

**Spirituals in the Voice Studio Survey and
Negro Spirituals in the Library Survey
Results, Analysis and Commentary**

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The Spirituals in the Voice Studio survey was presented on The Art of the Negro Spiritual (ANS) Web site from November 18, 2002, until January 18, 2003. Its goal was to obtain the views of vocal students, professional singers, voice teachers, and voice enthusiasts on the challenges of studying and performing Negro spiritual settings for the solo voice.

The survey was intentionally brief with the expectation that its brevity would encourage more vocalists and teachers to respond. The questions were a mix of multiple choice questions and open-ended questions soliciting their comments.

The survey was announced on several vocal music and afrocentric music discussion lists. The survey was completed--at least in part--by 79 respondents. Additionally, a secondary survey that dealt specifically with Negro spiritual acquisition by music libraries was announced and completed by subscribers to a music library discussion list. None of the respondents of either survey was required to identify him/herself; however, all were asked to complete the survey only once.

Below are the questions asked on the survey, results of the survey, an analysis of the results, and commentary by the researcher. Where there are open-ended questions seeking comments, those comments will be organized by type of response.

Part I. Spirituals in the Voice Studio Survey

When I designed this survey, I had some preconceived notions on the responses based on my own experiences as a vocalist. In fact, this survey was created because I realized that I might be making some assumptions about what other vocalists have experienced with regard to exposure to spirituals and that those assumptions might adversely influence my approach to my research. Unfortunately, I have had no success in finding surveys or discussions of the subject, so this serves as a first step for me in gaining an understanding of others' experiences. (Of course, I am aware that the subject of the survey itself would encourage a higher percentage of those with a strong interest in spirituals to complete it, thus the responds would very likely be skewed.)

Question 1: Currently, you would best describe yourself as:

Voice student	██████████- 35 (46%)
Professional singer	██████- 19 (25%)
Voice teacher/vocal coach	██████- 16 (21%)
Singer as an avocation	██- 6 (8%)

Since the survey was completely open to anyone who subscribed to the mailing lists I contacted or who visited the ANS site, I had no real idea of how many people would respond and what their backgrounds would be. Because I wanted the views of those who are trained as vocalists or voice teachers, I was gratified to see that 92% of respondents consider themselves to be voice students, professional singers or teachers.

Question 2: How many years have you studied voice?

10+ years	██████- 35 (45%)
2-5 years	██████- 22 (29%)
6-10 years	██████- 15 (19%)
One year or less	█- 5 (6%)

That 74% have studied voice at least six years suggests that most respondents have made a significant commitment to the study of the voice. I noticed that most of those who had less time—African American or not—also had almost no exposure to spirituals.

Question 3: What percentage of the music you studied/learned over the last year was Negro spirituals?

Less than 10 percent	██████- 31 (40%)
10 to 25 percent	██████- 19 (25%)
26 to 50 percent	██████- 10 (13%)
None	██████- 9 (12%)
51 to 75 percent	█- 4 (5%)
More than 75 percent	█- 3 (4%)
25 to 50 percent	┆- 1 (1%)

Forty respondents, or 52%, indicated that less than ten percent of the music they learned over the last year was spirituals. Admittedly, I was surprised—but heartened—that the number who gave that response was not higher. I looked over the individual entries and noted that 26 of the remaining 37 respondents--70 percent—had indicated that they were African American. Also, nine percent indicated that more than half of the music they have studied was spirituals. Such a concentration suggests a real interest in this music.

Question 4: How have you gotten most of the Negro spirituals you have studied/ performed?

Purchased from music publisher	██████- 36 (47%)
Made photocopies	██████- 17 (22%)
Other means	██████- 15 (20%)
Checked out of library	█- 5 (7%)
Have not acquired any	█- 2 (3%)
Acquired from composer	┆- 1 (1%)

Of all of the questions on this survey, the responses to this question surprised me the most. So much music is out-of-print or is available only from the composer or composer's family that I expected a much lower percentage of respondents to have purchased a majority of their music from the publisher. In my experience, I have seen Nth-generation photocopies so grainy that the text is hardly readable pass from voice student to voice student because it was the only way to get the music.

