

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ORAL L. MOSES

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Interview with Oral L. Moses  
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### **Interview # 1**

TS: Oral, why don't you just start by telling us when you were born and where you were born?

OM: I was born in 1946 in a little place called Olive Grove, South Carolina, which was located, at that time, fourteen miles to the southeast of Florence.

TS: Were you on a farm or was it a farm community?

OM: A farm community, exactly. My father was a sharecropper. Actually the house is no longer standing there, but when I go back to South Carolina to visit and we drive down that road I look over and the empty place is still there.

TS: Which I bet was a dirt road when you were growing up.

OM: It was a dirt road when I was growing up. We always point out—my sister or somebody will say, "Remember, you were born back over there." [laughter] "Yes, I remember."

TS: Did you have to work on the farm?

OM: Let's say this, my mother and my father had a total of ten children, and we grew up sort of in groups. The oldest is a boy—there were two boys and a girl. Then they waited four years and then there was a girl. They waited about two years and then there was a girl and a boy, me, in that group. And then they waited two and a half years.

TS: Did World War II have something to do with that wait?

OM: I don't think so because my father didn't go in. He came to New York for a time to work. The plan was he would come to New York and work and then send for my mother. But then he came to New York and found a job and worked and then wanted my mother to come to New York and she absolutely refused. At that time, especially for my mother and her family, going north to New York was not really looked upon the way it was for a lot of other people because my mother grew up on land that was originally bought by my great-great-grandfather down in Johnsonville, South Carolina. So she grew up, basically, born on the homestead and went to school on the homestead. My great-grandfather started a school of which his children went to that school, and then they became teachers

and in turn taught my mother. Then all the other children of that whole area there, many of them African-American children, really went to school—the school that my great-great-grandfather started.

DY: What a legacy to have!

TS: I messed up your story on the children, by the way.

DY: You were talking about the batches.

OM: Oh, yes, the batches. Then after me, then there were two and a half years later my younger brother, and eleven months later my younger sister, and then about two years after that then there were the last two children. And that's really how we grew up. The first three children, sort of the older children, they finished school, left home, got married, went away to school, and then there were five of us because the two younger children passed away as infants.

TS: Was it some kind of disease?

OM: My youngest brother caught typhoid fever and passed away, and my youngest sister had an accident and was severely burned and died three days later. That was really a painful time for my mother. So that left five of us. The two girls got married and left the last three—so we were the last three children to leave home, I was one of the last. [laughter] We don't really see ourselves in groups, but when we really think about it, it's kind of like there were three, then there were two, then there were three.

DY: What a glorious thing a family reunion must be for you!

OM: Oh, we have wonderful family reunions, we really do. On the Moses side, family reunions get up to be about sixty-two, but on the Lewis side it can be 244 to 250. [laughter]

TS: My goodness. I thought maybe it would be nice to put your father's and mother's names on the tape.

OM: My mother's name is Elveta Lewis and then my father is Otis Moses.

TS: Where did Oral come from?

OM: Oral came from my father's great-aunt. She was the matriarch of the family. When I was born, my father said I was to be called Otis, Jr., and his great-aunt, whose name was Mary Johnson said, "No, his name should be Oral."

TS: Was she a Moses also?

OM: She was actually a Johnson. We called her "Aunt Squerly."

TS: So she said no.

OM: She said no.

TS: And what the matriarch said is what counts.

OM: She and my mother sided.

TS: And your father didn't have a chance.

OM: My father didn't have a chance. Also what he did, he tried not to be the loser, they had Oral put on my birth certificate, and he put Otis, Jr. on the insurance policy. So growing up as a child, I really was Oral at home and at school, basically, but I was also known as Otis, Jr. And then my father's sisters—they were very political—they always called me O.M. [laughter]

TS: Everybody's happy with that.

OM: Everybody's happy. And until my Aunt Julia Mae passed away, she always called me nothing but O.M. She passed away about five years ago.

TS: The matriarch was named Mary. Why did she choose Oral?

OM: I have no idea.

TS: I don't know of anybody named Oral except you, I don't believe.

OM: Well, there's Oral Roberts.

TS: Oh yes, that's right! My goodness!

OM: I love to tell people that when I was born he was not yet popular! [laughter]

TS: So you were not named after him.

OM: So I was not named after him.

DY: Notice we don't remember his name anyway. You're the only Oral we know.

OM: But growing up it was sort of an odd name because there was no other child around named Oral.

TS: That gives you a distinctive name.

OM: Yes, but as children, you don't want that. You want to be named John, Robert, like everybody else. But it was never anything that hurt; it was just that I was Oral. I never remember being picked on for my name or anything like that, maybe because all of us growing up in my area of South Carolina—we all had nicknames. My nickname was always "Brother" or as a child it was "Little Brother" because I had two older brothers which is common in families that you would call the smaller boy Little Brother.

DY: And the older sister was Sis.

OM: Sis. Exactly.

DY: My mother was Sis in her family.

TS: Tell me about your mother's grandfather that became a landowner. Do you know the story on that?

OM: Yes, in fact, I'm doing quite a bit of work on that. His name was Carolina Kelly Cooper. Interestingly enough, in South Carolina they say "cuh-per"; they don't say "coo-per." In fact, I grew up hearing the name the "Cuh-per" River Bridge in Charleston which is not the "Coo-per." So my mother always talked about being related to the "Cuh-pers." But Carolina Kelly Cooper, I now know, was born in 1815. At the time when black people were freed he was freed or bought his freedom, but at any rate, he was able to acquire more than 400 acres of land during this time in the Johnsonville, Browntown area, which is about fifty miles from Myrtle Beach. That property, of course, my mother [remembers] growing up—she talks about him being a very wealthy man because he had a four-horse farm, and my great-aunts took buggy rides on Sunday afternoons. To have a buggy in those days [was a sign of wealth], okay? So she talked quite often about basically my grandfather, but Carolina Kelly Cooper was my great-great-grandfather and his daughter, Louisa, married a man by the name of Mose Lewis who was part Indian. They had six children, one of which was my grandfather whose name was Isaac Lewis. They basically lived on the homestead in Browntown all of their lives. I as a child went there, and my uncle Oscar—my grandfather's brother—fought in World War I, went to Italy, did all this sort of stuff, and came back, and told us [children] about his days in World War I and fighting and all that. But the fact that my great-great-grandfather, Carolina Kelly Cooper—in those days he, of course, had this property, had a farm—but at the same time he also owned his own cotton gin. He also had one room in his house reserved as kind of a medical or health place for people to come for healthcare. He had a store on his compound for the needs of the people; he did all of that.

TS: So did he have tenant farmers working for him?

OM: Basically his children and family members and I guess they had farm people working for them, I don't know that exactly.

TS: I just wondered with a store it sounds like maybe there were people that worked for him.

OM: Well, when I go back and look, I've gone on the web to the 1880 census where African-Americans are first a part of the census, and I found him there, he's listed, so I've gone through all the pages.

TS: He wasn't in the 1870 census?

OM: No. Well, I did not find him and I checked.

TS: The 1870 census was really a poor census; a lot of people were missed because that was right in the midst of Reconstruction and there was all kinds of turmoil and these were political appointees that went out and did the census, so the 1870 census is regarded as a very poor census in terms of completeness. That's probably why he wasn't there in '70.

OM: Right. But I've gone and I have that page book marked. I keep going back and looking and all the people that my mother always talked about—they are there; I see all of these names listed that are there, and it's just fascinating to be able to touch that at this time.

TS: You think he could have been free before the Civil War?

OM: I'm going to go back and read that document, but I think that somehow he acquired his freedom, and I know that document said that. But in my research in doing this, I could probably let you know.

TS: He could conceivably be in the 1860 census if he were free. I mean, there's a slave census in 1860 but it doesn't give the names. It gives age and color and sex and that's it. But if they were free they should have been in there whether they're white or black or whatever.

OM: Right. So in trying to guess his age I think in the 1880 census he was sixty-three years old when that was done, so he possibly could have been in the earlier census.

TS: And if they have sixty-three that's probably accurate. If they round off you have to question, but if they give a specific number like sixty-three it's probably accurate.

OM: Yes. And they even gave his date of birth as 1815.

TS: So that makes sense then, 1815 to 1880 would be sixty-five.

OM: Sixty-five, okay, but I thought I saw sixty-three. I'll have to go back and check on that, but it's close. I do remember the date for birth is 1815.

TS: Interesting. It'd be great if you could find out how he managed to be so successful.

OM: That is a part of my plan! I promised the family reunion—because I do a historical thing every year—I said, "Okay, I'm going to do details, and this is going to be my year when I

come back and [tell the full story], because I have photographs of him, but I just haven't had time to go back and do all the work.

TS: Might be a book in all of this.

OM: Yes.

DY: I was thinking the same thing.

TS: One of the things that we've been interested in all the interviews that we do is how people got into the field that they got into. I guess in your case you grew up singing, didn't you?

OM: I grew up singing, I did. But I did not come to school to be a singer. [laughter] Singing was something that everyone did.

TS: Did you do it in church?

OM: I did it in church; I was in the youth groups and was one of the leaders in the youth group, certainly in the choir singing, and was a musician for my church at fourteen or fifteen, but when I came to school I actually came to school to be a pianist and organist.

TS: Did you play the piano in the church?

OM: I played piano in the church.

TS: Or organ maybe.

OM: And organ. Actually the organ was my favorite instrument, not the voice.

TS: So no one said when you were ten years old, this kid's going to be a star.

OM: No! Actually the singer in my family was my sister, my oldest sister, and it is a sound I have in my ear for life—the most wonderful voice I've ever heard. It's my sister's sound. People would often have what you'd call prayer service at neighbor's houses—it would go from house to house. This particular week they were having prayer service at a neighbor's house. They'd have prayer service inside, and it was a wonderful time for us [children] to play outside, and the best time of day to play which was just at dusk for little boys. I recall us doing something like hiding, playing something, and running around the house. I ran right by the window of the living room of this house, and I heard this wonderful voice, and I could not figure out who that was singing. I heard this voice, and I later learned it was my sister. I may have been probably nine or ten years old, and that's the sound to this day that I have in my ears.

DY: What a story, Oral.

OM: I sang in high school, did the school reviews, sang in a number of the high school choirs because that's what we did; I had my own gospel choir in high school. But that was just a fun thing and being a part of school. When I graduated from high school my plan was to work for a year and then go to Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee to study . . . .

TS: Yes! I used to have relatives in Jackson.

OM: But I wanted to be a minister or a librarian. I was with the nerds in high school, I was a real nerd. I was a member of the library squad! [laughter]

TS: That may be stereotypical, but I can't think of any greater difference in personality than between that of a minister who is up before everybody and a librarian whose shelving books.

OM: Exactly. I have always had a great love for the library. In high school it became my favorite.

TS: Did you have a good library in your high school?

OM: I went to school in South Carolina up to the beginning of my freshman year in high school, and then my family moved to Connecticut.

TS: Oh, I see. I was going to say, obviously you were going through segregated schools back then.

OM: Exactly. But even in South Carolina, the school I went to was Carver High which is now called Ronald McNair High because it's the same high school that [Dr.] Ronald [E.] McNair, the astronaut, went to. He was two grades under me; he was in class with my brother.

TS: Did you remember him?

OM: No.

TS: Okay. [laughter]

OM: We were all kids! [laughter] But then we moved to Connecticut.

