Teachers, Song Writers And Choir Singers Join In Protest Against Swinging Spirituals

Letters Continue to Pour into Courier Office—Many Show Grave Indignation Over Revelations Exposed by Rev. Harvey's Article.

AN OPEN LETTER TO SWING BANDS

The increasing number of swing arrangements of Negro Spirituals, sacrilegious in the most amazing manner, causes me to address this letter to all bands, white and black, who are guilty of this offense. I could name several bands who seem to be the worst offenders, but I might add that others who are perhaps not so well known but who are no less guilty. Shall I say, guilty? You, guilty of trying to, and seemingly succeeding in, taking all the "spirit" out of spirituals.

"Just what is a spiritual? Do you refer to any spiritual being's kingdom? Evidently, you do not know there is. A spiritual does not have a body; it does have an emotional appeal to you. But it also has some harmonies and sacred texts or Biblical import. It is true that the Negro slaves who gave birth to these spirituals were unlettered and illiterate, whose vocabularies were limited to few words and phrases, but the souls of our slave ancestors were rich in deeper things than you can comprehend. That is because you have never known persecution. You have never known heartache and sorrow. You have never felt the lash on your backs. You have never seen an auction block. You have never been sold as a chattel. You have never been driven to God to help you to bear all this. And there, my swing brethren of spirituals, is the key to many, many spirituals.

They prayed and had faith in God throughout their days of bondage. Faith to believe that God would hear their prayers; and that even if they were not liberated in this life, they would be in the life beyond the grave. And that very faith and certainly made them able to shout and sing, in their darkest hours of sorrow. Could you have done that, Mr. Swing Man? Yet, you take that one element in spirituals, that heavenly bliss and exaltation which they put into their songs, and you turn it into a wild, noisy, unharmonious jumble of "hot" arrangements. How can you do it?

In spite of sorrow and sadness as daily companions, slaves could feel joy and gladness. In spite of chains, they could still sing such songs as "When the Saints Go Marching In." In spite of bull whips, they could steal away at night and sing, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." In spite of blistered, achy backs, they could sing, "Deep River," or "Good News, Chariot's Coming." In spite of auction blocks, they could sing, "Hallelujah" and "Keep Inching Along.

Well, Mr. Swing Man, if spirituals don't mean a thing to you, they mean a lot to me. If they mean no more to you than a chance to cash in on their rhythm and syncopation, some chance to

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