I am certainly very curious about what "other means" one-fifth of the respondents used. When only five indicated that they used the library as their primary source, I decided to ask music librarians about their collections (see below) to try to get a sense of whether this might be due to a lack of availability of music or a lack of knowledge that the music is available through that resource. Lastly, I was surprised that only

two respondents indicated that they had not acquired any spirituals. Considering the range of exposure, I had expected that number to be higher.

Question 5: At your last recital, what percentage of the works you performed were Negro spirituals?

None	██████- 33 (45%)
10 to 25 percent	████- 18 (24%)
Less than 10 percent	███- 14 (19%)
26 to 50 percent	█- 4 (5%)
More than 75 percent	█- 3 (4%)
51 to 75 percent	█- 2 (3%)

I was not surprised that 45% of respondents had not programmed any spirituals in their last recital. I was pleasantly surprised that only 21 of the 27 who had sung spirituals in at least 10 percent of their program had indicated that they were African American. Perhaps there is a growing interest in spirituals outside the African American community.

Question 6: Which best describes your current/last voice teacher's involvement in helping you learn or perform Negro spirituals?

Has never been discussed	██████- 24 (33%)
Encourages you to look for and perform them	████- 16 (22%)
Somewhat helpful	████- 14 (19%)
Has introduced spirituals to you in your lessons	████- 10 (14%)
Not helpful at all	█- 4 (5%)
Regularly suggests spirituals to expand your repertoire	█- 3 (4%)
Discourages you	█- 2 (3%)

30 of the 73 respondents (41%) indicated that their current/last voice teacher either had not discussed spirituals, were not helpful, or actually discouraged them. I reviewed their responses to see if I could find a pattern. 23 responded that they were not African American, 15 noted that they had at least six years of vocal training, and 17 had at least a bachelor's degree in some vocal area. Lastly, 12 of the 30 indicated that they are now teaching voice students. How has their own limited exposure affected the amount of exposure they are giving their students? How would these numbers look if the survey respondents reflected the percentages of vocal students/teachers in, say, the United States?

My biggest regret about designing this survey was that I did not place Questions 13 and 14 after this one. The questions ask voice teachers whether they received any exposure to spirituals in their vocal pedagogy or literature classes and, if yes, how helpful that exposure was to them. Unfortunately, the placement of those questions meant that all of the respondents who were not currently teaching voice missed out on the opportunity to include their experiences. I will rectify this in the next survey.

Question 7: What do you see as the greatest challenge to adding Negro spirituals to your repertoire?

Acceptance by the audience/colleagues	██████- 18 (28%)
Interpretation/stylistic accuracy	████-14 (22%)
No challenges	████- 11 (17%)

Accessibility of music/recordings	■- 8 (13%)
Quality/variety of spiritual settings	■- 5 (8%)
Teacher/coach/accompanist inexperience with spirituals	■- 3 (5%)
Unable to connect with repertoire	■- 3 (5%)
Insufficient vocal training	■- 2 (3%)

A majority of those who indicated that they found acceptance to be a challenge were non-African American singers who felt that either their audiences or African American colleagues would not accept their performance of spirituals. Some who identified themselves as African American were concerned that audiences and colleagues would stereotype them as “Black singers” and not take them seriously. The respondents who saw interpretation and stylistic accuracy as the greatest issue were concerned with the appropriate use of dialect and sensitivity of presentation without caricaturing the music. One response—“...OK for academic, but perhaps not for professional recitals”—reflects an opinion that I suspect would have been ranked higher had there been a wider range of respondents. It suggests one reason why singers and teachers don’t bother with spirituals. I probably would not do so, either, if I felt that they would serve no useful purpose in my vocal professional development.

Question 8: How many years have you taught/coached vocal music?

None (Please skip to question 16)	■- 38 (51%)
2-5 years	■- 12 (16%)
10+ years	■- 9 (12%)
One year or less	■- 8 (11%)
6-10 years	■- 7 (9%)

I was pleased that so many who are in the vocal teaching profession (49%) responded to this survey. It was very important to me to see not only how many singers have been exposed to spirituals, but also how many are now sharing this music with their own students.

