

## **Introduction**

According to a national study upon American choirs, almost 28,5 billion adults and children are part of some choral movement in USA, which proves that the involvement is far more developed here than in any other form of art. One or more adults from the 15,6 % have been members in at least one choir and, from the total number, 45% have joined more choirs. The study estimates an approximate number of 250.000 choirs in USA.

Even more, singing in a choir begins at school. Almost 70% of those that sing in a choir today assert that they did the same thing in an elementary or middle school. More than half of the choir members admit that they have been raised in a home where a member of the family was regularly singing in a choir. These statements are meaningful in an intricate way. They show the role of the education and the involvement of the family in art formation from an early age. The study proves that introducing, even from infancy, serious elements of art in education becomes similar to building a “block” for a lifetime. This form of art manifestation helps the formation and the strengthening of social abilities, the involvement into community life and academic life, in general.

We also specify that the bibliography is inserted into the text, between the brackets, accompanied by numbers that match the works in the bibliography.

## **Chapter I.**

### **Choral music in the American musical context**

About an actual American musical culture, hardly can we comment starting from 1918, *the moment when the American music comes to it's own and becomes an active participant to the universal musical concept.* (61).

#### **I. 1 The beginnings of the American musical culture. Influences.**

Finding a cultural identity for a people made by European immigrants, basically from the poorest categories, and African immigrants was one of America's problems. This cultural identity was mainly based on the English language, the

language of those who first colonized America, and then on the English past, that included the English religious and folkloric traditions.

The combining, the synthesis between these traditions and those having another origin, non-English, was a sustained process.

### ***1.1.1. Amerindian***

The term “Amerindian” is conventionally used to designate the population known under the name of Amerindians or American natives, that settled on the American continent from the north of Mexico before Europeans arrived in the 15th century.

Their music is tied to some seasons of the year, often being correlated to agriculture and hunting. The music of the American Indians is not popular, in the strict way of the term, but better said, tribal, a music of a large number of communities with a multitude of different cultural traits and a special variety of styles and shapes.

The song did not lack importance, he had the purpose of healing the sick, ensuring victory in battles or when hunting and helping the Indian in any situation that surpassed his plain human condition. An Indian once said: “ for a man to do something that is beyond human, he must have a superhuman power. The song was the modality to obtain such power and was used in a specific context. Thus, the Indian music, both the vocal and the instrumental, has its origins in religion.”(41)

### ***1.1.2 African***

Among the elements preserved from the West Africa, we may notice the frequent use of some rhythmic pattern in layers, based on the mix of some various tone colours, the active interacting between public and interpreters, the use of sounds and dance to express spiritual moods. (Hampton and Sykes, 1995).The shows promoted the active participation through moving, rhythmic clapping and dance, and also the frequent use of antiphony.

The improvisation is an important part of many West African traditions. In America, the rhythmic, melodic, verbal and dance improvisations are found in many genres, from children plays to blues, jazz and hip-hop. The most spread genre is the jazz, whose structure is usually a harmonic progression, while accomplishing this progression implies both group and solo improvising.

### ***1.1.3. European***

In every colony, the Europeans were the top of the social, economic, governmental and ecclesiastic hierarchy. The social groups were initially made of Europeans, whose intellectual orientation, and those regarding nourishment, architecture, clothing, music and dance went back towards Europe. The Europeans produced most of the documents that now serve as musical history for the American continent.

The European music may be portrayed as having steady metrics, a fixed set of modes, compositions based on harmonic structures, creation of complex melodic parts, united by complex harmonic ties, interpreted by vocal or instrumental assemblies, instruments with pinched strings, touched or played with a bow, with an increasing tendency towards musical scores and set melodies.

### ***1.1.4. Immigrant***

Many communities have emigrated to America from their originating places in various parts of the world in the last 500 years, a process that still continues at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike the previous category, these ones were escaping war, hunger or religious persecution, heading towards the American continent to improve their life conditions.

The communities differed mostly by the degree of maintaining their local traditions. The new emigrants kept refreshing the old traditions, and social, economical or political conflicts with other groups took to rivalry, competition or renewing of common musical forms.

