

STATEMENT OF INTENTS AND PURPOSES WITH REGARD  
TO BEING A DIVISION AMONG DIVISIONS  
AT BENNINGTON COLLEGE

It is the intention of the following to try to make more  
plausible and reasonable <sup>1. The reasons</sup> why the current Black Music Situation  
now ~~seems~~ feels that it is ready <sup>1. And should</sup> be admitted as a  
Division at Bennington College. ~~Very much~~

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I don't think it is necessary to say that Black Music as created by Black Americans has long served as an important force and integral part of American culture. There is no area of American music that doesn't either tacitly or overtly reflect influences of this music. That it is an art cannot be questioned even if some who should know refuse to recognize it.

For those who would raise the old argument as to why it is not a part of the regular music situation here at Bennington College, the reasons are too numerous to go into, but it can be said that the necessity for there being two divisions rests with the structure and philosophy of the college and was not invented by the people currently teaching Black Music. The current music faculty, with two exceptions, has rationalized

their position by declaring that (1) there is no such thing as Black Music, and (2) if there were such a thing they themselves could not teach it because they don't know what it is. It is obvious that each one of the divisions here at the college is so structured as to allow divisions, their faculty, and their students, to function at their highest levels. To the music division (and this is addressed to those who hold out for the 'talking it over' of this situation) not only does Black Music as an art, and an aesthetic, not exist, but there is no such thing as a Black Musician. There are creos (black on the outside and white on the inside), but ~~as~~ as regards specific groups having their own point of view as relates to other ideas about music, there is no room for experimentation, new thought or ideas or <sup>3</sup>implementation of those ideas within the single music division make-up. So things have to be separate. Why isn't the Soviet Union and the United States one lovely country? Why do you have a passport? Why do you lock your door at night?

WHY DOES BLACK MUSIC HAVE TO BE A SEPARATE DIVISION APART FROM THE ALREADY EXISTING MUSIC DIVISION?

*Because* the basic philosophy of the music division towards musics <sup>*IS TRUNDICED.*</sup> other than "Western" concert music <sup>*also*</sup> (they have said that they [the entire music division] do not know how to teach music other than Western music). They have <sup>*also*</sup> said that other musics should be taught in other places (see Quadrille Spring 1974.)

The absence of representation commensurate to its historical and utilitarian significance in the most vital elements of the mainstream of America's contemporary musical culture has made

it necessary for the Black composers and performing musicians most affected to lay heavy stress on the establishment of the music in its rightful place in the university and college educational system. Because of large philosophical and methodological differences with regard to the teaching of music as reflects the attitudes of teachers of both musics (white and black)-<sup>(STRIVING heartfully)</sup> both/for higher teaching standards and performance, and for the better interests of students, it is obviously necessary at the present time to continue the separation of these two aesthetic entities as separate divisions. All of this is to provide the proper facilities for the creation, rehearsal, performance, teaching and dissemination of information about the music to both interested students and audiences. Black music represents the epitome of individualism in the musical arts, and the experience of the black musician coupled with his studies of the tenets of other areas of music, particularly western music, allows him, when he elects to teach, to bring to his students a much more broad outline and concept of both what music is and how one can go about dealing with some of the intricacies of its metaphor. Such areas as harmony, theory, counterpoint and conducting are the essential studies out of which composition, improvisation, and performance emerge. Very few knowledgeable persons in or out of the arts will disagree with the statement that the survival of the arts is predicated on change. It should not therefore be construed as being radical but only pragmatic and contemporary to suggest that the teaching methods, ideas and concepts must also follow this natural law



of change. In order that methodology, as relates to students gleaning information about the arts, (in this particular instance, music and black music) from their artist-teachers, it must also be subject to change. And not change merely for the sake of change. As the musician-composer, Cecil Taylor, has aptly and appropriately stated, "...tradition does not have to be a prisoner, it can be a guide."

One of The Basic ~~ideas~~ ideas of teaching Black Music centers around the necessity for the student to first become acquainted with the music, its history, its creators, its assimilators, and its reason for being. This is vital simply because there are few students who come to the college who have had adequate listening and historical experience with the music. As regards teaching philosophy whereas the entire faculty of black music finds lecture courses not only a necessity but also they serve to stimulate students, the regular music division has for some time adopted a diametrically opposed philosophy that the learning of music (composition and performance) is done solely by "...doing". The following relating to this point of view appears in the current issue of Quadrille (Spring 1974).

