

Union film series to trace the roots of modern music

By KEITH GRIFFLER
Staff Writer

Today's music is as varied and capricious as is our society. That you know from walking through any dorm.

What you may not know is that much modern music traces its roots to the rich history of Afro-American music. This musical tradition will be the theme of a film series starting tonight at the Student Union Film Auditorium.

The series, says Dr. William Dargan, "covers, in part, the Afro-American or root tradition out of which the whole of black music has developed." This includes work songs, spirituals, blues, black gospel, New Orleans jazz, and black Creole.

Dargan, a post-graduate fellow in music, is coordinating the series. Dr. Daniel Patterson, Kenan Professor of English and curriculum chairman of the folklore department, and Dr. Colin Palmer, chairman of Afro-American studies are helping develop and fund the series.

Tonight's edition features four films of the early black vocal tradition: "Georgia Sea Island Singers," "Afro-American Worksongs from a Texas Prison," "Gravel Springs Fife and Drum

and "Songs from the Soul."

Dargan describes the first as "black spirituals sung in their original context." The others, he says, "all focus on the Afro-American music tradition, a folk tradition developed before the 19th Century."

The second showing, Sept. 19, includes three films on the blues: "Give My Poor Heart Ease," about the Mississippi Delta blues tradition, "A Well Spent Life" and "St. Louis Blues," memorable as the only Bessie Smith film.

The third showing, Sept. 30, will deal with regional traditions in black gospel music. "Fannie Bell Chapman, Gospel Singer" is set in the rural Mississippi, while "The Rapture Family" deals with urban black gospel. The latter, Dargan says, is "the story of a sacred musical play developed by the church congregation in Indianapolis, Indiana."

George Ninenburg's award-winning "Say Amen Somebody" will be shown Oct. 16.

"This film traces the development of modern gospel music as a commercial art form, focusing on many of its central figures: Thomas A. Dorsey, Willie May Ford Smith, Sally Martin, Delores Barret Campbell and the Barret Singers,

and the O'Neill Twins," Dargan says.

Two Les Blank films depicting New Orleans and Louisiana Creole music and culture will be shown Oct. 31. Each focuses "on a distinct aspect of the myriad cultural forms that feed into the uniqueness of Louisiana Culture," Dargan says.

"Always for Pleasure" is a most colorful presentation of the grandeur of Mardi Gras and lesser celebrations of food, music and life in New Orleans," he says.

"Hot Pepper" is more specifically directed toward an examination of lifestyles and influences that feed into the black Creole music of which Clifton Chenier and the Red Hot Louisiana Band are a part.

Dargan says he hopes the series will attract a diverse audience. "Students will find (the series) enjoyable and interesting."

"These films taken as a whole well trace the outline of music in black oral tradition," he says. "While every conceivable genre of black music has not been included, those heard and seen should represent a doorway and an incentive to those who would know more."

People need to develop more films documenting the black music experience, Dargan says.

"The most ideal result of this film series," he says, "might be (that) the students viewing the films might be peaked or encouraged to develop films and other media that enlighten our understanding about still other black music traditions, such as rap, funk, black sermonizing, and quartet traditions."

Patterson also sees another purpose for the series. "One value is to come to grips with the source of new music."

He cites the importance of modern music "touching base with its folk roots which revitalize it."

"Rock gets its vitality from influences in Afro-

American folk music," he says. "People forget this."

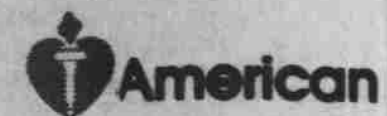
Patterson also hails the films for allowing people "to experience the music in its own context."

"(The films) get you into (the performers') world rather than bringing them into our world."

The films also are exciting and sometimes "visually beautiful," Patterson says.

All showings are from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the Student Union Film Auditorium. Come prepared to learn about the music that spawned the new generation constituting the music scene today.

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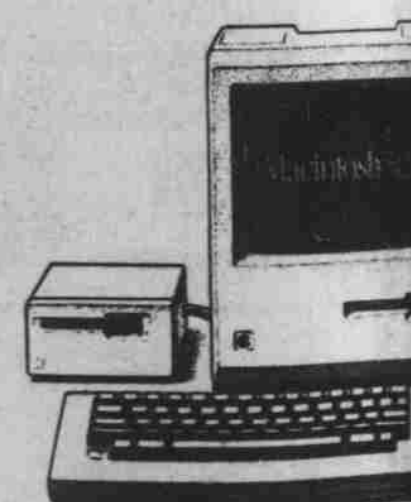
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