Question 9: How many students do you currently teach in an average week?

1-5	■- 11 (31%)
10-20	■- 10 (28%)
6-10	■- 8 (22%)
20+	■- 7 (19%)

Based on the email addresses submitted by the respondents, most of these teachers are affiliated with some academic institution.

Question 10: What percentage of your current students are African American?

None	■- 16 (42%)
25 percent or less	■- 11 (29%)
More than 75 percent	■- 4 (11%)
All	■- 3 (8%)
26-50 percent	■- 2 (5%)
51-75 percent	■- 2 (5%)

The primary purpose for this question was to see if the race of their students might have influenced their decisions to introduce spirituals to those students.

Question 11: To what percentage of your current students have you introduced at least one (1) Negro spiritual?

25 percent or less	██████- 14 (37%)
None	████- 9 (24%)
26-50 percent	████- 6 (16%)
All	██- 5 (13%)
More than 75 percent	█- 3 (8%)
51-75 percent	█- 1 (3%)

Comparing responses to Question 10 and Question 11, 42 percent of the participants indicated that they had not limited their introduction of spirituals to their African American students, and 18 percent introduced spirituals to fewer students than the number of African Americans they teach. The remainder indicated the same percentages of African American students and students to whom they introduced spirituals. Unfortunately, 63 percent of those teachers who seemed to introduce spirituals, at best, only to their African American students were themselves African American. This suggests to me that there is still much to be done to prove the validity of spiritual art songs within the African American community itself.

On a more encouraging note, I could not help but note the responses of one teacher, a non-African American. The person indicated that s/he had introduced spirituals to 51-75 percent of her/his students, although none of the students were African American.

Question 12: How have you gotten most of the Negro spirituals you have assigned to your students?

Purchased from music publisher	██████████- 19 (54%)
Other means	███- 5 (14%)
Made photocopies	███- 4 (11%)
Checked out of library	███- 3 (9%)
Have not acquired any	███- 2 (6%)
Acquired from composer	███- 2 (6%)

As with Question 4, I was surprised, but pleased, that respondents replied that a majority of music was acquired from music publishers. Again, I am curious about what "Other means" teachers used to get spirituals for their students and will offer the option to explain those means in the next survey. I will also attempt to find out which publishers provided this music.

Question 13: Were Negro spirituals covered in your college-level vocal pedagogy/literature classes?

No	██████████- 23 (66%)
Yes	██████- 12 (34%)

This question very closely reflects my own experience. I took both the undergraduate and graduate level vocal pedagogy classes and the English literature class at my graduate school. There was no mention of

any music by Black composers in either the undergraduate vocal ped class (I should note that this class primarily covered vocal technique and the mechanics of the voice—not really any of the various styles) or the English Lit class. The grad level ped class exposure consisted of a one-day presentation during which the teacher sang “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” The presentation was completely unlike the other presentations. In those cases, the teacher spent several days introducing recordings by singers of the past and the present whom had contributed significantly to the specific genre, and the class examined scores of standard literature. Two things I must note: first, the teacher gave the presentation of spiritual art songs because the other African American student in the class and I approached her about covering spirituals after we noticed that they were not listed on the course syllabus. It is probable that the teacher did not have the time to do the research and make the same type of presentation she did for the other genres covered. Second, in the years since I took the class, it is possible that this oversight has been addressed so that the graduate students that followed me have received more comprehensive exposure to spirituals.

Question 14: If yes, do you feel that the coverage was sufficient to familiarize you with the repertoire?

No	██████- 9 (47%)
Somewhat	██████- 7 (37%)
Yes	███- 3 (16%)

Since only 12 respondents indicated in Question 13 that they had exposure to spirituals in their pedagogy and/or literature classes, the No response should likely be 2, rather the much higher number related above. Based on this, “Somewhat” helpful would represent 58 percent of the responses, “Yes” would be 25 percent of the responses and “No” would make up 17 percent.