"Quadrille: Is Bennington unique in the way it goes about the teaching of music?

"...Brant: Most of us working here in music, feel that our work is essentially something you do rather than talk about (except for technical talk 'on the job'), so we don't teach music history or what is called musicology. We avoid the gossip-and-hearsay kinds of musical speculation which sometimes pass for knowledge ... I don't think we're in a position to train our students to be performers in a professional life because this requires an outlay of time and specialized concentration that obviously can't be available in a liberal-arts curriculum by its very nature and premises."

And perhaps this is so for the kind and approach of western music that is dealt with at Bennington College. All stress on performance, but what kind of performance? Because one is a student at Bennington College should not mean that higher standards of performance and composition should not be focused upon. And what about the art of improvisation? - that very significant and vital element necessary for the realization of all important music? Three quarters of the earth's population does not deal with notational music solely as its method for producing music. Contrary to popularly held opinion in western concert music circles, improvisation is not a lost art. And while it is legend that Bach, Beethoven, Liszt and Haydn were incredible improvisors (the improviser is a composer who does his composing sans manuscript paper and academic notation) it is rare (with the exception of church organists) to find a musician in the tradition of concert music who improvises with any degree of proficiency. But since music itself (as far as the listener is concerned) is largely structured around the idea of performance (the performance of something whether that something is written down and then played [notated by the ascribing of symbols that denoted certain kinds of activities to manuscript paper] or not) it seems a little short sighted not to include the teaching of contemporary concepts of improvisation to music students interested in performing music. But, on the one hand, if the area of improvisation most pertinent to the twentieth century has been nurtured, developed and dominated by the black musician/composer, and, on the other hand, the entire music division has, with the

exception of two people, strongly denied the existence of black music as both an entity and art, how can there be any meaningful pedagogical contact or dialogue established between students who want to study improvisation from a black music perspective (Taylor, Tatum, Ellington, Wilson, Hines, Monk, Jordan, and Tyner) but who are forced to settle for the offerings disguised as "improvisation" (the technical devices of Scriabin, etc.) that come out of Vivian Fine's class on the subject? Obviously, the real and immediate need for the separate black music division is readily made clear.

And for those who question the necessity for a Black Music Division, has it ever occurred to them to question the lack of a more equitable representation concerning Black Music on this campus? And why the negative attitude towards the inclusion of Black Music as a Division? Why, on the one hand, is it alright for the courses to be taught and supported by the college and community, but, on the other, this trepidation about divisional status? Is it because when one becomes a division, the fact that divisions offer majors is the real thing that is subtly being thought of? Is it because, as a Division, Black Music will, for all intents and purposes, be equal to the other division in terms of budgetary requests, secretarial help, placement of members on the various committees, votes as blocks concerning interests endemic to the overall interests of the Division, etc.? Is it not also a fact that some can see the inclusion of Black music as a division as <sup>A</sup>possible precedent for a black art division, a black drama division, a black dance



division, etc.? And if these feelings are in the air, why isn't there a more concentrated effort on the part of the entire college community, especially FEPC, to anticipate this so-called dilemma by seeing to it that a more contemporary idea towards the total curriculum be initiated?<sup>?</sup> And suppose it is true that there is a plan afoot to abolish divisions, how long will that take? And how many divisions want to be abolished? And even if they are abolished, how will that affect the teaching of all that has to be taught by those people most experienced in the area of study that the student wants to pursue. As said before, the reason for a separate division of music to be called the Black Music Division (already in existence and teaching - but not being faced as a public reality) is that for whatever reason, Bennington College has fallen behind. It has allowed itself to accept an incestuous attitude about itself - an attitude that has allowed only a certain kind of teaching, thinking and idea sharing to be publicly expressed. It is not forward thinking to call what is going on at the college in terms of what it teaches, who it teaches, who it allows to teach here, in the vanguard of contemporary attitudes towards education. It is not enough to engage in mere dialogue (in which only the chosen few are allowed entry) about curriculum changes. Before you can change something you have to have something to change. Students in this world have changed simply because the world around them, the world in which so many of you have had responsibility for its making has changed. And it has changed drastically. To try to delay simply because of ill-founded

fears is to sabotage a long line of tradition. True, some of that tradition isn't that much to be admired, but at least in days gone by one could not only say one didn't know but also one didn't know what to do. Now it is a different story. One has a responsibility to participate more fully and more honestly and with less fear. There is no more middle of the road.