TS: I can't think of a bigger contrast going from South Carolina to Connecticut.

OM: Well, one day I was in a segregated school and the next day I was in an integrated school.

TS: Were there any other black kids in the integrated school?

OM: Oh absolutely. Sure. There were many. It was well integrated. So this is '60, I think.



TS: If you were born in '46.

OM: Yes, so '60.

TS: Was it culture shock going to Connecticut?

OM: You know, growing up the way I grew up, no. In my family, no. With my mother, NO! [laughter] Because, let's say this, and this is the interesting thing about where I grew up in South Carolina, my best friend at age two and three was white, Wayne Gause. Wayne was the only child of the man [for whom] my father was a sharecropper. He was at my house as much as I was at his house; he ate as many meals at my house as we ate—we were always there, constantly, all the time. That's the way it was with my mother and my father; we always had white friends, black friends, close friends who my mother visited and sat and talked with all day, and that's just the way we grew up. There are still people, the Carraways and the Gauses and the Simmses, all those people that, not just my mother, but other blacks had close contact with. I always say, segregation for me in South Carolina, yes. There was in all the different ways of segregation, but for the most part what was really most noticeable, segregation was that we went to different schools and we went to different churches.

TS: One required and one voluntary.

OM: Right. Basically if we needed something, we could just as easily go to the Gauses and ask as to go to the Meyers, one black, one white. The Simmses, this way, white, the Robinsons, that way, black. Yes, but there was that separation there, but still yet you worked together, people came by and stopped and talk. My mother would say, "I'm going to spend the day with the Carraways." And she'd go. And so that was that.

TS: Did your closeness with Wayne Gause continue all the way up to the time you left or had you all drifted apart?

OM: We drifted apart, and we drifted apart at that crucial age, twelve or thirteen.

TS: You know, this is Jimmy Carter's story in *Hour before Daylight* that he wrote a few years back about growing up. Of course, his father was the landlord, and he was kind of the Wayne Gause and, well, he didn't have any white friends—for a while, all his friends were black.

OM: Yes. But that happened. I saw Wayne as a teenager, but by that time I was maybe thirteen or fourteen—just before I left—but we were already different. In fact, he was driving his father's truck down the road with a young lady, and I was walking, and he came and he just kind of swerved and kept going. I never saw him again until I decided—I found out where he was—he lives in Charleston—and when I was in Charleston about five years ago I called him up. We talked for the longest, and I told him I was going to be in Charleston. He said, "Oh great, fantastic, we should get together." So he came and picked me up and we spent the whole day with him and his wife and his

two children. His mom came from, well, the little area, Olive Grove, and we had a really wonderful afternoon just talking and, of course, asking—but the Gauses were always wonderful people. My father had to move because L.J. asked my father at one point, he said, “Otis, when are you going to keep your boys out of school to help me work?” My father looked at him and said, “When you keep your son out to work the fields I’ll keep my boys out.” [laughter]

TS: Did he kick him off?

OM: Of course!

TS: I’m not surprised.

OM: Of course! But that’s one thing in my family, when you asked the question did I work on the farm with my mother and father? Yes, you worked on the farm whenever there was no school. As children we had to beg to stay out of school because we thought it would be a great thing to stay out and work. [laughter] But we would have to, literally, beg, and the answer would still be no.

TS: Your parents are really your role models, your mentors.

OM: Oh yes, sure, absolutely.

DY: And your mother’s family has always had a history of teachers.

OM: Exactly. And one of the last ones now—I call her Aunt Melissa—she now lives in New Jersey and is a retired teacher. She was my oldest brother’s first teacher in the school that was built by my great-grandfather. They talk about that at the family reunions and there are all the children who are grandchildren and cousins who also attended that school. Of course, everybody is now in their sixties and seventies.

TS: I guess you’re going to get there this year too.

OM: I will go the Lewis’s reunion,

TS: You’ll be sixty.

OM: I will. Right.

DY: That’s hard to believe!

TS: I’ve passed sixty already.

OM: But it doesn’t phase me—not yet, no, because . . .

TS: I don’t see any gray hair up there.

OM: Oh yes, there are a few! [laughter]

TS: Well, why Connecticut?

OM: Following the tradition of most African-Americans who moved, from the South, to the North for a better life, you did not go to a town where you did not have relatives. My oldest sister and her husband had moved to Connecticut, so we moved to Connecticut.

DY: You finished high school there.

OM: I finished high school there, yes.

TS: Were you prepared when you got there for the work in the high school in Connecticut?

OM: I was. The first semester, making the adjustment, I do recall my grades dropping a little, but then the next semester they came back. But in high school and in Connecticut, what I did discover is that things were not as fair for me as I thought they would be; I had a guidance counselor who encouraged me to stay in the general curriculum. I was a good B student; that's what I took from South Carolina; I was a good B student. It dropped back a little; I do recall that. In Olive Grove, the little community where we grew up, we prided ourselves in always having good report cards. My sisters and I talk about that now; it was always something to get your report card and to show it. In those days everybody wanted a good report card.

DY: Especially in your family.

OM: Oh, yes. And that was standard. That always happened. So when we got to Connecticut we were on what may be called a tracker system, because you had a college prep, you had the sort of business/mechanical drawing, you had the general curriculum and you had the business curriculum. I was encouraged to get into the general curriculum. I was told: "This is quite easy for you; you will do quite well here; so stay here."

DY: Did you know you wanted to go to college?

OM: I knew I wanted to go to college, and I felt like I could go to college even in the general curriculum because I had good grades. But when I graduated I realized that it would have been more difficult for me to go to college because of staying in that general curriculum. Because we were members of the CME Methodist church (Christian Methodist Episcopal ) probably I could have gone to Lane College if I'd chosen to, but unfortunately for me staying out that year I was drafted and went into the military.

TS: Was this '62 when you graduated?

OM: It was '64. I went to the military. I was not really interested in doing anything except going into the military and getting the military over with. However, I was shipped to

Germany—got to Germany [and] one of the persons at orientation said, “We have a soldiers’ chorus, and anyone who thinks you have talent and would like to sing you are welcome to come and audition.” I went and auditioned, and the guy said, “Well, you’re not what we’re looking for.” [laughter]

TS: What were they looking for?

OM: He said, “You’re not what we’re looking for. But there is another chorus, Seventh Army Soldiers’ Chorus”—they were Third Army—“and they’re going to have auditions in September, so when you see the poster come around, you should really audition for Seventh Army Soldiers’ Chorus.” Little did I know, Seventh Army Soldiers’ Chorus was THE chorus. The Third Army Chorus was just a little group of guys who were given permission to have a part-time group. Sure enough I auditioned for Seventh Army Soldiers’ Chorus and . . .

TS: So you got good advice and encouragement.

OM: Exactly. I went in and was a part of Seventh Army Soldier’s Chorus for two and a half years—which traveled the length and breadth of Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria.

TS: So you must have re-upped somewhere along the line to stay in longer than your two years.

OM: No, I stayed my two and a half years and then got out because I had a plan. While I was in the military I decided to take a correspondence math course, and I was on my way back to school. I came back to Connecticut and decided that since I did not have the requisite college courses I needed to take additional college prep courses. I enrolled in a prep school, The University Prep School, and spent a year and a half at The University Prep School taking college prep classes.

TS: So this is ’67?

OM: Actually this was ’69. I was able to attend prep school, because I worked at a bank and had GI bill allotment funds. I studied basic language—French—algebra, geometry, Biology, Chemistry and College prep English. I took all the courses that I didn’t take in high school. Then I did my SAT and applied to schools and was admitted to Fisk University.

TS: Fisk is a beautiful campus and an historic institution.

OM: Yes, yes.

TS: Is Fisk where you always wanted to go?

OM: No, in fact, I didn't know anything about Fisk; while I was in the military one of my army buddies, Alfonso Britt from Chattanooga, Tennessee—he said to me—we were talking about schools—and he said, “Moses, if you really want to go to school, why not go to Fisk University. I attended Fisk, and while I was there I was fortunate to live in this professor's house, which took care of housing cost for me. If you want, I'll talk to him and see if you can stay there.” Sure enough, to make a long story short, he talked to Dr. Cottin . . .

TS: Is this on campus?

OM: He lived off campus.

TS: What's his first name?

OM: John. John R. Cottin. He was, at one time, the Chairman of the French department at Fisk. I was able to stay at his home for three years and maintained his house for him. At that time—which is quite interesting—he had retired from Fisk. He had taught at Fisk for forty-four years and then had gone on to teach at Vanderbilt for two years and then was asked to come to Lane College to teach! [laughter]

TS: So you never made it to Lane, but he did!

OM: No, I never made it to Lane!

TS: I think you were probably better off at Fisk.

OM: Oh, I was much better off. The education I received at Fisk—also, I can't say how fortunate I was to end up staying in his house because he had gone to the University of Michigan, one of the first eight African-Americans to be admitted to the University of Michigan in 1917. He graduated and then came back and taught alongside W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke and just every name that you could think of. They were friends and buddies. Some of his students who came to visit him while I was there, said, “Young man, you go to school over there at Fisk, but this is the university here.” For me it was very true because what I learned from sitting and listening to Dr. John R. Cottin talk on weekends was far more than I could ever get out of a book.

DY: That's real mentoring, isn't it?

OM: Oh, yes. Really, really, close mentoring.

TS: And his field was French?

OM: His field was French, yes. But he spoke fourteen languages.

TS: I stumble over one!

OM: I have been in his house when he's had several of his students there—I was there for Thanksgiving dinner—he spoke German to me, he spoke French to his student Dr. Askew, I mean, from one to the other; he never stopped—but just a brilliant mind, So it was quite fortunate for me have the opportunity to live in his house.

DY: I love the shape that I see your path has taken.

OM: Yes.

DY: It's wonderful. If you had not gone into the Army, had you not been in the Seventh Army Chorus, had you not met this friend . . .

OM: Exactly. It all sort of happened that way and certainly, to me, people like Dr. John R. Cottin, because the people he talked about. I mean, a man from Augusta, Georgia! But then who followed the path—and, of course, I then ended up going to the University of Michigan.

DY: That was what I was going to say, the next thing is that's where you went.

TS: You got your degree at Fisk in '75.

DY: You had a study abroad, didn't you?

OM: I studied abroad in West Germany because I was chosen to apply for a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship.

TS: This is the IBM Thomas Watson.

OM: Exactly. The fellowship program was for students from small private colleges. I think there were like twenty or so small, private colleges that are part of this program that can apply for these fellowships to study abroad. Students who are eligible for this fellowship are honor students. You must write a proposal of what you would do with \$7,000. At the time it was \$7,000. You could go anywhere you want in the world. The only thing you could not do, you could not officially enroll in a school. You had to choose a project that you could do on your own for a year in a foreign country.

TS: So what did you choose?

OM: My project was to study singing and observe opera and ballet in repertoire opera houses in Germany.

TS: Fantastic.

OM: Yes. So I was chosen, and I went to Germany for a year. I went to operas three or four times a week, ballet two or three times a week, had voice lessons twice a week and just spent the year in Germany.

DY: How delightful!

OM: Yes, it really was just an incredible opportunity.

TS: Well, the singers at Fisk are internationally famous for I guess going back over a hundred years ago.

OM: Yes, the Jubilee Singers. So being a part of that was also very good, to have that in my background.

TS: So you must have traveled with them.

