a sound technical equipment. He also has a simplicity in his style that might prevent him from going to extremes. Some other people are so intent on ostentation that they destroy what they are trying to attain.

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Ulysses Kay. It is evident that he has been working. Also, he is technically well grounded. But, although he is gifted, his basic creative ability and his innate feeling for music do not measure up to those of the preceding three candidates. The music he has turned out in the past year seems to me to be more cerebral than any I have seen from his pen before, and I am tempted to ask whether it is really music, if it so closely approaches mental exercises?

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James E. Dorsey. He has a certain degree of ability, but not rare ability. He does, however, stand out from the crowd. He has sent for examination his settings of Negro folk tunes, and these indicate that he could do well in that field. In fact, I wish he were more interested in Negro folk music than in the Schillinger system-which from all I have heard of it- is an attempt to reduce music to a series of formulae which would automatically discount inspiration. As a matter of fact, why does he need a Fellowship in order to study the Schillinger system? He can buy the books for a modest sum (the publishers have indicated their eagerness to sell them to anyone who can afford to pay) and can make good use of them as long as he seems to be so interested.

Rachel A. Eubanks. It is evident that she has studied and has acquired a good technical equipment. Her project has to do with work concerning Negro folk music, and I am sorry to report that if her present, exceedingly dissonant style of composing were to be applied to folk music, the folk music would emerge virtually unrecognizable. It would suffer indeed. At best, this particular idiom constitutes a mental exercise and is already decadent. In the strict sense of the word it is not music. Except as a means to a more pleasing end, I strongly disapprove of it, and see no reason for the encouragement of it in music, art, literature, etc.

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Eileen J. Southern. This lady laments the dearth of American piano music. It is true that it is limited, but she is not well informed on the subject or she would not make such sweeping statements regarding it. It is true that this is a good field for future endeavor, but if anyone is going to compose for the piano he must first of all be a composer and second, a pianist. Unfortunately, this lady is not a composer. She lacks originality and there is nothing outstanding in the style she has employed in her compositions.

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