

LONG TIME COMIN’ –

A teaching concert by Scott Ainslie & Reggie Harris

A TEACHER’S STUDY GUIDE

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ABOUT: LONG TIME COMIN’

Long Time Comin’ is a flexible concert program that can be adapted to audiences from 3rd through 12th grade, as well as college and adult audiences.

Taking its name from a line in Sam Cooke’s legendary song, *A Change Is Gonna Come*, **Long Time Comin’** combines history and music in a stirring, interactive, curriculum-based journey of cultural discovery. Using key historical and cultural resources, Harris and Ainslie take the audience on a tour of our national moral struggle with slavery, and its after effects.

Scott Ainslie and Reggie Harris have created a show about American history, culture, hope. In this teaching concert, Harris and Ainslie seamlessly weave together spirituals, songs of the Underground Railroad, Civil Rights anthems, work and slave songs, blues, and personal material. Interspersed with pertinent history and stories, they lay out a collaborative history that moves from depths of slavery to the heights of freedom.

Topics include:

- Strategies and coded songs of Underground Railroad;
- Simple African *retentions* (parts of African traditions that remain embedded in American music and culture);
- The years of struggle and oppression highlighted by performances of spirituals, gospel, and blues;
- The Modern Civil Rights movement, and Dr. Martin Luther King’s 1963 “I Have a Dream!” speech.

THE PERFORMERS

Like great two rivers coming together, **Scott Ainslie** and **Reggie Harris** approach music, history, and the realities of race in America from different perspectives and arrive at the same place.

Experienced educational performers, Scott Ainslie and Reggie Harris have seen and experienced first-hand the benefits that music and the arts routinely bring to learning and to perspective development.

Master storytellers, Harris and Ainslie have each spent years finding and pairing the right story, the right historical or personal detail, with the right song. In doing so, they bring to light the amazing history we all share. Both men bring to the stage their commitments to fairness and their love for cross-cultural exchange.

Scott Ainslie is a white performer who came of age during the Civil Rights era outside of Washington DC. After hearing Piedmont blues master John Jackson in 1967, he began playing guitar and studying America's roots music and history. He has worked with senior musicians on both sides of the color line. Scott sings and plays acoustic and steel guitar, his homemade cigar box guitar, and an African-style fretless gourd banjo.

Reggie Harris is a black performer who has cultivated long and deep relationships with veterans of the Civil Rights movement. He brings an acute commitment to fairness and determination to advance our dialogue for peace and justice. Following the examples of Dr. M. L. King and Pete Seeger, and other past and present day heroes; Reggie sings, and plays acoustic guitar and tambourine.

Both performers are skilled at adapting their music, stories, and our history to audiences at all learning levels. Working side by side, they manage to enlighten and thoughtfully address sometimes difficult and complex topics with intelligence, compassion, humor, and understanding.

SAMPLE ORDER OF PERFORMANCE *(Subject to change)*

- **Poem by Langston Hughes: Hold Fast to Dreams**
- **Song: A Change is Gonna Come**
- **Story/Song: A Woman Called MOSES**
- **Song: If Anybody Asks You About Me (African Gourd Banjo/Rhythms)**
- **Song Combo: Somebody Work Me Up This Morning & Slow Down Chariot - (Audience participation)**
- **Wade in the Water (Audience participation - code song)**
- **Story/Song- We Shall Overcome/I'll Be All Right**
- **Story – Dr. King and Mahalia Jackson - I Have a Dream!**
- **Song and Close – Another Man Done Gone**

Performance ends with Brief Question and Answer Period (Time permitting)

BEFORE THE SHOW: KEY ISSUES TO DISCUSS

WHAT WAS SLAVERY?

Slavery was a legal system of lifetime and inherited bondage that persisted in what eventually became the United States of America from 1619 through 1865.

During this period, African-Americans were legally considered property. They were bought and sold like horses, mules or other beasts of burden. They were held in bondage against their will and forced to do uncompensated work.

Predicated on brutal and intimately personal violence, slavery was a foundational element in the economic development of the United States. It also contributed to the economic rise of many European nations who engaged in the African slave trade. A number of the most important historical buildings that still exist in the United States, including the White House in Washington DC, were built with enslaved labor.

