

Andrew Legg & Southern Gospel Choir

Potters House DALLAS TX

Nov 16, 2014.

Brief description:

One of the key cultural-musical elements of African American gospel music performance is the capacity of the choir/musicians, to instantly recall and be able to perform songs from African American church/cultural history effectively and coherently without prior rehearsal. Also, their capacity to spontaneously invent, embellish, make-work and improvise music in a manner which - to outsiders - suggests significant rehearsal and preparation, is extremely challenging to people accessing this music outside of this community. Potters House director of choirs, Myron Butler, asked the SGC to learn 5 new tunes immediately prior to their televised performance. The SGC were expected to instantly memorize lyrics, notes, phrasing, forms and structures in one 30 minutes rehearsal, and then perform these tunes at professional standard in a live broadcast and performance venue. The capacity of the SGC to manage this demand to such a high standard is a key 'evidence' supporting the depth to which Legg has been able to translate the complex nuances and gestures contained within both musical and cultural practices of the African American community into an Australian context. The broadcast performances in conjunction with the survey statistics, part published in a book chapter (in-press, *This Is My City*, Rowledge) and Cambridge Popular Music refereed article underpin the key findings of my research, and continue to shape and inform our transformative immersing choral and musical practice.

Research Statement

The effective performance of African American gospel music is heavily reliant on the performers immersion in African American church and popular culture. The performance of 5 new songs at Potters House was required at extremely short notice (24 hours), and would therefore test the depth of my choral preparation of the SGC over the previous 16 years both musically and socio-culturally. In my ongoing research I refer to this 'deep' learning as *transculturalisation*, a concept that I first detailed in 2008 in my PhD, and subsequently in two publications with Cambridge Popular Music (*A Taxonomy of Musical Gesture in African American Gospel Music*, Legg, 2010: & *Continuing the taxonomy of musical gesture in African American gospel music: rhythm, lyric treatment and structures in gospel music improvisation and accompaniment*: Legg & Phillipot, 2013)

The effectiveness and impact of this performance was tested in real time, in the context of the originating culture, delivered to a live audience of 10,000, and simultaneously broadcast internationally to 25 million. This research project and linked performance/creative work was undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the

use of this stock of knowledge was applied directly in it's new application within the performance environment.

Research Background:

The performance of 5 new songs at Potters House was required at extremely short notice (24 hours), and tested and demonstrated the depth of my choral preparation of the SGC over the previous 16 years both musically and socio-culturally.

Research Contribution:

New knowledge is created in both the preparation and delivery of the performance. The findings are then also articulated in a traditional research publication.

The SGC had to demonstrate a capacity to learn music more rapidly than would normally be the case, demonstrating the effectiveness of their training as a result of the application of my previous and ongoing research (Taxonomy of Musical Gesture). Once performed, a new methodology emerges based on techniques for rapid memory development and cultural referencing techniques.

Research Significance:

The new techniques devised to achieve the learning outcomes have modified the ongoing learning and rehearsal techniques for the choir. Written music is no longer used in rehearsals, basing all learning on call and response as was experienced at the Potters House. Additionally, MP3's of all music is constantly referenced in rehearsal and personal practice times. The SGC's progress through new material has increased by 70% in 2015 and 2016; the choirs' built and performable repertoire has similarly increased. The standard of performance has also risen, with less errors detected and better/noticeably more effective use of African American dialect, implied rhythm and extension of vocal range, specifically in the tenors and sopranos.