As regards voting on specific issues, were there but one music situation (the regular music division), it is quite obvious to the entire community that on matters of aesthetics, philosophy and concepts, the black music point of view would rarely, if ever, emerge victorious. Reference is made to statements concerning Third World Musics by the division as a whole contained in the following statement in Quadrille (Spring 1974.)

"...Quadrille: And how about in teaching composition? Does that fit in with some of the things that Jack just said?

"Brant: ...Still another central question is how the practices of music in non-Western cultures can be authentically transmitted in the Western-oriented classroom? What are your views, Jack?

"Click: I feel, that schools which are already great ethno-musicological centers and where the purpose of the school has been to gather from the four corners of the earth, music of all the cultures would be a better place than Bennington College. Places such as U.C.L.A. or Wesleyan University are better equipped to handle that. I think a liberal arts college, such as Bennington or Sarah Lawrence does not have the expertise to deal with that kind of situation. Would you agree with me, Henry?

"Brant: I'm coming round to a sort of all-or-nothing view on this point. I suspect that aside from Western concert music, most of the world's music can't be authentically transplanted from its original geographical and social environment."



"Click: In other words, geography must have a great deal to do with how you listen, perceive and learn music?

"Brant: I'm beginning to think so ... that it is necessary to go there and see and do it first-hand.

"Click: Some of our composers have done just that and come back ...

"Lan: Can you go to, say, Africa, listen to the sounds, then come back and share them?

"Brant: Possibly, if the direct craft of making those sounds can somehow be authentically learned. Quite a big if."

#### WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR HAVING A BLACK MUSIC DIVISION?

The philosophies of the two programs in question are diametrically opposed. And the college has already made a commitment to Black Music, that commitment being the current Black Music Situation as exorcised from a proposal for a Black Music Institute submitted by Bill Dixon in 1973.

#### HOW DOES THE BLACK MUSIC DIVISION AFFECT THE COLLEGE AS A WHOLE?

As previously stated, the division is meeting the needs of both student musicians interested in a basic musical training, and student non-musicians interested in the history, aesthetics, and/or criticism of this art form. Black Music is, in fact, the only representative of any area of Black Culture on this campus. For student non-musicians, the experience extends into areas of sociology, and critical writing and history. For the student musician, the experience goes beyond the traditional Bennington musical education, as the Black Music program engages in an in depth study of some of the theoretical aspects of music, as well as a more thoroughly contemporary attitude towards ensemble playing and performance.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE BLACK MUSIC DIVISION?

The Black Music Division offers both the art, philosophy and technology of Black Music to the entire student body at an introductory level. At the same time, it offers a more specialized discipline for those who have committed themselves either to performance, composition, improvisation, or criticism of the music. A main purpose of the program is to both preserve and advance the art and discipline of contemporary Black Music - teach both its musical and philosophical points of view, and to train and engage the young musician in a specific musical discipline - acquaint the student musician with the art of ensemble playing, composition, how to listen with a critical ear, development in the art of the solo, involvement with the intricacies of the instrument, and, for writers, how to write critically and intelligently about the music.

### HOW DOES THE TEACHING OF BLACK MUSIC IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SCHOOL RELATE TO THOSE STUDENTS?

Such disciplines as ear training, the practicing and learning of one's instrument, ensemble playing, the interpreting of a notated part, are all universal. For the non-musician, the study of Black Music can provide the opportunity for the student to explore a social and philosophical outgrowth of Black Culture, in addition to the developing of critical (both literary and auditory) faculties.

In answer to the hypothetical question, is the program in Black Music broad enough to meet student needs?, the following should serve to further elucidate.