In 1865, the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution outlawed forced labor and involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for a crime*, a glaring loophole that was exploited throughout the former Confederate states during the Jim Crow era (1875-1964).

WHAT WAS ‘THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD’?

African-Americans and sympathetic, freedom-loving whites collaborated to develop a series of informal networks of routes, places, and people to help fugitives escape from slavery. The goal of the **Underground Railroad** was to move escaped former slaves to places where they could live their lives as free people.

While this system of networks is still known as **The Underground Railroad**, it was, of course, neither underground nor a railroad.

It was called **underground** because it was meant to remain secret and **railroad** because railroad terms were used as a form of coded speech to hide its activities from slave catchers and unsympathetic whites:

- Escaping fugitives were sometimes called **packages** or **passengers**;
- Stopping places were often referred to as **stations**;
- Routes from one station to another were called **lines** or **tracks**;
- People who secretly or, in the north, publicly aided the slaves were known as **conductors** and **agents**. **Agents** generally hid the escaping fugitives during the day, and often helped transport them toward their goals after dark.

Enslaved people themselves, at great personal risk, were always the primary actors in securing their own freedom. The decision to run away from a slave holder could be fatal.

But, once they ran, they were often aided by a network of other slaves, free Blacks, white abolitionists, and others, who opened their homes, barns, schools, and churches to escaping fugitives (**passengers**). Ex-slaves struggled to reach the free states north of the Ohio River (the dividing line between slave territory and free states ratified during the Constitutional Convention of 1787).

In 1855, after a southern-dominated Supreme Court ruled in the Dredd Scott Decision, free soil citizens of northern states lost their legal right to refuse to be involved in the capture and return of escaped slaves. The Dredd Scott Decision is now commonly understood to have propelled the nation towards Civil War.

Following this decision, **The Underground Railroad** had to be extended all the way to Canada to help fugitives from slavery reach territory where they would be outside the reach of slave catchers and might safely live as free people.

The Underground Railroad allowed hundreds of people to escape from slavery to freedom.

While this shifting and informal **Freedom Train** stretched from the south, up through the mid-Atlantic and the New England states, to the west and subsequently into Canada; the vast majority of enslaved people who successfully escaped came from the border states closest to the free soil territory in the north. It is for this reason that misbehaving or uncooperative slaves were often **sold south** or **sold down the river** as a punishment.

WHAT ARE SPIRITUALS?

African-Americans in slavery created and sang songs that became known as **Spirituals**. These are rural, southern songs created between the early 1800s and 1865. **Spirituals** generally employ stories or parables from the Bible, and express the emotions and the longing for freedom and stories prompted by the ordeal of slavery.

Spirituals were often **code songs**: songs that could be interpreted as songs of faith and/or as songs of freedom and resistance.

WHAT IS CODED SPEECH?

Coded speech was often employed to hide meaning in the old spirituals. Enslaved people were able to hide messages and advice in songs sung within hearing of their overseers or masters. Hidden meanings might offer advice on escape routes, on how to avoid the slave catchers and their bloodhounds, or notice that a **conductor** of **The Underground Railroad** may be near.

Fugitives and enslaved people used songs like **Wade in the Water** to remind each other to walk through water to cover their tracks and scent. Another spiritual, **Rise Up Shepherd and Follow** would advise escapees to look to the night sky and use the constellation we call the **Big Dipper** to find the guiding **North Star**. A **spiritual** like **Steal Away** might be sung on the night of an escape.

Generally speaking, any spiritual about a conveyance, traveling, or going to **heaven** can now reasonably be understood to have been both a **spiritual** and a **freedom song**. At one and the same time, **Spirituals** could be songs of comfort *and* resistance.

And a list of traveling **spirituals** can be quite long, and includes, among others:

- **Swing Low, Sweet Chariot;**
- **Gospel Train Is Coming (Get On Board, Little Children);**
- **I'm On My Way To Canaan Land;**
- **Slow Down Chariot/Let Me Ride** (a spiritual in **Long Time Comin'**).