In the next survey, it is my plan to put these questions in a position where all respondents will have the opportunity to answer them.

Question 15: What do you see as the greatest challenge to presenting Negro spirituals to your students?

Interpretation/stylistic accuracy	██████-16 (50%)
Acceptance by the students	█████- 7 (22%)
No challenges	███- 4 (13%)
Availability of music/recordings	██- 2 (6%)
Student’s vocal ability	██- 2 (6%)
Finding time to present music	█- 1 (3%)

This was another open-ended question that allowed the respondents to answer in their own words. I classified the responses into the six categories above. Half expressed concerns about their students being able to interpret spirituals with stylistic accuracy. Of this group, eight have chosen to introduce spirituals to 25 percent or less of their students (based on responses to Question 11 above).

Question 16: Are you African-American?

No	██████- 39 (51%)
Yes	██████- 37 (49%)

There were two primary reasons for this question. First, it would aid in interpreting some of the earlier questions. Second, it would give me a sense of whether a wide range of vocalists and teachers participated in the survey. Not unexpectedly, the fact that 49 percent indicated that they were African American suggests that subject matter of the survey likely impacted the level of response.

Question 17: Please indicate your age range:

18-35	██████████- 42 (55%)
36-50	██████- 24 (32%)
50+	█- 6 (8%)
Under 18	█- 4 (5%)

The responses reflect the experience and education indicated in other questions.

Question 18: Please indicate the highest level of education you completed:

Master's degree	██████- 17 (22%)
Some college	██████- 16 (21%)
Bachelor's degree	██████- 12 (16%)
Some graduate study	████- 8 (11%)
Doctoral degree	█- 6 (8%)
High School/GED	█- 6 (8%)
Post-graduate study	█- 5 (7%)
Grade School	█- 3 (4%)
Post-doctoral study	█- 3 (4%)

67 percent of respondents indicated that they had completed at least a bachelor's degree. Again, I see this as a positive sign that participants are serious about their musical studies.

Question 19: If you have a degree in music, in what area(s)?

Voice/Vocal Performance/Opera	██████████- 32 (76%)
Music Education	████- 5 (12%)
Other	█- 3 (7%)
Musicology	█- 2 (5%)

More than half of the total respondents indicated that they hold some type of music degree. Again, this reflects well on the validity of their responses to the survey.

Question 20: Additional comments?

Rather than attempting to classify the responses here, I refer you to the link below so that you can read the comments presented. Most reflect the experiences the respondents have had with spirituals. Others expressed their concerns about the validity of the genre; whether non-African Americans should perform spirituals; the lack of student exposure to afrocentric music, even at predominately African American schools; as well as the difficulty in finding music.

One comment that distressed me was related to belting. The respondent seemed to be under the mistaken impression that one must belt to sing spirituals. This is simply untrue. I was so concerned about this that I attempted to open a dialogue on one of the vocal music discussion lists to which I belong. The one response I got suggested that one could belt successfully; however, when I challenged whether spirituals should be belted at all, there was no additional response.

When a classically trained singer feels her/himself straining the voice, there is a problem, no matter what the genre of the music. One must select spirituals just as s/he would any other piece. The song should fit the singer's level of vocal training and her/his vocal range. It should fit the programmatic and stylistic need. With the variety of spiritual settings available, one can find songs that are suitable to them without endangering their voices.

In conclusion, the survey surpassed my expectations. For such a brief questionnaire, and such a relatively small sampling of respondents, it gave me a sense that there is an interest in spirituals and that others have found it challenging to add the songs to their vocal repertoires. I feel encouraged to expand the survey—both its variety of questions and the amount of time it is available to participants—and to make greater efforts to solicit an even wider variety of participants.

The complete results of this survey are available on The Art of the Negro Spiritual Website at <http://www.artofthenegrospiritual.com/cgi-bin/EventHandler/subs3.pl?action=ShowTotals&id=&filename=studio>. A new, more detailed version of the survey will be presented in the near future. The researcher thanks everyone who participated in the survey. If you wish to comment on these survey results, please contact Randy Jones at research@artofthenegrospiritual.com.