OM: Oh, yes. Traveling with the Jubilee singers is very much like the Morehouse Glee Club travels. When not in school—for instance, we had that month off in January—always the Jubilee Singers were on the road, California, Boston, the east coast somewhere traveling. We did not travel extensively during the fall, but in the spring there was always a long tour. Getting permission from teachers to miss classes was always possible. It wasn't that difficult to do because we never missed that many classes. It may have been two or three days, but not an excessive amount because the tours were planned quite well.

TS: No different than being an athlete.

OM: Exactly. That's right. That's what it was. And the teachers knew all the singers, and they knew if you were on campus or if you were gone, so they were always very aware of the schedule of the Singers.

DY: They were probably very supportive and very proud of you.

OM: They were. They really were.

TS: I'm sure the singers have brought zillions of dollars to Fisk over the years.

OM: Yes. And they still are. In fact, right now, a good friend of mine is the director. I know it's a hard job; I would not want to do it.

DY: Have you sent any students there?

OM: No I haven't. All of them come here! [laughter] That's the problem working at an undergraduate institution.

DY: You must have fast-tracked yourself because then you went and got your master's right on the tail of your study abroad.

OM: Yes. Well, I wanted to immediately get my master's because I was eager to go. I had a plan, and that plan was a chronological plan.

TS: You didn't want to be a student forever.

OM: Exactly. Because I had already faced one horrific rumor when I got to Fisk; keep in mind, this is in the day when you had totally traditional aged students.

TS: And you were older.

OM: I was older.

DY: Oh, because you'd been in the Army?

OM: I had been in the Army, which was even worse.

TS: And you had been out of high school for seven or eight years.

OM: Exactly. So when I got to Fisk and I'd been there for a few weeks and had gotten to know several students, one day a friend came to me and said, "Oral have you heard, we have a twenty-six year old freshman here." [laughter] I looked at him and said, "No!!" But, I mean, it was the shock of students because at that time you didn't have anyone that old as a freshman. [laughter]

TS: Things have changed, haven't they?

OM: Exactly. You don't have a second thought about it. Then it was really a shocker.

DY: Take us on down the road from the master's here.

OM: When I was in Germany, I wanted to really go right to a master's program, and since Yale was just sixteen miles down the road from my house, I said, "I want to go to Yale." I thought, I'm sure I'll get in, no problem. Well, I applied to Yale and didn't get in.

TS: Shame on Yale!

OM: But I look back at it now, and I understand why. Yale did not have a performance area, especially not in voice. I had no idea. That didn't dawn on me at the time, but I just wanted to go to Yale because it was sixteen miles down the road from home. I lived in Bridgeport and Yale's in New Haven sixteen miles from Bridgeport. So when I didn't get in I decided I would go to the University of Bridgeport and enrolled in a master's in Science and Music Education. I hated it because that wasn't what I wanted to do, and I felt the whole semester I was in that degree program it was keeping me away from doing what I wanted to do. So in November of that semester I applied to the University of Michigan at the suggestion of one of the professors from Tennessee State University who I'd met . . . through my voice teacher.

TS: Which is also in Nashville.



OM: Which is also in Nashville. She had accompanied for me, and she said to me, “Oral, if you don’t like it, why don’t you just go to Michigan?” I said, “I don’t know any one there.” She said, “Well, I know someone there, and I think we can set up an audition for you.” And that’s exactly what she did. I went there and auditioned on a Monday; on Thursday I had a letter saying I was admitted to the University of Michigan. I went there and was totally happy. And it was the absolutely right place for me to go because they had a program, a very fine program, in vocal performance and opera which was exactly what I wanted. Had I gone to Yale, Yale did not have such a program, so it would have been the wrong place.

TS: So you got your master’s and then did you stay there for the doctorate?

OM: Right, immediately went right into the doctoral program. I didn’t even wait a semester. My master’s recital was my audition into the doctorate program at Michigan. And when I look back on that, I think if I had my druthers, I would probably have liked to have gone out and taught at some school or something for a year because when I did the doctoral seminars, I realized I did not have the experience that some of the others who had had experience brought into the doctoral seminars. I’d only had classroom experience, and I realized then just how invaluable that would have been to bring that, especially in a doctoral program. Also, by that time I was so burned out. Oh gosh. I was just hanging on by my fingernails. One more course.

TS: Did you have to do a dissertation?

OM: We didn’t have to do a dissertation; we had to do three specific recitals plus all the orals and all the preliminary exams. I did all of those which was a complete recital in German, a complete recital in French with program notes, and an operatic role with program notes that the committee approved.

DY: No wonder you were exhausted.

TS: I guess what I was wondering with the question was when does Harry Burleigh get into the picture with that kind of music [arrangements of spirituals, etc.] as opposed to formal opera?

OM: After I came here. At the time I was finishing up my doctorate at Michigan I was also an apprentice for the Michigan Opera Theater. So doing doctoral work, doing apprentice work for Michigan Opera Theater, and working as an engineer’s helper for a consulting engineering firm. . . .

TS: To pay the bills.

OM: To pay the bills. I said to students just here at Kennesaw, “You’re not working one job. When I was in school I had five—trying to pay the bills. I worked as an engineer’s helper from eight to noon, then got in my car and drove to school and worked as a helper

for the opera production at school—that was Monday through Friday. Friday afternoons I went and worked in a classical music record shop, and on Sundays I sang in church on Sunday mornings. [laughter] You do what you have to do, and I was determined to make it through.

TS: How were we lucky enough to get you here to Kennesaw?

DY: Yes, I've always wondered that. Now the answer!

OM: This is really funny; I don't recall applying! [laughter] I'm sure I did because at the end of my doctoral study I started sending out letters for every job announcement that was listed. I just remember getting this call from [R.] Wayne Gibson [chair of Department of Music and Performing Arts]. I'm sure I [applied] because I went down to the Career Placement Services, and you just go through those books, and apply for every opening. I'm sure that's what I did. I don't know how many letters I sent out. At the same time I got a call from Wayne Gibson from Kennesaw I also got a call from the University of Pennsylvania at State College, so I interviewed at both places.

TS: Pennsylvania State?

OM: Pennsylvania State, as in Penn State at State College. I came here, interviewed and then was offered the position here. Right on the heels of that I was offered the position at Penn State.

TS: Why did you pick Kennesaw?

OM: Because at that time my mother had retired and was living in South Carolina, so she had moved from Connecticut back to South Carolina. My mom and I were very close, and so I said, "Well, my mom is in South Carolina; I'm going to Georgia." And so I did. At the time, she was ill, so I arrived here on campus on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, and my mother died on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August.

TS: Was your father already dead?

OM: My father died when I was nine years old.

TS: Your father died when you were nine years old? Who was it that told the landlord that . . . ?

OM: My father. For the two older boys.

TS: I see.

OM: Yes, for the two older boys. So even at that time, we were much younger kids but he said this to my father for my brother Jerome and my brother James. He was interested in having them work in the fields.

TS: I lost something because you were a freshman in high school before you moved to Connecticut. I thought that was connected with your father getting kicked off the farm.

OM: Oh, no. I told those in the same comment. . . but that happened much earlier.

TS: So y'all were living in town while you were in school after that?

OM: We always lived in the country in South Carolina. We were in the country on farms; we were never city dwellers.

TS: So you went to a different farm?

OM: Right. Which is basically the same kind of situation. You're always a sharecropper somewhere for somebody.

TS: And then you just went up where relatives were in Connecticut to go to high school.

OM: Yes, if I can go back and just sort of recap about my father when he farmed and worked as a sharecropper; his three older children were at the age for working in the fields and actually when sharecroppers said that, their reference was to anyone in the family who could work. There were many times you saw little children working in the field. But even at that time, as I said, we weren't even brought up to work outside. But then, once my father died, we had to be on our own. That was very rough for my mother, being a single, black female at this time with five children at home. Still yet she refused to let us stay out of school to work. So does that kind of clarify that?

TS: Sure.

OM: I guess we just got our numbers off.

TS: I just didn't understand correctly. So you got to Kennesaw to be closer to family.

OM: Yes, and my mom passed away. That's never okay, but you realize that's what it is. That's the hand you're dealt, and so you deal with it.

TS: Yes. There may be a follow up question to go beyond this. I'm sure that you had many opportunities, if you'd wanted, to go anywhere you pleased over the last twenty years. So why have you stayed at Kennesaw?

OM: You're right, and I have interviewed at other places, but for me, being here at Kennesaw, I thought about it, and I said, "I could go to other schools, but for me, it's not about going to other schools where it's going to be comfortable, but it is finding comfort where you are and making it work where you are." My teacher at Michigan, Willis Patterson, often said, "Oral, what's this school? Keen-e-saw?" [Laughter] He said, "You know, you could be doing better." I said, "I'm fine at Kennesaw." I liked the idea of being in a

department that's developing and always in a department also where I have a certain amount of comfort, of being able to go out and go beyond teaching and to perform. I was able to develop my performance skill here as well. And it's very close to the airport. [laughter] No, I mean, those are considerations when other friends of mine teach in rather remote places as far as performance, okay, and even now, those friends of mine who [are] flying back from somewhere—they have to fly into Detroit and then [have] to get a shuttle to Saginaw. So that is one consideration for performing; how accessible are you to getting in and out? And also I've always been eager to see where Kennesaw would grow to. I've not been disappointed in being here. I think had I been disappointed in an overall sense I would have been gone long ago. Also, I am a believer in that there's a Greater Power at work in my life for what I do and where I go, and I always go back to this—if I had gone to State College, would I have had the same kind of development that I had at Kennesaw State? I say that because I got into the Harry T. Burleigh project my second year here—I applied for an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grant, and that grant was for summer seminar to study music of African-Americans of the nineteenth century at Harvard University with Eileen [Jackson] Southern who was one of the foremost African-American historians [and musicologist] at that time in America. She was the first African American female professor to be granted tenure at Harvard. I applied for that not knowing what would happen, but—this is another thing; I always believed in, my mother always said, being kind to people, speak to people, always be friendly to people. When I came to Kennesaw, Kennesaw was very small; everybody spoke to one another, everybody talked to one another, it was very close, and that meant people at the maintenance shop and everywhere. Well, there was a young man who worked in the maintenance shop named Steve, I would see him, and he would talk to me all the time. I would stop and we would chit-chat and talk. One day after I sent this application off, I saw Steve and he said, "Hey, Oral, I was talking to my cousin last night, and we were talking about you." I said, "Who is he?" "Oh, his name is Johnny, and he's doing the Summer School teaching at Harvard this summer, and he's reviewing some applications for this summer program and he said there was an application from this professor name Dr. Oral Moses from Kennesaw College." [laughter]

DY: What goes around comes around. That is too wonderful.

OM: He said, "I just told him all about you that you're the nicest person!"

DY: So your mama's right.

OM: Yes, I was one of the thirteen professors chosen for that NEH summer program.

DY: Thirteen, wow.

