



"Cross Connection"

Radio Ministry of Hope Wesleyan Church and Wells of Salvation Ministries
Ultimate Oldies Radio – FM 97.7 and 101.5, Huber Heights, Ohio



Series: Christian Messages In Secular Music

04/23/08

Program 33 – “Amen” – © Jester Hairston

“Amen”, by Jester Hairston, is commonly mistaken to be a Negro spiritual. The similarity in style may be due in large part to the author’s having spent many years studying and arranging Negro spirituals. “Amen” gained considerable attention when it was featured in the classic film from the early 1960’s, “Lilies of the Field”, starring Sidney Poitier.

“Amen” – *“An expression used at the end of prayers, and meaning, So be it. At the end of a creed, it is a solemn asseveration of belief. When it introduces a declaration, it is equivalent to truly, verily.”*
<http://www.webster-dictionary.net/definition/Amen>

The song and songwriter¹ --

- Jester Hairston: American composer, songwriter, arranger, choral conductor, and actor
- Lived 1901-2000; from North Carolina -- his grandparents had been slaves
- Choir director, Broadway singer, actor; in plays, films, radio, television shows
- Also wrote "Mary's Boy Child" in 1956 – a hit for Harry Belafonte
- Noted arranger of traditional "Negro spirituals"
- It was Hairston singing as Sidney Poitier lip-sync'd “Amen” in *Lilies of the Field* (1963)²
- “Amen” reached number 7 in December 1964 and was on the chart for 7 weeks. Otis Redding also had a brief hit with this song, taking it to number 36 for 1 week in July 1968³

Featured artist – The Impressions⁴ –

- Formed in 1958 – the group underwent numerous personnel changes over the years
- Curtis Mayfield, Jerry Butler were core members – both enjoyed successful solo careers
- Other songs included "Gypsy Woman", "It's All Right", and “We’re A Winner”, “Choice Of Colors” and “Check Out Your Mind”
- Mayfield was lead singer and primary songwriter for the group – often authoring songs that dealt with social themes and black pride

Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen
Sing it over
Amen, amen, amen, amen, amen
See the little baby
Wrapped in a manger
On Christmas morning

- Choruses of “Amen”, in harmony, respond to each phrase – a hearty declaration of agreement with the truths being sung
- Lyrics describe the earthly life of Jesus Christ
- Simple in style, the song comes across as very engaging, uplifting and inspiring

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jester_Hairston

² <http://ronolesko.blogspot.com/2008/03/amen-and-jester-hairston.html>

³ <http://www.phillysoc.org/bartlettpaper.htm>

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Impressions_%28American_band%29

Singing in a temple
 Talking with the elders
 Tomorrow there's wisdom
 Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen
 Hallelujah
 Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen
 Down at the Jordan
 John was baptizing
 And saving all sinners
 See him at the seaside
 Talking with the fishermen
 And made them disciples

- Many secular songs with Christian messages miss the mark in some way when compared to Scripture, e.g. --
 - Nothing in the Bible indicates Jesus sang in a temple; Hairston's original lyrics are "Teaching in the temple"
 - *"After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers"* – Luke 2:46-47
 - John baptized people for repenting of sins, but he did not (and could not) save them

Note: Other versions of "Amen" add the following lyrics --

- See Him in the garden...
- Praying to His Father...
- In the deepest sorrow...
- Brought before Pilate...
- Then they crucified Him...
- And He rose upon Easter...
- He lives forever!...

"As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him" – Mark 1:16-18, NIV

What do you know about Jesus – His life, who He is, His ministry, and why He came into the world?
 Why not take some time to read through the four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John?

Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen
 Keep on pushin' now
 Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen
 Hallelujah now
 Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen

- This is probably an ad lib from Curtis Mayfield, who wrote a song entitled "Keep On Pushin'"

Final Thoughts:

Of the many songs considered to date in Cross Connection, I would say that this one is best understood and appreciated in a context – specifically, of the film in which it was featured – *Lilies of the Field*. Take a good look at the story's plot, which involves the meeting and interaction of characters from distinctly different cultural backgrounds. A review/summary of the movie can be found at the link in footnote five below. *Lilies* has been described as a "...simple, yet stirring story... written by author William Barrett, who was a master of the telling of belief in God without preaching... [He] tells the story in a humorous, poignant way of what the faith, prayers, courage and leadership of one woman accomplished for [her] community of faith."⁵

There are many "Amen's" in the Bible. But of them all, I like best the two at the end of the book –

*"He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."
 Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."*

-- Revelation 22:20-21, NIV

To all of the timeless truths of Scripture, we proclaim "Amen"!

⁵ <http://www.homevideos.com/revnclas/84b.htm>