Part II. Negro Spirituals in the Library Survey

Unlike the other survey, this one was not available on The Art of the Negro Spiritual Web site. I sent the questions directly to the 1000+ subscribers of the Music Library Association mailing list and asked them to reply directly to me. 16 subscribers graciously took the time to respond to the survey.

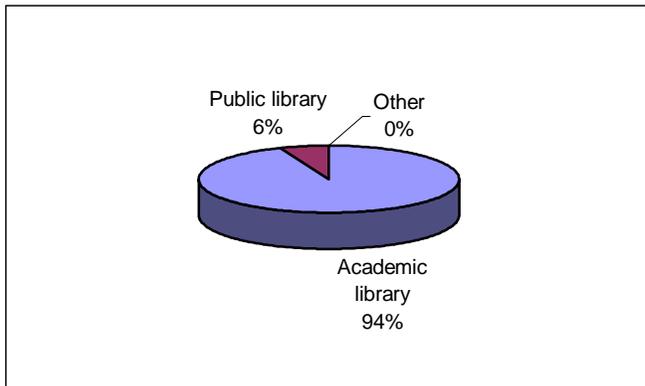
In the next version of the survey, I will attempt to integrate similar questions and make them available on the Web site. The anonymity of allowing interested parties to reply on the site might also affect the number of responses.

Question 1: Would you describe your library as a(n):

A. Academic Library: 15

B. Public Library: 1

C. Other (Specify): 0

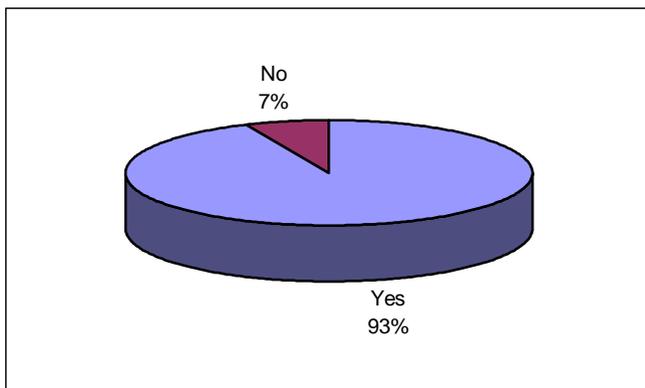


As was the case with the preceding survey, I suspect that the number and type of responses was strongly influenced by the subject of the survey itself. While I am not familiar with the statistical makeup of the MLA mailing list subscribers, I believe it likely that a majority of those with an interest in music librarianship would have an affiliation with an academic institution. Because of this, it is not surprising that a vast majority of the respondents indicated that they worked at a school library.

Question 2: If an academic library, does your school have a vocal music program?

A. Yes: 14

B. No (Please skip to #4): 1



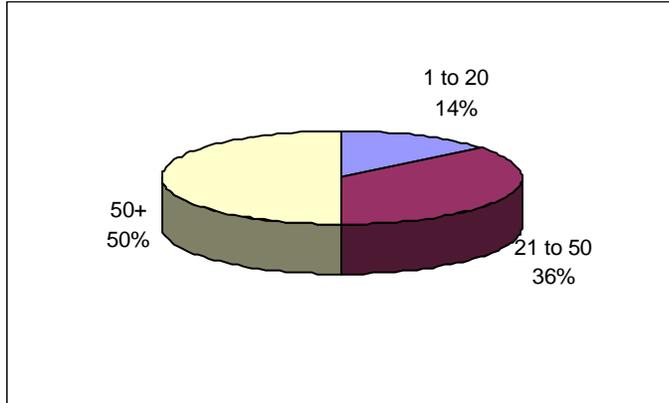
This question was important to the survey because libraries base their collection development on the academic programs they support. If their schools do not have a vocal music program, it is unlikely that they would extensively purchase any type of vocal music.

Question 3: If your school does have a vocal music program, approximately how many students study voice?