## **I. 2. American folk music**

*We may speak, in the case of the American background, not about the existence of a folklore, of a popular music, a folklore in the European sense of the word, but of a mixture of popular types of music, at different stages and degrees of evolution.*

*To this mixture, we must add the Indian's music, that of the American natives, the work songs of black people from South, discovered by the Americans in the time of the Civil War, the minstrel show, those imitations of the black people's music accomplished by white people and the Jazz music, born in New Orleans. (61)*

### **I. 3. Cultivated music**

#### ***I. 3. 1. The musical life***

Maybe the Americans are not as talented as Italian, French or German people, but concerning the universal study of art, the general public interest or the public festivals, United States are superior to many civilised countries in Europe.

#### ***I. 3. 2. The musical creation***

##### ***I.3.2.1. The profane musical creation***

A special category of the profane music is made of **the national and the patriotic music**, reflected in the first composing manifestations of the American authors. In the history of the universal music, the American music appears only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the generation of the composers preoccupied with turning to good account the native elements, in order to distinguish the American specific.

Among the most important composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we find: Randall Thompson, Elliot Carter, Seymour Shifrin, Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Charles Ives etc.

##### ***I.3.2.2. The religious musical creation***

Two of the richest native traditions of the religious music in America were, on one side, that of the Afro-Americans, and on the other side, a very popular tradition of the white people, whose continuity may be followed in time, from the psalm songs of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to the modulating interpreting of the hymns specific to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the extractions and recurrences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we notice a standardizing of the musical repertoire used for denominational sermons, so that we obtain a new category of religious music, destined to the praising services, named **worship**. The choral music in **worship style** combines old hymns and new tunes of that time, so that the praising repertoire becomes accessible to all age layers. At the same time, the variety of the repertoire plans to comprise a wide denominational area.

### **I. 4. Choral music**

#### ***I.4.1. Camp meetings***

Held in open air, due to the absence of a bower, but also because of the great number of participants – hundreds and even thousands, the number of the missionaries

being reduced, the religious camp meetings promoted a new choral musical genre – the **spiritual camp meeting**, “*the most American of all American popular hymns.*” (93, 61)

#### ***1.4.2. Choral societies***

One of the most important positions for the preservation of the choral tradition is held by the educational institutions.

#### ***1.4.3. Organ player, choirs and choir conductor***

#### ***1.4.4. Choral music composers***

Some of the most illustrative composers of American choral music were: John Knowles Paine, Horatio Parker, Charles Ives, Walter Piston, Randall Thomson, Henry Dixon Cowell, Roy Harris, William L. Dowson, Ulysses Kay, Daniel Pinkham, William H. Schuman Alice Parker, Irving Gifford Fine, Ernst Bacon, Leo Sowerby, Samuel Augustus Ward.

#### ***1.4.5. The American school of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the choral music***

All along the last 70 years’ complex history, the choral music kept its top position and almost no American composer that worked in this period hesitated in offering an important part of his creation to this genre.

#### ***1.4.6. The American choral music language***

***Melody.*** *From this point of view, the American choral works are especially varied and rich, sustained by the diversity of the inspirational sources. (61)*

## **Chapter II**

### **Styles of the American Choral Music. Spiritual and Gospel.**

The American music brings, to the choral music field, new genres: the Spiritual (with its variants), the Gospel, the Choral Music in Jazz Style and the choral music in Musical Style.

#### **II.1. Jazz**

##### ***II.1.1. Short history***

The Jazz was, with good reason, surnamed *the American classical music.*

##### ***II.1.2. Jazz styles***

*Dixieland*

*Bee bop*

*Soul jazz*

### ***II.1.3. Vocal techniques***

Despite its origins – blues and folk music, and the connections with these, the Jazz developed its own techniques and vocal practices, not all of these belonging to the conventional interpreting manner.

### ***II.1.4. Choral Jazz***

The choral music in Jazz Style appears in the third and the fourth decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, taking over, from the pure Jazz style, the improvising melody, and especially the syncopated rhythms and the syncopated contretemps. (61)

## **II.2. The Musical**

Embodies the traits of developing pop music, innovations in theatrical representation and expansion of dramatic themes.