OM: Yes. And in the program I met [Elizabeth] Ann Sears who was from Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts. At the end of the program—we, of course, were studying the music of African-Americans in the nineteenth century and Burleigh was one of the persons whose music we were studying. Afterwards, Ann said, "Oral, you know, there is all this wonderful music and no one's performing it; we should really get together and

perform some of it.” During this same seminar if we wanted to exercise we could not use the Harvard Recreational Center because over the summer it was closed, but they said to us, “There is a YMCA not too far from here, and you could walk there and you get in.” So I said, “Okay.” So I would walk there to do my jogging. While I was there sitting in the steam room I began a conversation with a guy. He said, “Why are you here?” I said, “I’m here attending the seminar.” He said, “Oh really? A friend of mine is attending the seminar.” I said, “Who’s your friend?” He said, “Lee Cloud.” I said, “I know Lee Cloud and he’s not there.” [laughter] He said, “Oh.” I said, “Would you like to come?” He said, “Sure.” He came to one of the sessions and it just happened to be one in which I sang, and he said, “Do you have recordings? You should be recording.” He had his own recording studio, and he was the first person to record me singing. This sounds like a fairy tale, but this is exactly how this happened. [laughter] So Eric Lindgren invited me to meet his mom and dad, and I became one of his friends, and he has produced all three of my CDs. A fourth one is coming out. But that’s how all of this happened. So believing there is a Greater Force at work—I could not have planned this. Again, if I had gone to Penn State would all of this have been in my path? I just don’t know. So being here at Kennesaw has been the right place for me to be, I think, for all of this. Who knows? Maybe I would have won a million bucks at Penn State, but I don’t know that I would have been happy.

TS: But they might have wanted to pigeonhole you into a particular classical, opera or something.

OM: Exactly. So it’s really been very rewarding since I’ve been here. And of course, out of that seminar, Eileen Southern—she chose I think six or seven of us to be a part of a book that was called *Feel the Spirit: Studies in Nineteenth Century Afro-American Music*. And I was one of the people whose work was chosen to be published in that book. So all these things happened because of that one connection there.

DY: Oral, you came two years after I did. I came in ’82, and as you said, watching Kennesaw grow—that in and of itself is a full-time job.

OM: Exactly.

DY: You have been such an intrinsic part of that growth; my question is this: what comes to you now at this moment as having been the most significant moments in the growth of this university as you have experienced them since you came in 1984?

OM: I have not really thought about that. I don’t know if I can—I think for me seeing this college move from the college to the state college, seeing that, and then the growth to the university, seeing that, and for me also, when I came to Kennesaw, a lot of the students we attracted at the time were students who were probably, in music, were those who could not go anywhere else in the state. Now those students wouldn’t even be considered. Also, I spent many days sitting in registration and listening to students who say, “I just flunked out at Life College,” or “I just flunked out of UGA and I just want to come to Kennesaw to get my average up and then I’m going back.” [laughter]

- TS: That's the way it used to be.
- OM: That's the way it used to be. Now here we are, and students who are choosing Kennesaw because it is a place to go because of its academic standards and integrity. Students choose between Shorter and Kennesaw State. At the time Shorter was probably for many years the most prestigious music department in the state of Georgia. Any student who wanted to study voice went to Shorter. We get a lot of those students now. Also, I just took students to competition to the National Association of Teachers of Singing competition. I took four students. Every last one of them placed.
- DY: How wonderful.
- OM: We're there now, we can do that. I take students and we compete, and our students are at a level that's with other schools in the area—so for me, to see that is very satisfying.
- DY: That is a wonderful answer. And you've also encompassed some of the other areas that we've been talking to people about or asking them to talk about with these oral histories, such as the change in the students. I don't know if you will want to prognosticate or not, but, Oral, where do you see Kennesaw going?
- OM: I think there is a lot more growth in a very different way, and for me, where I think it needs to grow is to be on an equal footing with the other universities—UGA. We need to be there as far as our teaching, as far as our research. For me, what I want to do—I would love to see established here a Center for African American Music Research or a Center for Global Music Research. I would love to see that. Those are the kinds of things that I no longer have to think that that's at Georgia State or that's at UGA. I can do that here at Kennesaw State. We now have a search to hire someone in violin. The candidates yesterday and the day before blew me away. The young lady who came from California studied with the most famous violin teacher in the United States from Julliard—the person yesterday plays with the Atlanta symphony. These are people who are working with the absolute best people in the business; they're coming from the top schools in the country to Kennesaw. That's where we need to be. When I say that—if we're going to attract those kinds of people here to teach, then certainly it's because we are already teaching at that level.
- DY: Yes, I agree.
- OM: Those are the kinds of people we want around us. I want my students to be around these kinds of musician. Right now—I have a student who finished here and is now finishing up her master's at Indiana University at Bloomington, which is the best music school in this country. I've just had two students to audition at the University of Michigan for graduate studies. These are students that we want to be at the absolute best school in the United States, and we want to be able to say we trained them to be there. So that's where I see us going, that's where you have to get. We have to connect with these people.

- DY: You said earlier that watching Kennesaw grow and the possibilities that are here—that's what we have been hearing. And when you said a Center for African American Music Research or Global Music Research, I thought, that is exactly where Kennesaw is thinking right now with our QET, with our diversity, with our global and international focus.
- OM: When I talk to my students who have senior capstone projects to do, I'm saying to them, "You must be able to choose a topic that is a possibility for greater research. I'm not interested in you choosing something that you can do and just throw out. I want you to choose something that can be developed into a bigger project later on—that you can develop into a published article. That's where you need to be thinking." And they go, "Oh!"
- DY: That is a wonderful analogy of what Kennesaw has been doing. We are always looking forward.
- OM: Sure. Rather than going and trying to find, yes it's nice to walk into a school, a job, and to know that that's happening. But I think it's also nice to know that I was there when—and we have grown.
- DY: That you're making it happen.
- OM: That you're making it happen. So rather than walking in someone else's footsteps, that you created it yourself.
- TS: Yes.
- OM: This is going on because we did it. And that's been part of the joy also that I can sit and think of some things and make it happen over there. For instance, this year I decided to do something around cycles, these are cycles—groups of songs by [Franz] Schubert and Robert Schumann and all. I thought, why can't we do a cycle of cycles? So that's never been done at Kennesaw, but we have the faculty. I want to do this in the vocal area. So I just sang a song cycle by Franz Schubert. This past Sunday Karen [C.] Parks sang a cycle by Robert Schumann. Two weeks later we have another two cycles by Beethoven and Schumann.
- TS: Are you looking forward to the new concert hall on campus?
- OM: Oh. Those are some more dreams.
- TS: It's under construction now isn't it?
- OM: I don't mean dreams that it is going to happen. It will happen. But dreams of what we can do with that. So definitely, yes, that's quite exciting.

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## Interview # 2

TS: Oral, we talked a whole lot about your background in the first interview and what you had done at Kennesaw, and so on. What I really want to focus on in this interview is maybe scholarship and service, and I think you've brought the two together over the years, and how your music has led to service and scholarship. We talked a little bit in the first tape about Harry [T.] Burleigh and how you got interested in that. Was it your first CD that you did *Deep River* [H.T. Burleigh: Songs, Spirituals, (Albany, NY: Albany Records, 1999)]?

OM: It was my first CD.

TS: Why don't we talk about that a little bit and how that came about.

OM: I guess that first CD—I could really go back to my undergraduate experience and talk about my connection to Harry T. Burleigh. It was one of the first spirituals that I learned and performed, let's say, as a trained classical musician coming out with an undergraduate degree in music and having to do a recital. The very last selection on my recital was "Deep River." It's very interesting because the theory teacher, Bernard Hunter, came up to me afterwards, and he said, "Mr. Moses, very nice job, and I think "Deep River" was the best piece on this program." At the time, I sort of saw it as a slight, as condescending because here I was . . . .

TS: Because you weren't doing the really important stuff.

OM: Exactly. And to me . . . .

TS: He didn't mean it that way, did he?



OM: Now that I reflect on that, he didn't mean it that way. But at the time when you're in school and you have high hopes of becoming an opera singer, you don't want someone to say that. For me, I guess the spiritual—I'd never done it as a trained singer, not a whole lot of them, but I had always sort of played around with spirituals. In high school . . . .

TS: And yet you were saying before we turned on the tape that you didn't sing them in your church growing up.

OM: Oh, no. No.

TS: Because they thought this was just low rent?

OM: Exactly. Basically people were embarrassed by this music. They did not want to sing it. And I find today . . . .

TS: Society had made them think that this was inferior music?

OM: Yes, absolutely. And there are people who will have negative things to say about spirituals even today, absolutely. But somehow—in high school choirs I had sung spirituals and fallen in love with them. While studying piano, I somehow received a book of a book of spirituals, and I played them and sang them at home, so I knew two or three. When I became a member of the Seventh Army Soldiers Chorus I sang several spirituals with the chorus and even had the solo in the spiritual, "Amen." I probably sang more than one hundred and fifty concerts singing, "Amen," in Germany, Italy, Belgium and Holland. It was absolutely wonderful to receive those thunderous applause after each performance. I didn't do any more until I came to Fisk University, and, of course, my first year I became a Fisk Jubilee Singer. I began singing spirituals as a Jubilee Singer and learning more about the value of them and the respect for them. Not that I disrespected them, but just learning how important they are.

TS: But it's important when somebody else affirms that they're valuable.

OM: Yes, exactly. And being at Fisk, that's exactly what happened. Then, of course, my voice teacher sang them on recital, and every other student was singing them on recital. So in your recital, you want to emulate what's happening around you. But that was my first solo experience with a Harry T. Burleigh song, "Deep River." I continued to sing spirituals at the University of Michigan for graduate studies, and when I came here I had the opportunity to apply for an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grant to study with Eileen [J.] Southern. Eileen Southern is one of the premier scholars in the music of African Americans, who was at Harvard. It was to study nineteenth century African American music. I applied and received the grant, one of thirteen professors. During that summer we all had to choose our research topic. I chose the topic, "Lyric Content of Spirituals in Gospel Music," basically, because spirituals have never really died in this country. People think that spirituals somehow have gone away; we no longer sing them; but they never really died or went away. They came back during World War

II. They came back during the Civil Rights era; and then again they came right back in gospel music. You always find people who will take a spiritual and rearrange it somehow, into a gospel song. I thought that was quite interesting. My take on it was not necessarily lyric content, but to try to find a way to say spirituals have never gone away. They've always been there, just rearranged. In that individual session with Eileen Southern, she said that we had to find a way to find what is it that's significant about the spiritual that identifies it as that genre of music. Rather than saying, "Okay, it's here, this is a genre of music, but it's being arranged over here, here, here, here." What is it that remains the same?

TS: What's the essential core?

OM: What's the essential core? We concluded the essential core is—although the spiritual has been used, I mean, in nineteenth century, twentieth century, all the way through, one thing that never changes—lyric content. The words always stay the same. And I started looking at lyrics, and I said, "You know, that's an incredible thread." We went through spirituals—I found at Harvard one spiritual, "Tis the Old Ship of Zion," that dated from 1824 in [Anne] Arundel County in Maryland. I started tracing different versions of it, and found that it had been used in the Civil War with the black soldiers who used it. Then it was used again at the turn of the century. I found all total about eleven different versions of it.

TS: They changed it to meet the circumstances of the time?

OM: The circumstances, but what was always consistent about it . . . the lyrics, or they would always use a part of it, not all of the lyrics. There was always enough of it there to identify it as the same spiritual. So that was quite interesting to do that kind of work and especially at that level. And you historians are such sticklers [laughter]. We would run downtown to the Boston Public Library or to the Widener Library at Harvard, and we would sit there and look all day for something. We'd come back with it to class the next day and gladly show it to Eileen Southern, and she would say, "No, no, no, that's not nineteenth century" [laughter].

TS: Well, I noticed on your website (<http://www.oralmoses.com/>) how even expressions like "stow back" change over time because nobody knows what "stow back" [shout backward] means anymore.