A. 1-20 2

B. 21-50 5

C. 50+ 7

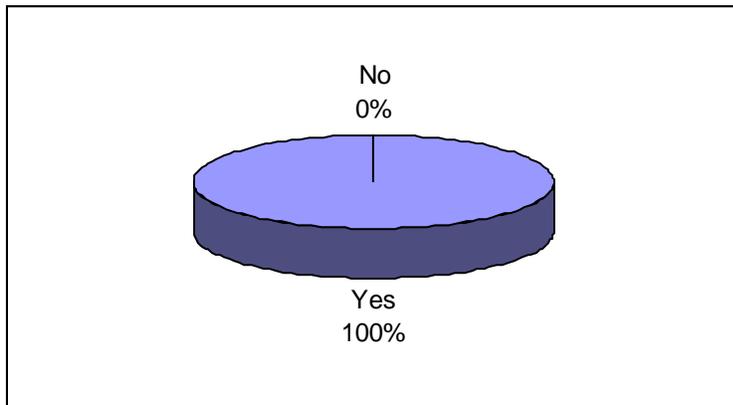


Again, the size of the school's vocal program would play a part in how important acquisition of vocal music would be to the supporting library. Half of the respondents indicated that their libraries support at least a moderate-sized vocal program.

Question 4: Do you acquire vocal music for your library collection?

A. Yes: 16

B. No (Please skip to #7): 0



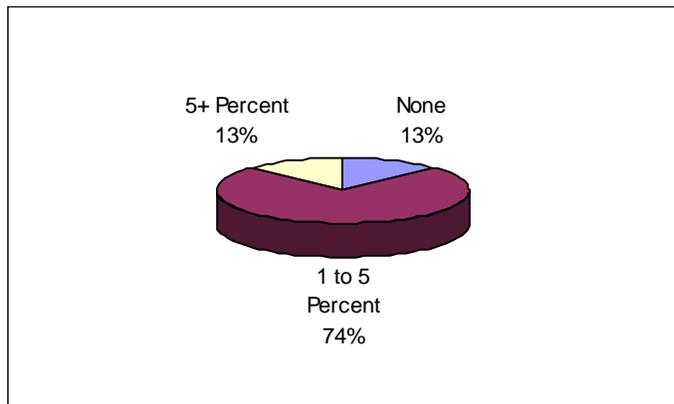
All respondents at both academic and public libraries indicated that they acquire vocal music for their collections.

Question 5: Approximately what percentage of the vocal music you have acquired over the last two years were Negro spirituals?

A. None: 2

B. 1-5 percent: 12

C. 5+ percent: 2



One of those who indicated that they had purchased no spirituals replied that s/he was “not aware of quality sources/arrangers in this area” (see Question 6). I can not help but be concerned when I wonder how many others who are involved in the acquisition of music for their libraries share this opinion. I am also curious about the nature of the libraries whose Negro spiritual acquisitions represented more than five percent of their vocal music and what type of programs they support.

I did not ask the respondents to indicate what percentage of their patrons are African Americans nor whether they, themselves, were African American. These questions will likely appear on the next survey.

Question 6: What are the primary reasons for your selections?

Responses to the survey are below:

- Material relevant to taught courses in the music faculty here in Oxford
- Requests for material made by faculty staff or students
- Collection building (e.g. filling in of obvious gaps in holdings)

- Our choir has performed spirituals with the Fiske Jubilee Singers
- Our choir director is doing research in the field
- As a Quaker influenced institution, we collect “information” as it relates to the “oppressed”

- Many patrons (not only voice students) seek spirituals
- Is an important genre for any vocal program, especially one devoted to a diversity
- Important for the study of American music

- Well rounded vocal repertoire in the collection
- Important scholarly commentary
- Faculty requests

- To build a broad representation of music for students, faculty and community users
- To build on an existing, fairly strong collection of spirituals

- Good recital material
- It’s significant from a historical/cultural perspective
- Students need it to perform at church

- Richness as an American cultural contribution

- Gift materials

Well balanced collection

In response to requests and use by faculty and students

Inclusion of musics outside of traditional Western art music (realizing that such musics can be considered part of that canon, depending on context).