During the Civil Rights era, spirituals often supplied the soundtrack of the freedom movement when singers explicitly changed the original **coded speech** lyric to a more explicit demand – from **Heaven** or **Canaan**, for instance – to **freedom**.

The same musical and lyric conventions that made **Spirituals** a distinctively African-American art form also informed the development of **The Blues**. **The Blues** later recombined with spiritual themes to create modern **Gospel** (which paired religion-influenced words with **Blues**-influenced music and vocal styles).

WHAT ARE 'THE BLUES'?

Having **The Blues** includes a fairly specific set of emotions:

- Feeling Sad;
- Feeling Upset/Angry;
- Feeling Betrayed/Mistreated.

The term has roots that predate the music we know as **Blues**, by at least two centuries. In the time of **William Shakespeare** [1564-1616], people believed in fairies and sprites invisible, magical beings that could assist or worry people in their daily lives.

In the context of this superstition, when someone became irritable or depressed for no identifiable or obvious reason, people would say that “the blue fairies”, or “**the blues**” were bothering them, like a cloud of gnats or mosquitoes might worry us today.

By **Thomas Jefferson**’s time [1743-1826], the notion of little invisible fairies had fallen into disrepute. But the expression ‘**having the Blues**’ can be found in Jefferson’s writings. Having **The Blues** remained a common expression for those less-than-happy emotions to which we are all prone.

Blues and other African-American art forms often show their deep African roots in what are known as **African Retentions**. These are parts of African tradition that we still find embedded in American and African-American music, art, and culture today.

In **The Blues**, the easiest **African Retentions** to identify include:

- **Call & Response:** a ‘conversation’ in music between a solo ‘call’ and a group or instrumental ‘response’;
- **Syncopation:** a musical term for stresses that fall off the established beat;
- **Emotional Singing Style:** which can include shouting, crying, screaming, and other speech sounds not typically found in European singing prior to the 1950’s and 60’s (when African-based vocal styles began to be heard more widely and influenced white singing styles).

DO WE FIND CODED SPEECH IN THE BLUES?

From the time of their enslavement forward, Blacks have consistently generated language and slang that could be employed to hide explicit meanings from a casual observer.

Hiding information from white or black overseers (or from someone sitting at the next table in a music club) was a survival mechanism. This is a common need for oppressed people everywhere: they need to be able to communicate sensitive information in ways that won’t easily be detected.

While **coded speech** was critical in the ante-bellum slavery era, it remained vital during the Jim Crow era in the South. And even after the modern Civil Rights push of the 1960s, creating slang continues to be a creative and useful strategy for communicating within the black community.

WHEN WERE THE FIRST BLUES SUNG?

As the first generation born out of slavery came of age in the South, **the Blues** were born.

The first written account of the music we know as **The Blues** turns up around 1902, provided by **W. C. Handy**.

Handy was a literate musician and band leader who heard the music while sitting waiting for a train in Tutwiler, MS, about 25 miles southwest of Clarksdale, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta region. The music he heard was bound to have been a fully developed local style in the decades prior to its being noticed and written about.

The brief and ineffective era of **Reconstruction** was abandoned ten years after the Union's victory on the battlefields of the South. With the violent end of **Reconstruction**, the South essentially won the Civil War by taking back complete legal, economic, and physical control of black labor.

Using the tools of **segregation, unequal funding of education, share cropping, convict leasing, local judiciary and police** (as well as the less formal, and generally more violent terrorism of the **Ku Klux Klan** and **White Citizens Councils**), former Confederate states dramatically curtailed the social and legal aspirations of their former slave population.

During the many decades of what became known as the **Jim Crow South**, the rising hopes and aspirations of African-Americans were systematically crushed.

While **The Blues** frequently address love relationships between men and women (and the ways we can break each other's hearts), it is impossible to ignore the social, political, and economic timing of the music's appearance.

In addition to the common **Blues** complaint that 'he/she done me wrong', the reflexive linguistic habit of creating **coded speech** in the black community, leaves the door open to considering that these intimate and personal cries of frustration, betrayal, and disappointment might be aimed at two targets, not just one.

