

THE HAITIAN PIANO PREFACE

This edition of the piano music by Haitian composers is based on the collection of scores preserved in the archive of the *Société de recherche et de diffusion de la musique haïtienne* (SRDMH). The aim is to bring forward and to make accessible to scholars, musicians and the Haitian people the extent and variety of the artistic achievement spanning a period of more than a century. The archive contains fewer than two hundred scores for the piano, the large majority of which, are unpublished and accessible only as photo-reproductions. The archive does not include the entire repertoire of Haitian piano music, but it preserves an important and representative example.

The table of contents of the nine volumes presents a list of composers and their works. The first three volumes display a variety of compositions dating from the 1890's to the present by a number of *petit maîtres*. Four volumes focus on individual composers who contributed a substantial number of pieces and for whom two volumes each were necessary. This is the case for both Carmen Brouard (1909-2005), volumes V & VI, and Ludovic Lamothe (1882-1953), volumes VII & VIII. The remaining two volumes contain the works of two composers who represent the remit of this research; volume IX contains the works of Edmond Saintonge (1861-1907), the first composer of art-music for piano, whereas volume IV presents the works of the present-day composer, Émile Desamours (b. 1949).

The process leading to the creation of this edition began in 2011, when I ventured on a new path of research. Having finished my edition of the extant collection of Haitian string quartets, my interest turned to Haiti's piano music. A request to begin this research was presented, but delayed due to the decision of the SRDMH to transfer their library of documents from its housing at *l'Université de Québec de Montréal* (UQAM) to the *Laboratoire de recherche sur les musiques du monde de l'Université de Montréal*. This transfer necessitated their reception into the archive through a new cataloguing of their contents. This process involved a further delay of a year. Finally, in May of 2013, I spent two days with Claude Dauphin in the archive photographing the contents of the piano scores. (At present, the archive is housed in the *Centre de documentation de l'OICRM¹ de la Faculté de musique de l'Université de Montréal*.) Some scores in the collection of the archives could not be included due to paper loss and missing pages. Recently published scores are not included here as they need no assistance from this editor. The scores of Émile Desamours are included with his consent; unpublished pieces by other living composers are not included, since they could be revised in the future.

From May of 2013 to the present, the critical edition of the scores has generated two types of documents: edited scores and editorial notes. The edited scores aim to eliminate a variety of errors, lapses and omissions in notation so as to present a reliable and performable score. The editorial notes contain basic information about the source material such as the dating and autograph status of the document, its condition, and number of pages. In addition, any concerns that effected a change in the edited score are enumerated in detail

¹ OICRM : Observatoire interdisciplinaire de création et de recherche en musique.

so as to provide a transparent explanation of what was changed and why. It is important to recall that many of the edited scores were based on manuscripts that were still working copies of these composers: second thoughts, corrections, crossed out passages, insertions, and marginal instructions had to be sorted out and assessed for their inclusion in the edited score.

A further element provided in the notes is a formal outline of each piece. Some composers are very clear in providing their scores with exact directions as to the formal design. Perhaps, because the composers themselves played from their own scores, they sometimes did not need to write out a 'road-map' of directions. In several cases I have proposed what I believe is a viable way of performing a composition due to the source material's unclear and even confusing directions. Interpreting artists are free to consider adopting or modifying the proposed formal plan as desired.

Very little has been added to the revised scores. An absence of a tempo and dynamic mark at the outset of some pieces has prompted a parenthetical suggestion for both in the edition. All fingering found in these editions is original to the documents themselves. It cannot be established with certainty that all these are in the hands of the composer, since some scores are photo-reproductions of manuscripts that may, at some time, have been played by another artist, photo-copied and then deposited in the archive. I have retained all the fingering since its use is ultimately discretionary.