It's part of the great body of AMERICAN vocal music

Spiritual arrangements are usually very accessible to young voices

Spiritual arrangements are audience pleasers, useable in recital and church

Spirituals are frequently programmed by our African-American students

Collections with attractive accompaniments are being issued

To maintain a research collection (for both MPA & Hackley)

To respond to public need for music scores (MPA)

To maintain a balanced collection of circulating music (MPA)

Most orders are for specific titles

Not aware of quality sources/arrangers in this area

To support faculty/student requests and as part of general collection development

Ready availability in primary selection sources (e.g. Oxford Book of Spirituals; possibly reprints--Burleigh's)

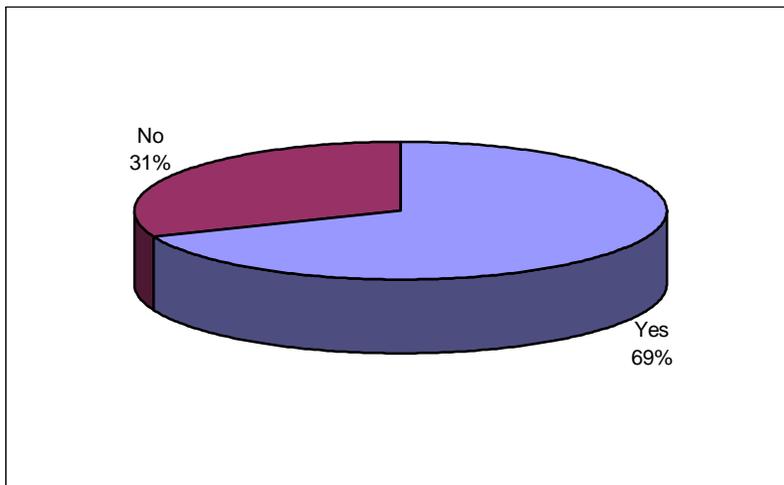
Choral music (chosen by choral department)

Mostly it's the choral people

Question 7: Have you received requests for Negro spirituals from your patrons over the last two years?

A. Yes: 11

No: 5



This was a question directly influenced by the Spiritual in the Voice Studio survey. I wanted to know if vocal students, teachers and others interested in spirituals showed familiarity with the library as a potential source for scores and recordings. The responses suggest that patrons of a majority of this survey's participants do use their libraries to access this music.

Question 8: Additional comments?

Responses to the survey:

We are a small fine and performing arts collect with a very small acquisitions budget. We can't afford a lot, but I continue to increase our holdings on Negro Spirituals (books, music and sound recordings) because it's such an important part of American music history.

Negro spirituals still form a small-ish part of choral society and small amateur choir concert repertoire over here. "Steal Away" is particularly popular, but there are other items that feature fairly regularly.

The survey does not make a distinction between printed music and recordings so I have lumped both together in my mind in answering the questions.

I don't know how our acquisition pattern compares with the repertoire sung by our vocal students. Most of them are very adept at asking the library to buy repertoire, so I'm sure if they were putting spirituals in their concert programmes, then they would be asking me to buy them, if they couldn't find them in the library. (I hope that makes sense!)

New music bibliographer. Plan to increase both print and sound materials.

You are researching a personal favorite area of vocal literature. I am a singer and perform spirituals a great deal. I will be very interested in the results of your research.

We may not have requests because our collection has some nice choices.

Both the Hackley Collection and the Music and Performing Arts Department maintain collections of Negro Spirituals for solo voice and also SATB and other choral combinations.

A woman who was chief of the Department of Culture in the Ukraine (really!) came in looking for Negro spirituals and music of Stephen Foster. (The woman was a choral director.)

Like the other survey, I do plan to expand this survey. While the responses suggests that libraries are sensitive to the need to include spirituals in their collections and that their patrons participate in that development with their requests, I would really like to get more responses from a wider range of respondents.

My thanks to everyone who took time from their busy schedules to complete this survey.