“Building the Vocal Community” with Ysaye Barnwell
Compiled by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley

Singing in the African American Tradition: Choral and Congregational Vocal Music. From a workshop designed by Dr. Barnwell and co-leader George Brandon, this teaching tool grew out of the conviction that African American music has been a vehicle for survival in a hostile environment, as well as for humanizing that environment. Designed for all levels of familiarity with the music, you will learn how to sing multiple parts—melodies, harmonies, rhythms and counter-melodies, and vocal styles—to more than 20 inspiring calls and chants, spirituals, ring shouts, hymns, jubilees, gospels, songs of resistance, protest, and struggle from the Civil Rights Movement and contemporary South Africa. Then, decide whether to sing along with the melody or choose one of five or six distinct harmony parts. These lessons are suitable for individual learning, or for church, school, or community choirs, camps and conference ‘pick up’ choirs, or friends of any background—including intergenerational groups—who wish to engage in a unique and inspiring activity. Available as four CDs or six audiotapes, both of which include a workbook with suggestions on how to use the product, a brief history of lyrics for many of the songs featured, a bibliography and resource list. Order from Homespun Tapes, Ltd. P.O. Box 694, Woodstock, NY 12498, or on the web at http://homespuntapes.com or call 1-800-33-tapes.

Um Hmm, by Ysaye Barnwell. A delightful feast of African American stories, songs, and poems beautifully packaged as audiotapes. Meet the frog who wanted to be a singer and invents rhythm and blues. Discover stories behind the old spirituals, the Underground Railroad, and personal stories from Ysaye’s childhood that shaped her life. Her dynamic vocal range and African percussion breathes new life into classic children’s tunes.

No Mirrors in My Nana’s House, by Ysaye Barnwell. A children’s book (ages 5 to 7 or grade level 2) created from the lyrics of Ysaye Barnwell’s song by the same title, recorded by Sweet Honey in the Rock (included with the book). With paintings by Synthia Saint James that illustrate how to see beauty, this book tells the story of a young girl who sees herself and her world through her grandmother’s unconditional love: “The beauty of everything was in her eyes, like the rising sun.” Hardcover. Harcourt Brace, 1998. For related teaching materials, see the following web sites:
http://www.bookpals.net/storyline/nomirrors/
http://www.eduplace.com/tview/pages/n/No_Mirrors_In_My_Nana_s_House_Y__aarnwell.html
http://www.bookpage.com/9808bp/childrens/no_mirrors_nanas_house.html


Come Sunday: The Liturgy of Zion by William B. McClain, professor of preaching at Wesley Theological Seminary. A complement to “Songs of Zion,” each entry is numbered to correspond to its counterpart in “Songs of Zion.” The book offers a historical, sociological and theological context for deepening our understanding of the music. Abington Press, Nashville, 1990.

Continuum Songbook: The First Songbook of Sweet Honey in the Rock, compiled and edited by Ysaye M. Barnwell with Sweet Honey n the Rock. Lyrics, composer’s notes, and a bio of the members of Sweet Honey in the Rock who composed each song invites readers behind the
scenes to understand how the music moved its originator. Shirley Childress Saxton explains a “sign interpreter’s song.” With an introduction by Harry Belafonte, the songbook offers a historical context of the traditions that inspired the songs as well as the history of the group. Transcriptions by Moore and Roma. Contemporary A Capella Press, Southwest Harbor, ME, 2000.

**We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock … Still on the Journey,** by Bernice Johnson Reagon and Sweet Honey in the Rock. From Dan Bogey for Library Journal: “This book celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Grammy Award-winning a cappella group Sweet Honey in the Rock. Starting out in 1973 at Howard University and singing in a wide range of styles from traditional gospel to songs of the Civil Rights struggle to original material, Sweet Honey in the Rock has lovingly explored every aspect of the African American musical experience. The group has maintained its vitality over the years by continuing to change its personnel, and the recollections of group members provide the book’s format. While music is one constant of this story, freedom is another. The Civil Rights Movement, peace, and feminism have all received the support of Sweet Honey in the Rock’s harmonizing.” Anchor Books/ Doubleday, 1993.

**Odetta: Exploring Life, Music, and Song.** An instructional video taught by Odetta, one of the most beloved figures in American folk music shares the wisdom, history, and singing techniques that she has acquired in more than 50 years of singing. Hosted by Ysaye Barnwell.


**Wade in the Water,** Smithsonian Folkways Recordings - 4 volumes
- African American Spirituals: The Concert Tradition
- African American Congregational Singing: 19th Century Roots
- African American Gospel: The Pioneering Composers
- African American Community Gospel

**Been in the Storm So Long,** a collection of spirituals, folk tales, and children’s games from Johns Island, So. Carolina. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings (Not the same as the 1991 UUA Meditation manual by the same title).

For a websites and a bibliography of “Reference Materials on the Negro Spiritual” developed by Ysaye Barnwell, go to: [http://www.ymbarnwell.com/Spirituals.htm](http://www.ymbarnwell.com/Spirituals.htm)

For general information, see Ysaye Barnwell’s website: [http://www.ymbarnwell.com/index.htm](http://www.ymbarnwell.com/index.htm).