The range of compositions found in this collection points to an obvious fact - there is no one way of writing Haitian piano music. All the composers presented here are native to the Republic of Haiti, but their music exhibits a wide range of styles and degree of artistic achievement. The influence of Mozart, Chopin, and Bartok are clearly evident and attested to by the composers themselves. Romantic, Neoclassical and Modernist styles are all represented. To this, the heritage of Haiti's own musical culture has an equal share in the imaginative lives of these composers: some are clearly influenced by the musical legacy of Vodou, while others prefer the urban musical culture with its reference to the passing fashion of popular songs, singers, dance steps, and jazz. When engaged in drawing from the music associated with the spiritual world of Vodou, composers have had recourse to citations that are ethnographically based, or regard this resource as a point of departure for their own impressionistic rendering. The musical heritage of Europe, the Americas, and Haiti have all contributed something to their art in addition to their own independent voice.

All this music was not created in a vacuum free from the turmoil of life. Many composers left Haiti to advance their education; others, for safety and security. Emigration was not uncommon, though it should be stated that the twentieth century saw the displacement of a great number of artists from all over the world seeking security. The turbulent politics of Haiti from the nineteenth to the twentieth century has motivated some Haitian composers to leave. For example, following a coup in 1869, our earliest composer, Edmond Saintonge, was compelled to leave Haiti as a child accompanied by his father who was a minister in the deposed government. Their departure from Haiti only led them to a world still dominated by prejudice supported by a dogmatic and scientific racism.

Haitians had already encountered these attitudes, as exemplified by the Haitian diplomat and anthropologist, Anténor Firmin, who in his treatise on the equality of the human races, *De l'égalité des races humaines* (1885), challenged the racism of the *Société Anthropologique* of Paris. In the twentieth century, the *Négritude* movement was initiated by the writings of the Martinique polymath, Aimé Césaire, who makes reference to the Haitian revolution in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939). The dawn of the *Négritude* movement heralded an articulate intellectual awakening among certain thinkers in the Afro-Caribbean world who may have encouraged some artists to speak more boldly in their music. While all this is true, the medium in which the composers in this collection worked was text-less and consisted instead of sounds captured in abstract musical forms. It is thus rare to find evidence of these social concerns in the music of the majority of composers of art music. It is perhaps Carmen Brouard who is the most interesting composer by engaging us with her love of her country and, through her dedications, reveals the importance of community. Her *Negro sonate*, at first, appears as the most obvious example of what may have been her registering in sound of the aspirations of the *Négritude* movement. However, the reality is that the sonata is dedicated "...to all the Negroes of the world, Black, White, Yellow." Brouard's dedication is intended to express a universal aspiration not limited to an ideological agenda based on racial categories. This sonata, plus many other fine compositions, remain unknown to the world due to a lack of access: the dances of Lamothe (celebrated in his time as the black Chopin), the sonata of Desamours, that catalogues Haiti's popular music, the artful six *Méringues populaires* of Justin Élie (1883-1931) with their virtuoso élan, all merit attention. To this must be added the remarkable music of Saintonge whose scores were only recently salvaged from disintegration after a century-long abeyance following his death.

Considering the neglect of this repertoire, one of the goals of this edition is the discovery of how to play them. There is, at present no living tradition, no continuity of performance. Only a handful of pianists know and play some of this music. The solution to this issue can only be found in the judicious deliberation of interpreters who repeatedly and in public present this music- it must be sounded aloud to reveal its architecture. Not all of this music is destined to enter the standard repertoire. However, the challenge must be made.

-Robert Grenier, Orangeburg, January 2023

Acknowledgements:

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The Piano Repertoire of Haiti

From the Archives of the
Société de recherche et de diffusion de la musique haïtienne (SRDMH)
at the

Centre de documentation de l'OICRM²
de la Faculté de musique de l'Université de Montréal
02/27/2023

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Critical edition
Robert Grenier, editor

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² OICRM : Observatoire interdisciplinaire de création et de recherche en musique.

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à partir des manuscrits appartenant à la collection particulière de Claude Dauphin,
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Edmond Saintonge

OEUVRES POUR PIANO

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