OM: Exactly. So those are the kinds of things word expressions you frequently find. That expression is from one of the articles that I found in *The Nation*. I was just flabbergasted at being able to find all of this information, just first-hand accounts of people who were observing what was happening at the time. So that was quite fascinating to me, and I made different presentations during that summer. At the end of the summer, another participant there by the name of Ann Sears, who is a pianist, approached me about singing some of the music we were discovering. Ann said, "You know, Oral, this music is really quite exciting. We should get together and just go down into the basement of one of the houses and just sing through a lot of it." So I said, "Great, let's do it." We

went down and sang through many songs and that was the beginning. A lot of that music was arranged by Burleigh. As we sang through much of it we found that we liked it. She said, “We should do a recital. And finally, “We should do a cassette tape” [laughter]. From the cassette tape, that’s how that CD came about. But I must say one of the important things about that summer was that at the time I also met Erik Lindgren. I was an avid jogger and working out in health clubs. We could not use the Harvard facilities at all, but they suggested that we go to the YMCA, which is just a short walk from campus. I would go down daily and do my jog and do whatever and use the steam room. One day after my workout I was sitting in the steam room making conversation with other people. I started talking to Erik, who said, “Well, where are you from?” I said, “Oh, I’m just up here this summer for a seminar at Harvard.” And he said, “Really? I have a friend who is supposed to be there.” I said, “What’s your friend’s name?” He said, Lee Clough. I said, Lee Clough? I know Lee Clough, and he’s not there” [laughter]. So anyway, we kept talking, and I invited him to one of the performances because we always had evening performances. He came to the evening performance and I sang, and he said, “Do you have any recordings?” I said, “Oh, no, I don’t have any recordings.” He said, “You should be recording.” So we continued our friendship and found out he had his own recording studio. And one day he said, “We should record something for you.” And that’s how all of this fell into place. Erik has produced, five of my CDs.

TS: So he’s done all four of them?

OM: He’s done all five of them.

TS: That’s great.

OM: I would say that Dr. Ann Sears at Wheaton College [Norton, Massachusetts], was the one who suggested that we get together and just sing some of the songs, and it started that way. Then we found yet another person who was a Burleigh specialist, and she said, “Oh, I’ve got tons of Burleigh music for you.”

TS: Who was that?

OM: Her name was Dr. Jean [E.] Snyder. She’s now on the faculty at Edinboro University in Erie, Pennsylvania. And she has written the definitive biography on Harry T. Burleigh. One of the things that I really love to tell people is that I sang at Burleigh’s funeral [laughter]. I sang at Burleigh’s funeral. Jean had finished her dissertation on Harry T. Burleigh, and at the same time there was a group in Erie, Pennsylvania—Burleigh’s birthplace was in Erie—who started this campaign, to bring Burleigh’s body home because he was buried in [Mount Hope Cemetery, Hastings-on-Hudson in White Plains, New York] He was buried there because he lived in New York and Stratford, Connecticut and was soloist at The Riverside Church and the Jewish Temple [Temple Emanu-El] in New York. When he died in 1949 they buried him in New York. Then Erie, Pennsylvania said, “We would like to bring him home to Erie.” They had to fight the state of New York and all kinds of people to try to get the body removed and brought to Erie, but they did. This may have been in 1990 or ’91, something like that. So when

they brought his remains to Erie, Jean asked me if I would come and sing because they had a funeral [laughter]! I went to Erie and sang at his funeral [laughter]!

TS: Did he not have any descendants that would have a say where the body would be?

OM: Oh, yes. Well, yes, they had a say-so in Erie, but the state of New York would not release the body. No! They even had to go to the Navy Corps or the Marine Corps to get approval to remove the body. I don't know why it was very complicated to get his body removed from New York back to Erie. His grandson was there, and his family, whom I'm still in contact with, the daughters whom I guess, would be his great-great granddaughters. His grandson said to me, "You know, I looked up there when you were singing, and I could just see my grandfather." So it was really very nice! It brought that connection for me to this music, it really did. Just to have his grandson say that to me made all the difference

TS: Fantastic. You also were featured in a PBS documentary on Dvorák ["Dvorák and America" (Arlington, Virginia: PBS, 2000)] and *New World Symphony* [Antonín Dvorák, *Symphony No. 9* from *Symphony from the New World*]?

OM: Yes. That's because in 1892, after Dvorák came to this country to be a visiting professor at the National Conservatory in New York—at that time, African Americans were not allowed to attend many of the schools, but they could attend this conservatory. And Burleigh and Will Marion Cook were two of the students who were there.

TS: A student?

OM: A student. Right. While there Antonín Dvorák became interested in the African American students.

TS: So that's what led to the *New World Symphony*.

OM: Exactly, because he would invite those two students over to his house for conversations about Negro music. Burleigh sang many spirituals for Antonín Dvorák. That's where the whole conversation came from, and that's what led Dvorák to say what he said about "the spiritual" being this new music.

TS: Right. So I guess you would think of "Going Home" as one of the best known from the *New World Symphony*.

OM: *New World Symphony*, yes. There is that connection there with, yes, Burleigh. There's a picture with Burleigh and Dvorak, I think—I have that dissertation in my office, and I'll let you see that photo.

TS: So "Going Home," that was a Burleigh . . . .

- OM: Yes, that is a Burleigh arrangement used by Dvorak. “Going Home” is a “field holler.” It’s just one of those everyday, common kinds of spirituals that anybody would sing. [hums a few notes]. Yes. I imagine Burleigh knew that backwards and forward. And of the many things, of the many songs he sang for Antonín Dvořák, probably that one stuck.
- TS: Well, I guess you did your CD, and it was reasonably successful. Is that what led to more CDs?
- OM: That’s what led to more CDs because I had no idea—making a CD would be so complicated. It is easy to sit down and come up with the idea, but for classical record companies, they’re interested in one thing: how is it going to sell [laughter]? They say, we can make a CD, but what’s the market? How do I recap my money? And so for us, it was finding the hook for Burleigh. So we did a number of presentations at conferences to introduce Burleigh to people to say, “Here is this African-American composer; here is his entire body of music that he composed. There’s not a single CD on the market. No one can go anywhere and find a CD that says Harry T. Burleigh.” So that was one of the hooks that we were able to use.
- TS: What kind of conferences would these be?
- OM: There was the Sonneck Society for American Music [University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania <http://american-music.org/sam/SocietyHistory.php>] at the time. The Society of American music. You find most of the real scholars who are dedicated to learning about American music are the people who are there. The most prominent scholars of music in the country, American scholars, belong to [the Sonneck Society], named after [Oscar G. T.] Sonneck, who was a scholar himself of American music [chief of the Music Division of the Library of Congress]. But then over the past years they have changed it from the Sonneck Society to SAM—Society of American Music. That’s what we now call it. And then at that conference people are forever making presentations of kinds of American music that maybe you haven’t heard before. Maybe it is not on the top shelf any more, or has never been on the top shelf. It’s just like that at conferences—you make presentations, that’s what we did and it had a really excellent reception. In fact, so much so, that we were sort of deceived a little bit, the Center for Black Music Research [Columbia College, Chicago, Illinois]. There was not a single Burleigh CD on the market, when we were at this conference. We were talking about making this presentation of Burleigh. “Oh, really? Harry T. Burleigh? That’s interesting. There’s nothing out there.” “Right, nothing.” So we made our presentation, nice, long presentation, and talked about our CD that was coming out very soon. At the time, our CD was recorded. We were waiting for the record company to put it out, and they were sitting on it because—Harry T. Burleigh! They didn’t know what the reception was going to be, so they were sitting on it. Well this person came back to the Center for Black Music Research, and within the next year they had quickly put together a CD.
- TS: So they did one.

- OM: So in less than a year they had put a CD out. Suddenly this CD comes out of Burleigh music, chamber music, some vocal music and some piano music, and we were like, “Why did they do it?” [laughter] And none of it was out there, not even talked about, but yes, that’s how that market can work. But we can still say we have the first complete vocal recording of Harry T. Burleigh’s music.
- TS: Right. A lot of people who like Harry T. Burleigh music, you know, if they had one they’d want a second, and so on.
- OM: Yes, sure, and now they do. And I really do like the feeling of knowing that we were the first to decide that this music should be recorded. And since that time, there are a number of people who have one or two Burleigh songs on their CDs. I’ve had many students from the AU Center [Atlanta University Center], where their teachers have said, “Call Dr. Moses because he has some Harry T. Burleigh music.” So even at the AU Center where they were not doing Burleigh music, now they’re doing it. So I like the feeling of knowing that I had something to do with bringing Burleigh to the attention of the music world. That’s a great feeling.
- TS: Well since then, as far as CDs, your second was *Amen! African American Composers [of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]* (Albany, New York: Albany Records, 2001)], so I guess you expanded beyond Burleigh.
- OM: I did because when you find a nugget, when you find a vein of something that’s working, you want to explore it. I had one black composer and then when I was in graduate school in Michigan I met this other composer whose name is Robert Owens. Robert Owens is an African American who had gone to Paris in 1945 to study at the Ecole de Musique-- School of Music Conservatory in Paris. He wanted to be a concert pianist. Once he had studied he had accomplished his mission, [and] never came back to the United States. until 1967. When he came back, one of the persons he met was [James] Langston Hughes, and he was just so enthralled with his poetry. Langston Hughes gave him a book of his poetry and personally autographed it to him.
- TS: He didn’t know about Langston Hughes before then?
- OM: He didn’t know about him. When he left here he was a kid of eighteen years old. He had no idea who Langston Hughes was. Of course, he went back and started composing songs from the poetry of Langston Hughes. He composed songs of almost an entire set of poetry of Langston Hughes. Robert Owens really never came back to this country until, I think, it was 1967. He came back and taught at Albany State for two years, went back to Germany . . .
- TS: To Germany?
- OM: To Germany. Well, he was in Paris, and after that he went to Scandinavia and then somehow ended up in Germany. He became an actor, pianist, film star, and just made his life in Hamburg and Munich and decided he was never coming back to this country

again. When I was a student at Michigan my teacher invited him to Michigan, and we met Robert Owens and sang some of his music, and all of that. I said, “You know, I would like to explore some more of his songs,” because I had started to going to Germany to sing concerts. Once I said, “Next time I’m in Germany I’m just going to take a tape recorder and call him up, and if he would let me I am going to interview him.” I did—called him up, went to Munich, sat down, had a couple hours of conversation with him, and he told me all about his life and everything. I became even more interested in wanting to sing some of his songs. So that second recording really came out of an interest of wanting to explore the music of Robert Owens. I did, we became friends, and again, like Burleigh, here is a man who had volumes of music that had never been recorded. It was not out there at all. So I seized the opportunity again.

TS: So you were the first to record Robert Owens?

OM: To put out a commercial recording. Because he had recorded some with a friend of his in Munich, but that album was just sort of like his own little souvenir, a vanity project that he wanted to do.

TS: What did you do with the tapes that you made?

OM: I still have them.

TS: You should publish them.

OM: Yes, but Robert Owens is I think in his eighties and he’s still performing in Munich, so it would be good. He talked about quite a bit of music because he had gotten to know people like George [W.] Goodman—I don’t know if you know that name—from the ’60s, who was a friend of Angela Davis, or somehow there was a connection. I don’t know if you recall the incident, the court case about George Goodman who had broken out of court and started this kind of riot in California with Angela Davis, and that whole movement.

