Black Sacred Music is a semiannual (Spring and Fall) publication devoted to scholarly articles, essays, and book and record reviews in the areas of black sacred music, religious music of Africa and of the African diaspora, and black secular music and musicians analyzed theologically.

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This volume presents the collected writings of American composer William Grant Still. In these critical works, as in his music, Still offers a perspective on American music and society informed by a diversity of experience and associations that few others have enjoyed. That diversity, evident in a career that encompassed jazz, traditional African-American idioms, the European avant-garde, and a range of compositions including chamber music, ballet, symphonies, and opera, was marked by a central concern and guiding principle. In addressing the problem of race, Still considered the sacred task of his music, its power and duty, to serve in the quest for an ideal society. As prophetic model and inspired medium, music, much like religion, was to assist others to attain this goal. Whether providing insight into both the pain and exhilaration of the African-American creative experience, probing questions of the universality of music vs. the cultural identity of the composer, paying tribute to the fallen black soldiers of the Second World War, or offering a view of the interdependence of all people, Still's work, his life, writings, and music shared in this higher purpose.

A valuable and unique collection, The William Grant Still Reader will assume an irrevocable place in American musical historiography.

Some composers, such as Chopin, have been politically motivated, while some, like Wagner, have expressed definite racial opinions. And yet, for these composers as for most others, their music has taken precedence over their messages.

Not so for my father, William Grant Still. For him, his work in the world was firstly spiritual and social, and only secondarily artistic. He felt that he had been divinely directed to bring the races together in harmony, and he knew that the job could not be done by political activism; it had to be done by returning order and beauty to human culture, and by, as Olly Wilson says in the foreword, expressing "personal grace, charm, and dignity."

Because he was a "musical Messiah," this book, The William Grant Still Reader, is perhaps the most significant document to be published since the composer's death. It crystallizes the essence of a lifetime contribution to human progress. Jon Michael Spencer and our respected friend, Olly Wilson, have carved the meaning of Still's music in stone and have carried it down from the mountain so that a noble journey may be completed.

—Judith Anne Still

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