At the present time, Black Music is offering the following courses to students taking 150 quarters:

COMPOSITION, IMPROVISATION, ENSEMBLE, INTRODUCTION TO BLACK MUSIC, THE SAXOPHONE, PERCUSSIVE MUSIC OF ASIA AND AFRICA, THE INFLUENCE OF MUSIC, AESTHETICS AS THEY RELATE TO BLACK MUSIC

TUTORIALS (FLUTE, SAXOPHONE, VOICE, TRUMPET, PIANO, HARMONICA, PERCUSSION, SONG WRITING AND THE ART OF THE SONG, ACCOMPANIMENT) INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION (INSTRUMENTS)

THE DISCIPLINES OF BLACK MUSIC:

Aesthetics, Composition, Improvisation, Ensemble

In terms of the range and scope of the curriculum and the extent to which the student is encouraged to plan his/her program, the curriculum is not only broad, but is also, in each of its areas, an in depth situation. In aesthetics, not only is the student required to deal with the sociology and environmental situations that have had much to do with the shaping of the music, but also with the reasons for the ideas that the critic and historian (largely steeped in the mores, forms and aesthetics that form and formulate western music thinking and evaluatory processes) brings to his "criticism" and "evaluation" of Third World Musics.

#### AESTHETICS AS THEY RELATE TO BLACK MUSIC

This course is an advanced course although any student who is willing to do the work is generally admitted. Its concerns are much as the course title suggests. There is extensive reading (done by the teacher in class to the class) of the writings of critics from Shaw to Harold Schonberg and Clayton Reilly. Students, in conjunction with reading criticism and literature on the subject of Black Music, are



required to listen extensively to various examples of the music: George Russell, Cecil Taylor, Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, etc. Students are also required to acquaint themselves with the writings of writers as they pertain to liner notes, record reviews, daily reviews, Sunday reviews, and the European critic versus the American critic; Frank Kofsky's work and work of Jones and Spellman are discussed when appropriate. Pieces of music are sometimes played in class and students required to write both a review of the piece and a critique in the class. The language of the writer/critic/reviewer is dealt with as well as the language of the musician that this writer, as a liaison person to the interested listener sometimes uses. This is primarily a class for the non music student who is interested in writing.

#### INTRODUCTION TO BLACK MUSIC

is being taught as a full year course, and its primary purpose is to bridge the gap between the student who has minimal knowledge of black music, and the moderately knowledgeable one. The course is being taught by three members of the Division: Stephen Horenstein, George Barrow, and Milford Graves. Each one teaches the course for three weeks at a time, the first two weeks being used for the dissemination of information and the third week functioning as a sort of recapitulation, thus allowing both teacher and student to assess what has been learned through the lectures and the programming of the music through prepared tapes and recordings. In addition, students are advised to attend any of the rehearsals

of the five ensembles. Mr. Horenstein's lectures to the class covered the period from the mid-forties to the seventies. Dealing with the music, what it sounds like, who makes the sound originally (the innovators) and who later duplicates this sound (the assimilators). Who the major people were, who were their influences; where did they work, how did they study, what did they study, how did they live; the nature of the music business, and how the musicians survive in it - the music in the university, who have these people been, etc. Mr. Barrow's lectures deal more specifically with how the music as music is arrived at both through improvisation and the materials that the improvising musician uses (the identical materials that the non-improvising musician deals with) - rhythm, melody and harmony and their separate and collective functions and uses. The scales, modes, chords, the progressions, the songs that are improvised upon and the forms that the musicians choose (in the making of their styles). Mr Graves' lectures concern themselves with the use of Rhythm (drums, basses, cymbals, etc.) as it has developed throughout the years. What the instruments are, what they are called, their more traditional use in other societies (Asia and Africa, for example) and how they have been used by Black Americans. The rhythms and their African derivations - the use of contemporary notation, etc. After each teacher has completed his three-week stint, they collectively seminarize for the duration of the term. The student's grade is measured by how well the student has been able to absorb both the material and information. There are papers, some assignments,

a bibliography, a discography and projects that students are required to do.

### COMPOSITION

In the teaching of composition, the student is constantly made aware of the fact that composition is inseparable from both performance and the people who will be performing the composition. One does not write both vacuosly and in a vacuum. There has to be someone to write for. Not the anonymousness of composing a large work for just anyone to perform. (Witness how Ellington has virtually created the sound of America by his almost ingenious use of the components of composition orchestrated through the sounds that each individual member of his orchestra makes.) And, while centuries old, fundamentals, as regards things that can be construed as seemingly basic, are not ignored (the use of scales, chords, their inversions, etc. and the systematic practice of them, especially for the beginning student) constant reaffirmation towards these elements as they relate to the idea of music and the role of both the elements and their usage in the hands of each individual performer and composer, is constantly referred to. It must be remembered that in black music, no two performers on the same instrument sound alike.