TS: I remember Angela Davis, but I don’t remember George Goodman.

OM: There was a connection there with this and the poetry is “If we must die, let it not be in vain,” and all of this.

TS: Right. That’s George Goodman?

OM: Yes. So Robert Owens set this poetry to music, and so he talked about that connection. It was really quite wonderful to come back and to sing these songs having had this kind of personal connection. The music meant a whole lot more to learn it. I had a place from which I could learn the music, which was so good.

TS: I would think for Robert Owens he would feel cut off from his roots spending all that time in Europe, yet it seems like he’s maintaining contact.

OM: He is maintaining contact. Not only that, there is a large community of African Americans who, when he went to Paris in 1945 . . . .

TS: The expatriots.

OM: The expatriots. He met—I don't know if you knew Anne Brown, Anne [W.] Brown was an actress. She was the very first soprano to sing the role of Bess in George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Anne Brown left the United States and went to Switzerland to live. So then her sister and her sister's husband followed her there, and then they ended up in Paris in 1945. So when Robert Owens went to Paris in 1945, these are the people he met and became friends with and formed a coalition with all these people. And, of course, by him wanting to be a concert pianist, that's what drove him to Scandinavia. At that time wanting to have more connections, probably, with African Americans, he came back to Munich. And you have yet another large community of ex-patriots in Munich, who I met when I was there as a student in 1975—a large community of musicians who have made their home in Germany, and these are the people Robert Owens met. He started writing music for [them], they performed his music, and it's a large community of African American singers in Munich. So as much as he missed home, he liked being there because he had determined within himself that America was not the place where he could do what he wanted to do.

TS: It wasn't ready for him yet?

OM: No, it wasn't ready for him, and he would never have the kind of success—he wanted to be a concert pianist. He wanted to be a composer. He wanted to be an actor. He wanted to do all of these things, and so he said America was not the place for him. Being in Europe he finally could do all of those things. So he's made his life there. He went to Paris when he was seventeen or eighteen, something like that, yes. And that's where he is—that's his life there. But it's been good getting to know him, and that's what sort of spurred that second CD, Robert Owens.

TS: And then with your third one you move into gospel with Babbie Mason and it's a CD/video, *Treasured Memories* [*Celebration of Our Gospel Music Heritage* 1999]).

OM: *Treasured Memories*. And I think I've never left gospel. Gospel is my heart, and when I start talking about modern music that I like to sing and be a part of, that brings me home; that's church, that's every day, that's comfort, that's a lot of the joy of music for me. So I've always done that. When I came here to Georgia, I was in a store in Merchant's Walk [Marietta] and they were playing this CD, and I said to the cashier, "Who's that?" She said, "That's Babbie Mason; she's a local artist." I said, "Oh really." I didn't really pay much attention to her. Then having students here in the Department of Music, some of my students said—there were like two or three of them—they said, "Dr. Moses, would you like to go to a concert with us, we're going to hear Babbie Mason, she's really great, she's wonderful, and she's so nice. We want you to meet her, we know her." So that's how I met Babbie Mason, through my students in the Department of Music. We became



fast friends and still are today. Babbie was born and grew up in Jackson, Michigan. She wanted to do a tribute to traditional gospel music because she basically is a contemporary Christian gospel musician. At the time, when I first came here, contemporary Christian gospel singers were not in the black community; it was in the white community. So Babbie Mason really was not in the black community at all doing music, but really steeped in the white community.

TS: I wanted to ask you about that because the Theatre in the Square [Marietta, Georgia] every year does the *Smoke on the Mountain* [Written by Connie Ray, conceived by Alan Bailey (New York: Samuel French, Inc., Play Publishers)] and that's white gospel. What's the connection between white gospel and African American gospel?

OM: I think for me African American gospel comes out of the blues, Thomas A. Dorsey.

TS: Who started out as a blues pianist?

OM: Blues pianist. In 1921 or '22, right around there, when he was still singing the blues, he said, "The voice of God whispered to me and said come out of singing the blues." He changed his life and started singing songs similar to Charles Albert Tindley who was one of the early African American preachers who wrote songs such as, "Bye and Bye When the Morning Come." Dorsey wrote his first gospel tune, which was, "I Do Don't You." He was trying to imitate what was already out there from Rev. Charles Albert Tindley.

TS: Was Tindley white?

OM: Oh no, Tindley is African American. He was singing early songs which people started referring to as, "Tindley songs." This is all before gospel music came about.

TS: Pre-gospel.

OM: Pre-gospel. The reason Tindley came up with these songs was for his own church. He was a minister who was born in Arundel County, Maryland.

TS: That's the county you mentioned earlier.

OM: Exactly. Charles Albert Tindley. As a young man he walked from Maryland to Philadelphia. He became a minister and started his own church, which is called Tindley Temple, which is still in Philadelphia today. Tindley wanted music for his own church that would reflect his style of preaching, so he started writing or putting together his own kinds of songs. Songs like "Bye and Bye," "Stand by Me," and "Beams of Heaven," are just a few of his many songs. They were upbeat songs, not the typical hymns. Dorsey heard these songs and wanted to write songs like Tindley. So the first song he wrote was really "I Do, Don't You?"—which, as he said, was a feeble attempt to try to do this. But the second song, which really became the first real gospel song, was entitled, "If You See My Savior Tell Him That You Saw Me and I Was on My Way." This song came out of a real experience. It had to do with a neighbor who was dying, and Dorsey and his wife had

to sit with this neighbor until this neighbor passed because there was no money to take him to the hospital. So he started writing, “I was standing by the bedside of a neighbor who was just about to cross the chilling tide, and I asked him if he would do me a favor, kindly take this message to the other side. If you see my Savior, tell him that you saw me and I was on my way.” So that became his first real gospel song which had success. From that he started writing other songs in this real bluesy style. Dorsey did not change any of the harmonic vocabulary of the blues. He just changed the lyrics. So that’s why these people were fighting against them, because it was the blues.

TS: It’s sinful blues.

OM: The sinful blues. The ministers said we don’t want our congregation rocked. We don’t want them swayed. We don’t want them clapping their hands. We don’t want any of that stuff [laughter], and of course, that’s what Dorsey was, right out of the blues world. So he had to fight many times just to have his music heard. If you listen to early Dorsey and play through his music, it is nothing but the blues. So I guess—where were we?

TS: We were talking about the CD with Babbie Mason.

OM: Yes, and Babbie wanted to come back and talk about traditional gospel.

TS: I guess I’d asked you the question about the origins of African American gospel as opposed to white gospel.

OM: Right. So, therefore, this “Dorsey gospel,” as they called it, also “Dorsey music” in the early days, was the music that really emulated the blues, just with different lyric content, which is everything. When you talk about those traditional gospel singers—I’m talking about Dorsey, Dr. Dorsey said it—I talked to Mattie Moss Clark, who said it. I talked to Clinton Utterbach and it was amazing that all three of them said the same thing, “the most important element in gospel music is lyric content.” If you take the lyric content out, music will say anything [laughter]. That’s one thing that distinguishes black gospel from white gospel as well.

TS: Where do spirituals fit in?

OM: Spirituals are just eighteenth or nineteenth century music that “sprang” into existence out of the horrific lives of enslaved Africans.

TS: Right. So there’s no direct link?

OM: There’s no direct link. Gospel is a twentieth century phenomenon. I mean, we’re talking about a style of religious music that is not yet even a hundred years old.

TS: Oh no, more like from the ’30s maybe.

OM: Exactly, that's exactly it. And so often I'm always correcting black folk when they talk about gospel and all those good old spiritual gospel tunes, and they keep mixing the two. I say, "No, no, no, they're not the same." Spirituals came before Gospel and there's really a distinct style for spirituals. Gospel come out of the blues and most church folk don't want to hear you say gospel comes out of the blues. They don't want that at all. But Dorsey himself said that. In the book, *The Gospel Blues* [Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (Paperback, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)], Dorsey knew what he was doing. And I guess we wanted to say, what is the difference then? And I think you have that traditional white gospel that comes out of the style of country and western from the Carter family about 1929. But it's amazing how the two intertwine; the two connect. That's what's quite good.

TS: They're both folk music.

OM: They're both folk music and right out of the folk tradition. And they have to intersect. Black and white folk have never been apart. Black and white folk in this country, you know, enslaved or whatever, black and white folk. I've said this over and over and over again, growing up in South Carolina, the only thing we did separate from white folk in segregation is we went to different schools and different churches. My best friend as a child was Wayne Gause who I saw every day and played with every day. My mother visited, again, whites just as well as she did blacks. She sat and talked, had connections, if we needed something you would just as easily run to the Simms house who were white, for a cup of sugar, as you would to the Meyers for a cup of sugar. If something happened in a family and you needed help you would in many instances go to your white neighbor before going to your black neighbor. I was just talking to my brothers about my father. when my father passed away. At that time, if you were a farmer and you got sick the wife and the children were left to finish the crop for that year. That's what my mother was faced with. Of course, who came to our aide? My father's white friends who were very dear to him, the Matthews and the Gauses. When we had nowhere to move to, the Matthews said, "Otis, you and your family can come and stay here and work for me here." L.J. Gause said to my family, "I have a house, you can stay here and it will cost you nothing." My brother was just telling me this over the past weekend. So this thing of a black-white, it's much closer sometimes than [we think]. And not only that, I think even in the churches, I remember the Simmses who oftentimes with my mother sat and talked about church, and they talked about songs, and people had prayer meetings together in their houses. So there was all of this closeness of people in need. On an everyday occurrence in the country folk, you kind of needed each other [laughter].

TS: Right. Yes. You know, there's a theory about segregation ordinances that they were urban in origin because in urban areas people lived more anonymous lives and the ordinances were directed against people you didn't know. In rural areas everybody knew everybody and therefore they didn't need segregation ordinances.

OM: Right. You worked together in the fields. You worked together in the barns. That was a close connection that you worked—you just knew all of these people.

TS: Yes.

OM: So even today when we—I think I said this maybe before, I had gone back and contacted Wayne . . . .

TS: Yes, that was on our first tape.

OM: On our first tape? So I think those were real relationships out of a real need, yes.

TS: Well, when you did *Treasured Memories, Celebration of Our Gospel Music Heritage*, was it mainly about Dorsey’s music, or a variety of composers?

OM: It was a variety of composers, but certainly we could not have done that without Dorsey. You can’t move without Dorsey. It would have been of no use if we had done that and not included Dorsey [laughter].

TS: By the way, “Precious Lord” did make the Presbyterian hymnbook when they redid it about ten years ago.

OM: Right. Exactly. Even with that and when we talked about it and we were writing the Foreword for it, we talked about those times of the ’20s and ’30s, of what was significant to black folk at that time. You really had to set the Foreword so that it could set the music up much better for that.

TS: And then let’s see, now you also have a CD with *Third Day Offerings: A Worship Album*.

OM: I have a CD with Third Day.

TS: So that’s four already?

OM: Well, you know, when I do CDs, I count the solo projects. But Third Day is very interesting to me in that the leader of the group of Third Day is my student from Kennesaw.

TS: What’s his name?