In a very real way, **The Blues** arose as a cry of an entire generation of African-Americans who had had their hopes and dreams raised by the 13th Amendment.

Black hopes for better lives were betrayed, frustrated, and stolen from them at the end of the Reconstruction era legally through **Jim Crow laws** and through extralegal White terrorist violence. **Jim Crow laws** to enforce segregation and limit black voting rights were systematically passed and enforced in the states of the former Confederacy between 1875 and the mid-1960s.

During the **Jim Crow** era, aiming songs with these angry, accusatory emotions at Whites could get black musicians jailed or killed.

Employing **coded speech**, complaints about a mistreating partner may also have been a stand in for the larger, societal and personal abuse predicated by the white supremacist power structures in place across the nation.

WHAT WAS THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT?

The modern civil rights movement was a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-faith, freedom movement in the US that was fueled and inspired by African-American strength, suffering, culture, and song.

One hundred years after slavery was abolished in the US, African-Americans still found themselves fighting for voting, education, housing, employment, and other civil rights commonly held by Whites.

During the struggle for Civil Rights, African-Americans and their allies used music, in the form of **de-coded spirituals, work songs, blues, gospel songs, and hymns** to great effect as they organized and worked for justice. These songs (and the injustice they exposed) inspired millions of Americans to join the struggle to end the legally sanctioned mistreatment and segregation of their fellow American citizens.

Repurposing old songs and creating new ones at protests, rallies, mass community meetings, and events like the **March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom** in 1963, **movement music** empowered and inspired the resistance to oppression across America.

But, those songs also inspired resistance movements elsewhere. For instance: **We Shall Overcome** was sung when the Berlin Wall came down; at pro-democracy protests in Czechoslovakia in 1968; at Anti-Apartheid demonstrations in South Africa; and at the 1989 protests at Tiananmen Square in The People's Republic of China.

The struggle for freedom, justice and equality of opportunity continues today, both publicly and privately, as people continue to work to extend the promise of America to all its people.

ON HISTORY, CULTURE, AND TRADITION

What you will witness in **Long Time Comin'** is the combined result of many years of concentrated study of history, music, and tradition.

We each respond to the events and conflicts that frame our lives in different ways. But, our actions and choices of expression are often influenced by our own particular societal history, culture, and traditions.

People work within the musical, literary, visual art, and dance traditions that they know and practice. They extend these resources to address the problems before them. Their contributions advance their own progress while advancing new ideas and new forms of expression to inspire action. Song forms evolve and will continue to adapt and change as each generation addresses its new set of challenges.

Long Time Comin' presents a particular slice of this heritage and of our legacy, too, as we bequeath our experience and struggle for a better world to a new generation that shares similar hopes and dreams for a more humane nation and world.

As musicians, singers, and history-keepers, Ainslie and Harris have chosen to use their experience and skills to share examples of the ways that cultural resources and traditions have helped move people from acceptance to action.

Harris and Ainslie present well-worn song forms that have been passed down in tradition-rich cultures. With vocal and instrumental expertise, they raise their voices in service to advancing our understanding of our past as we work to improve our present and future.

Long Time Comin' highlights a shared quest for a world that is both more free and more fair.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE: SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell us something you learned from the performance that you did not previously know?
2. Did the show change or deepen your understanding of any historical or contemporary issue or event?
3. Without necessarily limiting it to the content of **Long Time Comin'**, can you give us any examples of how music is used to address or reframe an issue, or inspire action?
4. Can you name two key people mentioned in the performance and how they contributed to our history?

5. Can you identify any civil rights issues that were mentioned in the **Long Time Comin'** that are still in the news today?
6. Did you have a favorite moment in the presentation? What instrument or song do you remember most vividly?
7. How would you describe **Long Time Comin'** to your family and friends who didn't see it?

AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR: RESPECT IS CONTAGIOUS

A supportive, welcoming reminder about audience behavior at the start of a performance will always be more effective than threatening students with removal or disciplinary action.