The Musical, born on Broadway and then transposed into movie, brings away a new musical genre, in which the light music elements are combined with the jazz music ones. (61)

## **II.3. Spiritual and Gospel**

### ***II. 3.1. Origins and content***

#### **II.3.1.1. Traits of the African music**

The fundamental elements that dominate the African music have been the group creation and the improvisation.

#### ***II.3.1.2. African Practices that influenced the American Spiritual songs***

Three musical practices have survived and managed to influence the American spiritual song in a remarkable way.

- The first one and, probably the most important, was the practice of variation:
  - The second one – the interacting between, dancing and singing, that generated rhythmic characteristics that we, nowadays, put next to the Spiritual: the syncopation, the unstopped vibrato, the rhythmic ostinato and polyrhythmic;

- The third element – the vocal improvisation, came to life due to the prominence of the human voice upon other instruments. Improvising and experimenting took to screaming, shouts, moans, falsetto-s;

### ***II.3.2. Influences exerted upon the Spiritual***

#### *II.3.2.1. The influences of the New World upon the Spiritual song*

#### *II.3.2.2. Religious popular music: Spirituals and Psalms*

A text without date from the Southern colonies says: “*I can hardly control the pleasure I feel when I see the black people with psalms and hymn books, singing and helping the others, the beginners, to find their place, and then all bursting into a torrent of divine harmony, capable of taking all the other parishioners to Heaven.*” (87)

#### *II.3.2.3. The Spiritual music in the Revivalist period*

Singing was, from the beginning, a vital part of **revivalism** – an extremely efficient pioneer in preparing the way for preaching, an emotional valve and a common act, during which everybody could shed his energies in complete fraternizing with the other worshipers.

#### *II.3.2.4. How did the popular spiritual song survived*

The Spiritual song, one of the richest and the strongest sources of folk music, was an inspiring material for many other subsequent musical forms.

#### *II.3.2.5. Parallel traditions: Black Spiritual and White Spiritual*

We cannot doubt the existence of a parallel tradition of this kind within the white people music, confirmed by George Pullen Jackson, which included in his work *White and Negro Spiritual* a comparative list of 116 titles from both categories.

#### *II.3.2.6. The influence of the urbanism*

*II.3.2.7. The black people popular church and the music intended for sermons in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*

Within the popular churches of the black people, the folk Spirituals and the collective improvising in free style remained composing parts of the ceremony.

#### *II.3.2.8. The Camp meetings*

From a musical point of view, these religious meetings had a double impact: acting positively upon the choral music, in general, and upon the Spirituals, in particular.

The Camp Meetings concept extended quickly all over the place, and the Camp Meeting Spirituals circulated widely, becoming the most spread American popular songs. (61)

### ***II.3.3. The Spiritual song and its arrangements***

#### ***II.3.3.1. Musical traits of the Spiritual Song***

*Everything that is transmitted through notation, type or even voice is only a small part of the manner in which these songs sound in reality. The coloured people's voices have that special quality that cannot be copied; the intonations and the variations of a single interpreter cannot be reproduced on paper. (87)*

#### ***II.3.3.2. Characteristics of the choral arrangements of the Spiritual song***

The rhythm and the characteristics it involves are more important than the melody in the African music and also, in the situation of the Spiritual. There are many reasons for that. First, the increasing role of the dance and of the implying movements – head, shoulders, arms, hands, hips, legs. Every movement of some part of the body or of the whole body determined the appearance of particular, unique rhythms.

The African dance and, later on, that ring-shout of the slaves, is reflected through a continuous pulsation in the choral arrangements of the Spiritual.

#### ***II.3.3.3. The dispersion and the adapting of the Spirituals***

The choral harmonisations from the 1870's preserved the spiritual music, turning it into a language that could be shared to large audiences through concerts. The arrangers that followed continued to cultivate the expressivity, the innovating rhythm, the texture, the form and the sonority that spirituals are imprinted with and use as their own arguments.