OM: His name is Mac Powell. Mac was one of my voice students, and a good guy. I knew he had a group that he was working with as a student. He would always come to his lesson not prepared, and I said, “Mac, I know what you are doing” [laughter]. He said, “Yes, that’s right, Dr. Moses, but really, I’m going to learn my music.” And he would learn his music. He was just a good guy. Eventually his group, of course, made a CD that took off. They became one of the early contemporary Christian rock groups and became the symbol for that whole genre of music. Mac Powell brought his family by to see me one Christmas, and we visited and had a wonderful time meeting his children and his wife. The next day or so he called. He said, “Oh, Dr. Moses, I’ve just written this song and I

wondered if you could get a group of singers and do background for me.” So that’s how that came about. We went in the studio with him and did background work for two of the selections on that CD. About a year later he called me up and he said, “Dr. Moses, I have something for you, I need to drop by your office. I just need a few minutes.” I said, “Sure, just pop by whenever.” So he came running in, and all the students in the hallway were looking at him with mouths wide open, you know. He came in with this big box, and he said, “I just wanted to give this to you.” It was a gold record. The CD had sold more than 500,000 copies, so that was very nice [laughter]. But Mac is still a very good friend, and I’ve gone down to Philips Arena to see him with about 40,000 other folks in Philips Arena. But he’s a Kennesaw student.

TS: How about that.

OM: Yes—that has just taken the world by storm.

TS: Has he ever been honored when the alumni give those awards to distinguished alumni?

OM: Not yet, but that’s something they’re trying to work on.

TS: I hope so.

OM: Yes, because he is really—it’s big business.

TS: Now, you said you have a CD that’s about to come out now?

OM: I do. We’ve missed one, which is my favorite.

TS: I was thinking there was one missing, but I didn’t know which it was.

OM: That’s the a capella CD from Old Zion.

TS: Oh yes!

OM: Now, that’s my heart [laughter]! That CD was—the first time I walked into Old Zion, I said, “You know, one day I would love to come in here and just sing.”

TS: Old Zion is Zion Baptist Church in Marietta, and the old building is on the National Register [of Historic Places] now. I think it was built—there are different dates—but about the 1880s it took its present shape.

OM: Exactly. So I was saying this to my producer, Erik Lindgren, and he said, “Let me know when you want to do it, and I’ll come down with a DAT machine and I’ll record it.” I said, “Really?” He said, “Yes.” So I called up the church—which is wonderful about Old Zion—they really just let me go in there, and they said, “Sure, Dr. Moses, just let us know when you want to come in, and we’ll just give you a key.” So I chose two days at twelve midnight, when we thought everything would be quiet [laughter]! We’d forgotten

about Dobbins [Air Reserve Base], we forgotten about the train tracks, or the buses going by [laughter]! But we said, “Okay, we’re going.” So Erik came down, brought the machine, we set it up, and we spent two days recording in Old Zion, and that was an incredible experience. Erik afterwards said, “Wow, Oral, this is going to be great!” So at the same time, we edited the *Amen* CD, we were going to edit this CD, but then the sound was so good that Erik said, “I don’t think we need to do any editing.” He said, “We’re going to keep it just as is and not touch it.” That’s the true sound of Old Zion.

TS: Do you think they had a sense of acoustics when they were building that building, or it just happened?

OM: I don’t think so. I think it just happened. I don’t think they had the slightest idea in their minds about trying to deal with the sound. But what they came up on, to finish with, was just unbelievable. So that’s how that came about.

TS: I did some oral histories in Old Zion with some of the senior members of the church back in 1986, Hattie [Gaines] Wilson and Annie Mae Solomon and ....

OM: Yes, okay. Did you interview Ms. [Rosalie] Andrews?

TS: Yes.

OM: Oh, yes, yes, yes!

TS: So that’s a great building.

OM: It is. It is. But the reason I wanted to talk about that CD before this new CD is because that CD inspired this last CD that’s coming out. Once it was completed, Erik Lindgren, the producer has a group of musicians called Birdsongs of the Mesozoic. In the ’80s, these guys were sort of a heavy metal rock group in Boston. Now that they’ve grown up and have become respectable businessmen—one is even on the faculty at Berklee College of Music in Boston—they have become this kind of eclectic classical mix that still have a very good reputation around Boston and around the country [laughter]. Erik said to me, “Oral, I would like to take some of these spirituals and arrange them.” Because what I did, Tom, when I recorded in Zion, and I took spirituals directly out of the book *Slave Songs of the United States* [William Francis Allen, edited by Lucy McKim Garrison, Charles Pickard Ware (New York: A. Simpson & Co., 1867; reprint, Paperback, Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1996)]. Not arranged, but just the way probably Fredrica Bremmer and Colonel [Thomas Wentworth] Higginson [“Negro Spirituals” by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1867] and a number of those people who were just writing down the spirituals that they thought they heard. I just went in with that from what I knew in my mind growing up and sang them. So there are no real arrangements of anyone’s on that recording. It’s just traditional spirituals. So Erik said, “I would like to take some of those traditional spirituals and do arrangements with them.” I said, “Great.” And so he did. He started out with two or

three of them, and he loved the project and decided to go further and after he had completed nine of them . . . .

TS: He did the arrangements himself?

OM: He did nine of the arrangements. Then another guy in the group, Michael Bierylo, said he wanted to have a hand at a couple, and then one other guy, Ken Field said he also wanted to do an arrangement. So that's what the CD is—twelve arrangements by these guys from *Birdsongs of the Mesozoic*. And they really are what he wanted to do, which was to have this mix of the two genres, their style of classical rock, mixed with the spiritual, bringing the two together. That's what's very attractive to a number of people about this CD is that we're bringing these two cultures together and fitting them into one. Yes. It's already getting some sort of pre-release interest from a lot of people. I saw there was a release notice in England the other day, so it's a different audience, and I'm going "Whoa! I'm not ready for this."

TS: I look forward to that coming out.

OM: Yes. September 19 is the release date for that. Yes. [*Extreme Spirituals, Birdsongs of the Mesozoic with Oral Moses*].

TS: Well, now, do you still perform standard classical opera?

OM: Oh, absolutely. I don't do so much opera because academia doesn't lend itself to the time it takes to do opera. To do an opera, when you get engaged to sing an opera, they're going to want full-time, and you're talking about being away from campus for a straight three or four weeks non-stop. It just doesn't lend itself to that.

TS: So you're better off doing a performance at the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra or whatever?

OM: And I still do a lot of oratorio which is, individually contracted. In fact, I just sang three or four Mozart requiems this past spring because this is the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mozart. So I had four performances of Mozart's Requiem during this time. Last year was the Durufle Requiem, and this Fall it's going to be the Brahms Requiem with Cobb Symphony, so no, definitely I haven't left that at all.

TS: Well, now, when you do these with the Detroit Symphony or Nashville, do they call you up and say, "Will you come and be our guest performer?"

OM: Absolutely, they will call. And for me, the ideal vehicle for a classical singer today, is management. But that works two ways. It's like being, "between the devil and the deep blue sea," because everybody wants management, and it's an ideal way to work. But, on the other hand, you have to make yourself available for management because what management wants to do is make money [laughter]. The only way they can make money is if they have you out there working [laughter]! But, again, you have to balance this

between academia and the professional stage. You have to have the time. You just can't walk away and leave students for two and three weeks, two and three times out of the semester. So you have to know how to do that, then how to make yourself available to say, "I'm a professional singer and I can be there when you want me there."

TS: When you say to Kennesaw, "I've got to be away because the Detroit Symphony Orchestra has invited me to come perform Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday," has Kennesaw been supportive?

OM: Oh, absolutely. That's more doable. That's expected. That's as good as saying, "I'm writing this article here and I'm going to present this article here and I'm going to do this here." That's normal. But I guess for anyone, when you say, "I've been invited by Michigan Opera to sing this role and I need to be gone the month of September" [laughter].

TS: That's a little different. Who's going to cover your classes?

OM: Who's going to cover your classes for that length of time. So ideally, you look for the individual kind of performances that will allow you to be away for three or four days, and then when you come back, you make up those lessons with the students that you missed. If it's a class, you find a way to work that in. And many times with these performances you know well in advance.

TS: Yes, they'll know a year ahead of time what's going on.

OM: Exactly, exactly, so there's ample time for you to work it into your syllabus and prepare something. And that's what I found to be most doable with academia, the individual performances.

TS: About how many do you do a year would you say?

OM: I would say with my recitals and symphony engagements, I will do between ten and fifteen a year, and that's good. Part of that ten for the past fifteen years, I've had these standard engagements with concert halls in Germany.

TS: So you do that in the summer time?

OM: In December, I go to Germany and will sing several performances. Normally I get out of class like the tenth or the twelfth of December and get over to Germany by the fourteenth. Sometimes I sing about nine performances between the fourteenth of December and the first of January.

TS: So you spend your Christmas in Germany?

OM: I spend it in Germany and that has been really, as they say, "a real good gig" [laughter]. It's been really good, yes.



TS: You talk on your website about guest lecturer and holding clinics for gospel and spiritual. Would you talk about that a little bit? How often does that happen, and where do you go?

OM: A lot of that happens with individual churches. There are church choirs that will have music seminars and invite clinicians to come in and to do workshops on gospel music, as well as workshops on the history of spirituals. I do a number of those, sometimes jointly with other clinicians, yes. I'm happy that I've become known in the Atlanta area for doing the history of gospel music, or the history of spirituals. In fact, I just did one this past spring at Pleasant Grove [Baptist Church], which is right on Whitlock [Avenue, Marietta]. Usually that will be coupled with a big nationally named gospel singer, who will be the special guest. They will have choirs or open it up to anyone in the Atlanta area. People will bring sometimes eight or ten members of their choir to these seminars. The one at Pleasant Grove I think ended up having in excess of a hundred people in attendance for four days.

TS: So this is especially Atlanta area?

OM: Especially Atlanta area, but I've been invited definitely to other places in the United States to present workshops and am still getting invitations to do that, yes.

TS: You also mentioned conferences.

OM: Yes, it's the same—music conferences, I may be invited to do that, or apply for it, like SAM, ( Society of American Music) as I said earlier on.

TS: Do you call this service or do you call it scholarship, or can you make a distinction between the two?

OM: I like to make a distinction between the two. Certainly, when I make presentations at the National Association of Negro Musicians Conference . . . .

TS: That's scholarship.

OM: Exactly, and at SAM, Society of American Music. But then, too, when I do that for a church, Pleasant Grove, to me that's service.

TS: That's the way I'd classify it.

OM: Yes, that's definitely service.

TS: Although it's hard to make the distinction in some ways, because you're bringing in your scholarship on the history of spirituals and the history of gospel.

OM: Right, and I think on the one hand, certainly when I made those presentations at a conference, there is somewhat of a different format because certainly the audience make-up is more of other scholars.

TS: Right, it's peer review.

OM: Exactly.

TS: Or at least it's your peers.

OM: Exactly.

TS: Informally, they're reviewing it, or they wouldn't invite you back.

OM: Exactly! For all of us, we go in and sit in on some of these things, and whether we are officially or whatever, we are always saying, "Okay, what's the information that's being given here? Is it credible information?" There is someone there who really can give an assessment of what you're presenting, whereas in the local church, I really am teaching people the difference between a hymn and a spiritual, who have been singing them all their lives and calling them all the same thing.

TS: I understand. I know you are the co-author of the book, *Feel the Spirit: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American Music* [compiled by George R. Keck, edited by Sherrill V. Martin, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988)] that grew out of the NEH. You've got writings on your website, but are any of these presentations getting translated into publications, or have you gone that route?