Sadly, as touring educational performers, Harris and Ainslie have seen students berated in remarkably harsh ways before a performance by teachers or administrators who are sure to have the students' and our best interests at heart.

But, both disrespect and respect are contagious.

Berating an audience tends to poison the atmosphere in the room. And it forces performers to try to bring the students back to a place of mutual respect and balance before continuing.

Reggie Harris and Scott Ainslie have decades of experience working in educational assembly and classroom settings. Depending on the age and experience of the student population, a certain amount of audience management is almost always a part of their teaching performances and something they do with authority and grace.

Should the performers need your assistance with managing student behavior during their performance, they will ask for it from the stage. You can trust them to be responsible members of your teaching staff.

In the absence of a direct request for assistance, teachers and staff can relax and model appropriate audience behavior with and for your students – showing your respect, engagement with, and enjoyment of the material being presented on the stage.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A LIVE PERFORMANCE

In the event that live performances are rare for your students, it can be useful to remind them of the generally accepted norms of audience behavior. Their focused attention during the commentary and musical performances on stage will enhance everyone's experience.

We are all facing a generation that is used to watching content on screens and commenting on it to their friends. The action on screen can generally be paused, stopped, or replayed at will.

A live performance is different. As with live teaching, the audience and the teacher/performer share the space and experience in real time.

Students can be encouraged to act in ways that enhance rather than inhibit with their own experience of the performance, or the experience of others.

If you have witnessed less than optimal behavior in assembly situations before, it can be useful to take a moment to teach audience behavior. Here's one activity that you might try.

AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR: A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

You will be dividing the class into **READERS**, **LISTENERS**, and **OBSTRUCTORS**:

1. **READERS** will stand, move to the front of the room, and read selected passages or poems to the class at your direction.
2. **LISTENERS** will listen attentively and try to understand and remember the meaning of the passages being read to them by **READERS**.
3. **OBSTRUCTORS** will be engaging in distracting behaviors during the readings.

MATERIALS REQUIRED: one 3 x 5 card for each student in your class and a marker.

On three cards, write:

READER: Read a selected passage to the class.

On three cards, write:

OBSTRUCTOR: allow the reader to begin, then either check your cell phone, lean over and talk to your neighbor, or quietly laugh inappropriately. Applaud and talk to your neighbor after each reading ends.

On the rest of the cards, write:

LISTENER: Listen attentively to the reader. Applaud after each reading is over.

BEGIN TEACHING ACTIVITY:

- Shuffle the cards and pass them out facedown to your students;
- Have students all turn their cards over and privately read the message on their card;

- Ask students if they understand the instructions on their cards;
- Ask for the holders of READER cards to raise their hands;
- Thank READERS and pass out highlighted passages or short poems to your READERS and allow them a moment to look them over. Have READERS begin.

When all the READERS have finished their readings, call the class to attention and ask those who had LISTENER cards to raise their hands. Do the same for the OBSTRUCTORS.

Begin your class discussion by interviewing each class of cardholder in this order:

1. **LISTENERS:** What were the readings about? Did you have a favorite reading or reader? Was it difficult to hear or to concentrate on the READER with the distractions provided by the OBSTRUCTORS?
2. **OBSTRUCTORS:** What were the readings about? Did you have a favorite reading or reader? When you weren't engaging in obstructing activities, could you focus on the reader and the readings?
3. **READERS:** Did you enjoy the passage/poem you were asked to read? What was it like to read your passage/poem to the class? Were you distracted by the OBSTRUCTORS? Did you notice that majority of the audience were LISTENERS?

Have **OBSTRUCTORS** and **READERS** trade cards, pass out new reading selections and begin again.

Discuss.

RESPONSES TO LONG TIME COMIN':

"Their concert...combined their wealth of talent and knowledge with an audience-inclusive call-and-response, and the result was a standing ovation and an encore from a pretty sophisticated audience. It was, hands-down, the best performance I have ever seen at the Swain Arts Center...."