## **II. 4. The Gospel Music**

The Gospel is the sum of all American religious songs, containing texts that reflect aspects of personal religious experience of some protestant evangelic groups, both white and Afro-American people.

The Gospel is derived from the negro-spiritual. As a self-reliant style in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is no longer an anonymous creation, but belonging to a composer. (61)

#### ***II.4.1. The Gospel Music of the white people***

The form is almost always the same with that of the lyrics containing a refrain. This feature proves not only the descending from the older *spiritual revival*, but also the connection with the profane songs.

#### ***II.4.2. The Black Gospel song***

The term “Gospel” is now associated with the sacred popular music of the black people. The same way in which the White Gospel replaced the old popular hymns, there was, among the Afro-American people a parallel tradition of the Gospel songs that gradually replaced the Spirituals from the period before the war.

#### ***II.4.3. The historical evolution of the Gospel***

Before being declared as self-sustainable genre, the Gospel had a significant evolution, influenced by the activity of some musical personalities or institutions.

#### ***II.4.4. Major intercrossing with Jazz music***

The Afro-American Gospel music had a great impact on Jazz, whether as a transforming musical and spiritual experience in the life of many jazz musicians, or due to various aspects of its vocabulary, imported into jazz, or because of the connections between the ecstatic experiences, common both to sermons and Jazz concerts. Among the most evident borrowings we may notice the question-answer pattern, established between the preacher and the congregation, transposed within jazz by the improvising soloist and the ensemble, or between the same soloist and the audience.

#### ***II.4.5. Popularization of the Gospel music***

The rhythmic vitality, the unsophisticated harmony and the simple lyrics have transformed it into the most popular music form from the rural area in the South.

#### ***II.4.6. The Gospel hymn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century***

Nowadays, the term “Gospel hymn” implies any congregational song based on folk musical style, especially when it is clearly defined by terms like “classic” or “traditional style”.

The contemporary Christian music, as popularized after 1980, is a synonym of Gospel music. Still, there must be a clear distinction between the “concert Gospel” and the “congregational Gospel”.

#### ***II.4.7. Stylistic traits***

The Gospel hymn has a strophic form, its music being characterized by plain melodies, in major tonalities, with simple harmonic vocabulary to suit it (that is occasionally coloured, especially in the case of the last innovations of the genre, through chromatic harmony of the “barbershop” style), along with a low frequency of harmonic shifts.

The tune, short, rich in inflexions, of a special beauty, is supported by a striking rhythm, with highly obvious contretemps and syncopation, often standing out through rhythmic beats or percussion instruments. In the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, piano and small orchestral bands are added. (61)

#### ***II.4.8. Interpretative skills***

A common feature, both in traditional and contemporary interpreting of Gospel songs is the improvising accompaniment, whose rhythm then serves for textual and musical variations, while a supporting vocal group reaffirms a single phrase.

#### ***II.4.9. Instruments***

The first instruments used for accompanying Gospel music in Afro-American churches, in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the percussion ones (including the snare drum, the bass drum, the triangle, the tambourine); it seems that the tambourine was the most employed of all. The banjo was preferred until the 1920's, being afterwards replaced by the guitar. At that time, approximately, the piano was beginning to be used.

Other instruments occasionally used in Gospel music are: the trombone, the trumpet and the saxophone.

#### ***II.4.10. Interpreters of Gospel music***

The number of musical groups, of recordings has grown so fast that Gospel music could not be classified as traditional or contemporary.

#### ***II.4.11. Gospel choirs***

*a. Quartets*

*b. Choirs*

## **Chapter III**

### **Types of American Choral Groups**

**According to:**

- 1. The repertoire**
- 2. The size of the group**
- 3. Types of voices**
- 4. Denominational and nondenominational choirs**
- 5. Execution manner**
- 6. Examples of American choral groups**

#### **Conclusions**

The Spiritual and Gospel choral styles stand as reference point for the American musical culture, representing not only symbols, but also veritable autochthonous values, that make proof of the uniqueness and the worthiness of the American culture, despite its late onset.