OM: I have not gone that route, and it's because, as a musician, I say, "Okay, I want my recordings to be more representative of what I do scholarship-wise." But, now, even on my recordings, I helped to write the liner notes for the recording in Old Zion with Paul T. Kwame, Director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. I just wrote the liner notes for the new CD [*Extreme Spirituals*] that's coming out. So I am writing more than I thought I would. Another aspect of my writing is contributing to a collection that's soon to be released. One is *Notable Black American Women* [III], which is a publication by Dr. Jessie Carney [Smith], who was the librarian at Fisk University. She has published at Gale Press [(Farmington Hills, Michigan: 2002)] a number of these books, which look at the contributions of significant African Americans in the country. One, *Notable Black American Women*—I did the citing, which is about a 3,400 word citing for Babbie Mason, who was listed as composer/arranger/business entrepreneur in America. I just wrote two more articles for the one coming out, *Notable Black American Men*, Volume II (Gale Press, 2006)]. I just did the writing for Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, as well as Dr. Eddie Long. I look at those as really being connected to music.

TS: Eddie Long is the one who has that mega church in Atlanta?

OM: Yes, exactly. I just wrote the articles for both of them, and they are coming out, hopefully, this year. I look at both of them as being musicians because both of them are ministers in churches that had huge music programs, and that's kind of my territory [laughter].

TS: Yes, right.

OM: So it was really good, and especially writing the article on Dr. Ralph David Abernathy. In a sense, that was hard for someone like me, a musician, to write an article about him that's going to go into a publication.

TS: Sure. And your focus is on music?

OM: No, my focus was on just generally what he's done.

TS: Because I don't think of him at all in connection with music.

OM: Yes, you're right, but when you look at his church, West Hunter [Street Baptist Church], which is one of the main churches of the Civil Rights movement, and the music that comes out of it, "I've got to steal it" [laughter]! And these churches, all of them are important, because no one has yet looked really at the churches and their importance in the Civil Rights era, not from the standpoint of music.

TS: Right. I was thinking, wasn't it Pete Seeger that actually reintroduced, "We Shall Overcome?" It had been there for ages, but people had forgotten it I guess.

OM: Well, speaking of "We Shall Overcome," who do you think is the composer, where does that come from?

TS: I don't know.

OM: Charles Albert Tindley.

TS: Really?

OM: He wrote the song for his church, "I'll Overcome." "I'll overcome, I'll overcome some day, if in my heart I do not yield, I'll overcome someday" [lyrics] [laughter]. I say to people all the time that song was out before the Civil Rights movement, directly from Charles Albert Tindley in Tindley Temple. So it's really quite fascinating. I guess one day I may go back and do an article on the music out of the churches of the Civil Rights Era, those main churches.

TS: That would be wonderful.

OM: Because that's what Bernice Johnson Reagon did. Do you know that name?

TS: I've heard it.

OM: Sweet Honey in the Rock. That was a group, well, they still are a group in Washington, D.C., a women's group. Bernice Johnson Reagon, who for years worked at the Smithsonian, formed this group, Sweet Honey in the Rock. They sing everywhere. Their music is really the music out of the Civil Rights era, gospels and spirituals. She was a young girl during this time and started singing in Alabama in the marches, and she developed her own group, Sweet Honey in the Rock. She just retired, in fact, last year.

TS: Maybe you ought to do a CD on civil rights.

OM: Well, you know, I now have this new group that I formed, and we did a concert on Sunday in Old Zion, which really turned out very well. It's a group of five Kennesaw students, all who studied with me and we are six singers and that's what we sing, spirituals. And that's what we'll stick with, spirituals. I thank you [laughter]! Thank you very much! That's a good idea!

TS: That would be great.

OM: Yes.

TS: Everything you've talked about is just fascinating. You're making such a contribution in the music world, but also you're spreading the name of Kennesaw State everywhere you go and with your students as well.

OM: Yes, well, you want to do good, Tom. You try to do good. And I think for me it's the love of it, the love of music. And it's amazing, I was just talking with my teacher this weekend, we were talking about our connections and making music—how you seem to run into someone that knows someone that knows someone that knows someone. It just creates this circle of friends, of people, you know. And I think that has been the joy of it in making music. You meet a lot of folk who are also doing the same thing, maybe a little different from what you're doing, but it all connects. When I think of Harry T. Burleigh and all the people I've connected with since recording the Harry T. Burleigh CD, it just keeps going. It's been really good.

TS: Right. We talked in the previous interview a little bit about why you've stayed at Kennesaw. Have you felt that the kinds of things that you've done have been appreciated at Kennesaw?

OM: Oh, definitely. I've met a lot of good people here at Kennesaw. Really, I often think, and I don't know if I said this in the last conversation, I started to go to a state college, Penn State, and I've often thought what would my life have been had I gone to Penn State. And certainly coming to Kennesaw has opened a lot of doors in a lot of different kinds of ways for me. I think about that; if I'd gone to Penn State, would I have done the NEH? And that NEH grant opened the door for all of these other recordings.

- TS: Well, you know, I think I'm gradually grasping what Betty [L.] Siegel talked about for twenty-five years. The kind of institution that Kennesaw is, whether a metropolitan university or a state university, or whatever—but it sounds to me as though your career has exemplified this idea of an institution that's engaged in the community and where that service to the community is also attached to applied research that serves community needs. To me, that sounds like exactly what you've done.
- OM: Right, and I would agree with you. I was just thinking, had I gone to a University with a great tradition and—we talk about this a lot—and a well-established music department that had already been defined . . . [laughter].
- TS: Yes, that's one of the great things about Kennesaw, isn't it—that you can build new institutions.
- OM: And since I've been here, it's just building and developing and developing, which is always that door. There's a door to be opened to do things and that's what's happened to me here, because I know friends of mine who are at universities like that, they are there, they are in their position and that's where they've stayed. So it's been fast-paced at Kennesaw, it's been incredibly fast-paced, but I can say that, also, has not allowed me to sit down [laughter].
- TS: Maybe we'll have a building named for you on campus some day.
- OM: Oh gosh, the thought of that is . . . [laughter]. But it's been, Tom, we often talk—I was talking with Harold and Rosa and we sort of looked around at Kennesaw . . .
- TS: Harold [L.] Wingfield and Rosa Bobia?
- OM: Yes. And we sort of looked around at Kennesaw and even as you talked about, Betty Siegel, and just looking at what has happened in the twenty-two years I've been here. There's not a single building that has not been touched at the school in addition to all the new buildings, in addition to all the different initiatives. So this certainly has not been a campus that has just sort of sat. But everything in my twenty-two years, every building has evolved into something else [laughter], and to me, when you look back, when I look back at that . . .
- TS: Well the Music building started out as the maintenance building.
- OM: Right [laughter]! And it's gone, it's been the Music building, and we've had some great programs in that building. We've had some world famous people in that building.
- TS: And hopefully before long they'll be coming to the new performance hall.
- OM: I'm looking forward to that.
- TS: I understand the Wilson Building is going to be renovated too.

OM: Yes, that's what we are saying, so hopefully that will give us a little bit more room to expand. But everybody at Kennesaw needs a little bit more room.

TS: Yes. We've all been lucky to be in on the ground floor of a lot of things around here.

OM: Exactly, and you, Tom, you've seen it all [laughter]!

TS: Just about. It's been fun to see it all. It really makes me proud in doing these interviews to have so many colleagues like you that have accomplished so much and built such a reputation.

OM: Yes, and it's fun to do that and, when I was talking to my teacher . . . .

TS: Who's your teacher?

OM: Her name is Bernadine Oliphant. She was the very first voice teacher I ever had. I met her at Fisk University in 1971, and she had just returned to the United States from having a career in Europe, in Italy and Germany, and at the time East Germany as well as West Germany, in Berlin. I think she got back to the country in 1969, so I met her in 1971 at Fisk. She was my teacher, an incredible teacher, and from then to now we have become friends. She was here this past weekend to do sort of master classes with my students, as she's done before. Speaking of people coming to do recitals in that little building, she came and did several recitals with Joe Meeks [Joseph D. Meeks] playing. So she now—she's always lived in big houses, and she was just saying that she has just sold her house, had a big garage sale, and she has sort of down-sized everything to a one-bedroom apartment. One of the things she said is that she has to now go back and go through all of her books, all of her recordings, all of her music. We talked about all of the things that we've collected from the enjoyment of doing what we do. We've talked about all the books we've bought about music, not to collect them, but we have such a thirst for education that you think you're going to get through it, you see it and you think, "Oh, I've got to read this." You end up with just this collection of things [laughter]. She said there was just so much, I just wanted to learn so much, and there's so much I still want to learn. And that's how we are from doing what we do.

TS: I'm convinced if you put them on your bookshelf and they stay there long enough they seep in by osmosis whether you read them or not.

OM: Right, whether you read them or not [laughter]! I certainly hope so because it's true, you see things, you use books, you see subjects and for us, for me there's so much I need to know to be a musician, to be a performer. I need to know history. I need to know English. I need to know political science. I need to know it all to get up there on the stage and to sing.

- TS: Kathy and I were at a funeral the other day, and I told her afterwards that you've got to outlive me, and her responsibility is to have you come sing at my funeral [laughter]. You'll have to remember that.
- OM: Well, hey, that's a tall order [laughter]! I don't even want to think about that [laughter]! I don't, not at all, but certainly those are the kinds of things when you form relationships and friendships and sometimes you want to however have that last moment with these people. And many times that's just what it is.
- TS: Well, I really appreciate your coming in for the second time on this interview. The first part was great, but I think this part has really been fascinating to me, of all the things that you've done and how your scholarship and service ties in with your teaching.
- OM: Well, I've enjoyed sharing with you. And some of these things, you don't reflect on them once you do them; you do something and you move on to the next project [laughter]. That's what it is. Yesterday I was just sitting in my house writing down a list of selections for the next recording. And this next one is not out yet, but I need to start doing that, I need to start thinking, what's next.
- TS: So you're not going to retire any time soon then, are you?
- OM: Oh, no! You don't retire from music. And I think I'm just learning how to sing spirituals [laughter]. I'm convinced, William Warfield—do you know that name?
- TS: No.
- OM: William Warfield was one of the premier African American baritones, and in fact he sang in *Porgy and Bess*. I think from the '50s until probably the '70s or '80s, he taught at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, for many years and was always down here. I'd see him a lot and as a singer I'd run across people who knew him. At 83, he did his last recording of spirituals, and I think . . . .
- TS: Well, you've still got twenty years.
- OM: I've still got twenty years to do that. You know, Tom, I think that's the key to learning how to sing spirituals right now. I was just saying to my group a couple of weeks back—when I sing a spiritual I have my Aunt Lula in my mind. I have my Uncle Bossman in my mind. There are people from my community that as a little boy I had this image of those men and women in the church singing and their antics, their movements, everything in their voice. I think that's not something you go to school and learn how to do. You have to live. You have to live to know how to do that.
- TS: You've got me intrigued about one thing, I would love to see somebody do a history of how the music in black churches has changed over time, and what fifty years ago would have been—and again, I guess you can't lump all black churches in one category because you've got the elite churches and . . . .

OM: That's the complication Tom. There is such an expanse of difference in these churches: when you go to just those who sing gospel still, those who do only this part of gospel, those who do the more modern gospel, those who don't do gospel at all. And with the fight of young people to do this more contemporary thing at church, and it is just a mix of those people who want to do the praise music of contemporary Christian music.

TS: Well, thank you for a great interview.



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