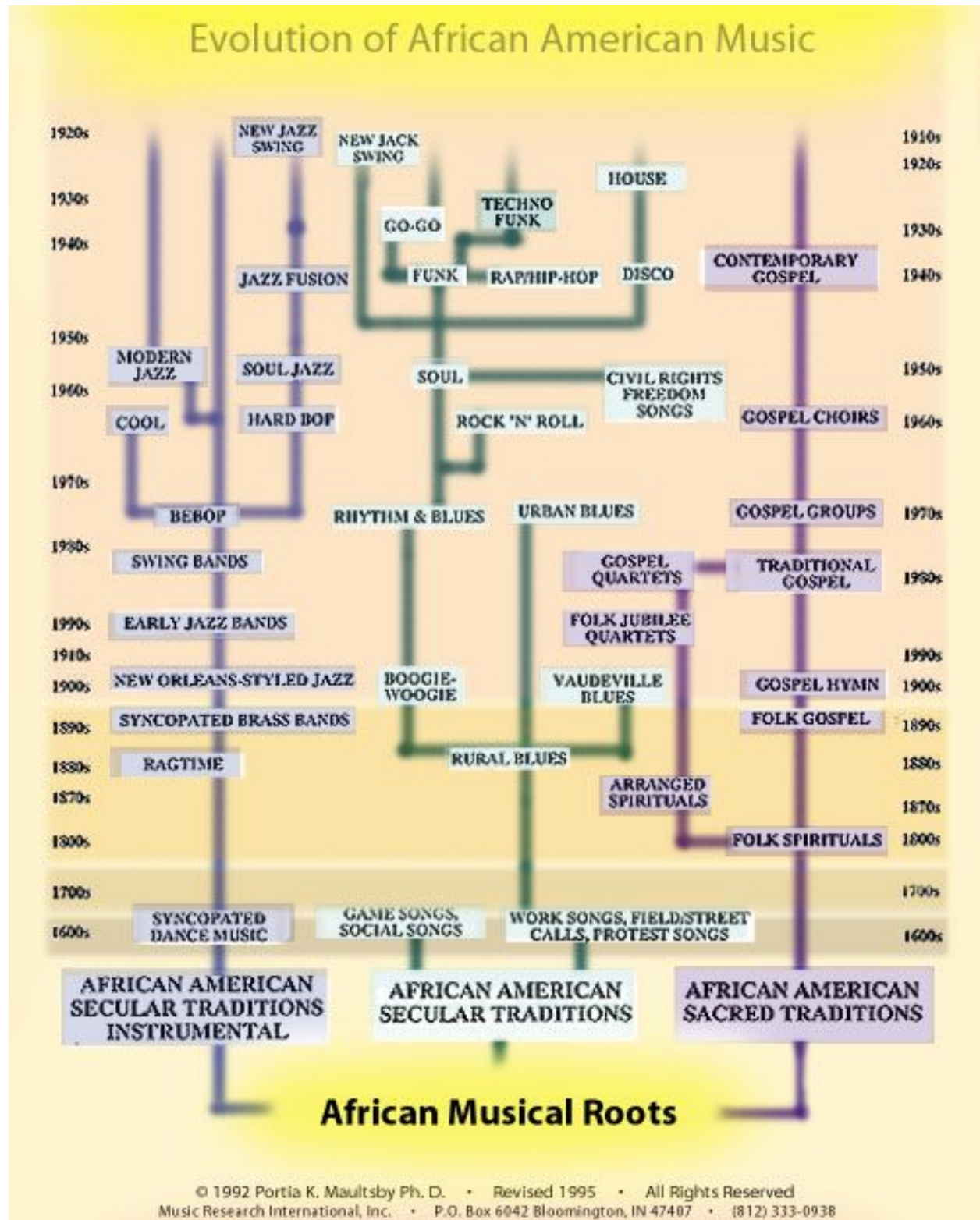
– Swain County NC Arts Center audience member

ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

There are other educational resources and teacher study guides pertaining to **Blues** and **African Retentions** at Scott Ainslie's website (<http://CattailMusic.com>) and at Loyd Artists (<http://LoydArtists.com>).

Feel free to contact Loyd Artists for more information on both these performers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:



Here's a video clip of a recent concert: <https://youtu.be/F9pVcUE5fxY>