### ENSEMBLE I

taught by George Barrow, comes directly out of Mr. Barrow's classes in improvisation. It deals primarily with the more traditional forms of Black Music as well as with the discipline of vertical improvisation (through the study of scales.)



Students are required to play within the smaller group format, such as the trio, quartet, and quintet. This ensemble is primarily for those who have had little or no experience in the performance of Black Music and emphasizes through performance the study of basic theoretical materials indigenous to the music.

#### ENSEMBLE II

taught by Milford Graves, deals with both African and contemporary aspects of percussion. The knowledge of the assembling of both simple and complex rhythms is studied while, at the same time, coordination of the body is heavily stressed. The ensemble works collectively on the essential elements of percussion in contemporary Black Music, and raises questions as to how they relate to those in the African tradition, how they relate to those in the Asian tradition, and how they relate to those in the "Western" tradition. The ensemble is a practical realization of these questions. It is open to interested students of all levels of experience.

#### ENSEMBLE III

taught by Stephen Horenstein, is essentially an ensemble for saxophones, though each term other instruments have been added. The stress is on more orchestral ways of organizing musical materials, with a heavy emphasis placed on learning and acquiring the skills of improvisation. What is a solo? How is it as an art, studied? How does a musician determine his given role in the ensemble? What is the role of the saxophonist in the contemporary Black Music ensemble, orchestra, small group? This ensemble is taught in conjunction with

a course entitled "The Saxophone," a history of the saxophone in contemporary Black Music from the mid-forties to the present. All members of Ensemble III are required to attend this class. Concurrently, certain technical aspects demanded of a player in the more recent music are examined by the use of specific reference to recordings by the instrument's principal players and innovators.

#### ENSEMBLE IV

taught by Bill Dixon, is the Advanced Black Music Ensemble. It is comprised of those who have had considerable training and who have shown a deep commitment to Black Music. Here the emphasis is on learning one's role in the ensemble, as well as learning the arts of improvisation and composition within any given context. Different contemporary attitudes and means of composition are used (such contemporary forms of notation as the playing of the parts on a trumpet, the singing of parts, the playing of parts on the piano, and verbal instruction, etc.) out of which the player must learn to function ... Advanced ear training skills are implicit in all that the ensemble does. Rehearsals, which are open to all members of the community, are considered performances.

#### INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION/BASIC MUSICIANSHIP

In addition to the ensembles, lecture courses, etc., tutorials are also offered on the saxophone, flute trumpet, strings (fall semester) and general basic musicianship as it applies to all instruments. The stress is placed on learning how to practice, as well as learning the materials emanating

from compositions used for the ensemble. How should one practice? How should the practice time be ordered? What should be practiced? What are the elements common to both traditional and more contemporary Black Music?

#### BLACK MUSIC WORKSHOP

As a summation point for all that is taught and engaged in, there is a weekly workshop in the Carriage Barn (Monday, 4:15) where student pieces are rehearsed and/or performed, workshops in instrumental techniques given, and discussions and criticism engaged in.

#### ENSEMBLE V

taught by Arthur Brooks, makes use of notated lines, scales, rhythms, and sung parts to achieve an ensemble sound within the most recent developments of contemporary Black Music. The musicians are given extensive opportunities to improvise individually and collectively.

#### IMPROVISATION

taught by George Barrow, deals with the more traditional elements of Black Music (the 12-bar blues, chords and their related scales, metric time, songs). Students also learn how to assemble these materials into coherent solos and are at the same time, required to play within the context of the class. What is improvisation? How is this skill taught? What does one practice to attain proficiency in it? What are the traditional forms and how are they used?



Are

As far as students and their preferences ~~are~~ concerned,  
there are now ~~21~~ <sup>TWENTY</sup> who have indicated that they would like to major  
in Black Music. One student, Susan Feiner, this year will  
graduate Interdivisionally between Music and Black Music.  
Her Senior Recital is currently being worked on and will consist  
of original works by the faculty and teaching assistants and  
Densities 21.5 by Varesse. There is another student, Christina  
Compton, who will graduate this year Interdivisionally between  
Black Music and Dance. There are sixteen other students who  
have indicated a preference for being Interdivisional between  
Black Music and something else.

Bill Dixon  
Secretary  
Black Music Division  
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