The Eubanks Conservatory of Music and Arts in Los Angeles (1951-2006)  
by  
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Introduction  
What connection does an African-American teacher-composer in North America have with China, Korea, Viet Nam, and India? Beginning in 1951 she nurtured students and musicians, and in the process her passion for teaching brought personal and institutional friendships resulting in enduring connections. The history of the Eubanks Conservatory of Music and Arts in Los Angeles, California in North America (henceforth called Eubanks) spans over 40 years from 1951 to 2006 where it thrived because certain conditions were met. What were they and how were they manifested when local and international interests are considered? And how did its distinct character and survival instincts operate within a diverse environment? (For this
paper I shall focus primarily on the conservatory. Her music compositions will be the subject of a future essay.)

**Background**

Because this school operated outside of the academic establishment, their activities, for the most part, went unnoticed within the academic mainstream. Yet, this seemingly modest school has had an impact far beyond what one might expect. Since no comprehensive data was available, a timeline was devised using published and unpublished sources and formed the basis for examining the central role of its founder and the impact the school had on the community by looking at historical indicators and geographic, demographic, and cultural environment. Also examined were the school’s mission and objectives, facilities, faculty, student-body, and curriculum. Figure 1 [not shown] shows the timeline and district map of Eubanks’ 7 locations. I shall focus on the period where the school remained longest for 41 years at the View Park-Baldwin Hills and Crenshaw districts located within the 4083 sq miles of Los Angeles, the second largest populous city in the United States with a 2004 population estimate of 3.84 million and home to individuals from virtually every nation on earth.

*View Park* in 2005, population 11,000 is one of the wealthiest areas in the United States and one of the upper-middle-class affluent African American communities comprising a band of communities from Culver City’s Fox Hills district on the west to the Los Angeles district of Leimert Park on the east, containing the single largest geographically contiguous middle-class black area in the United States. View Park-Windsor Hills population is 5% White, 88% African American, and the remaining 7% Native American, Asian, Hispanic and Latino. South of View Park-Windsor Hills and east of Crenshaw lies *Baldwin Hills* long a major source of petroleum.

The *Crenshaw district* by the south Los Angeles city limits consists of a smorgasbord of people. In the 1930s. It did not have the restricted covenants found in other parts of the city because it was 6 miles outside the downtown power structure. But 60 years later in the 1990s Crenshaw became more desolate with the departure of local industry and lost jobs. Much of the middle-class left but wealthy black neighborhoods such as View Park remained. Since the 1965 LA riots, race relations are still sensitive but the increase in the Latino immigrant population has altered neighborhoods and the recently built metro subway connects Crenshaw with Koreatown.

**The Early Years**

The School, an independent non-profit corporation, was named for its founder Dr. Rachel Eubanks (1922-Apr 8, 2006) who maintained close ties with the majority African American community, general Los Angeles population, and students from other parts of the world including East and Southeast Asia.

Rachel’s biography is included in the *International Dictionary of Black Composers* (1996). Born in San Jose, she has lived in San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, New York, Albany Georgia, Wilberforce and Columbus Ohio. She received her B.A. degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1945. She was married to Reverend “Mac” MacDonald, a Baptist minister who wanted her to be a pastor’s wife. But that’s not what she envisioned and so their 1950 marriage ended 1 ½ later in 1952. For she had already received her M.A. from Columbia University in 1947. Later she also attended the Eastman School of Music, University of Southern California, Westminster Choir College, and the American Conservatory in France where she studied with Nadia Boulanger during the summer of 1977. She obtained her D.M.A. from Pacific Western University in California in 1980.
Travel accounts of a family missionary friend who lived in India inspired Rachel’s first serious composition, “Waters of the Ganges” for solo piano (1935) at age 14. In fact she was already composing when she was 11 and 12, two of which are entitled “Just You and I” and “Memories of Mother of Mine” accompanied by her own comments. Here is a rare insight into the mind of an 11 year-old girl after she composed her first piece in 1932. She writes: “One afternoon during school I thought of the coming of Mother’s Day and how nice it would be to write a poem for this day. I succeeded all right but somehow or other I wasn’t satisfied with the poem alone. After awhile thought, “why couldn’t I put these words to music, other people do, why can’t I? I had to study quite hard on this piece being it is my first one I had ever tried to write, I soon had it though. How thrilled I was at the thought of having composed a piece”.

At Columbia University she studied ethnomusicology and subsequently traveled widely, collecting musical instruments and artifacts and recording music. These experiences gave her the knowledge and insight to compose in a variety of styles, over 52 works reflecting her activities as a musician, educator, scholar and administrator and include sacred and secular works in many genres; songs, choral music, solo instrumental works, music for instrumental ensemble, cantatas, and orchestral works. She wrote a 2-volume textbook titled Musicianship (1956, 1976, Eubanks: Los Angeles). At the University of California at Berkeley, Eubanks studied undergraduate composition and orchestration with Charles Cushing, studied for her master’s degree at Columbia University with Otto Luening, Douglas Moore, Seth Bingham, Randolph Thomas, and Normand Lockwood; and later returned to UC Berkeley to study with Roger Sessions and Cushing.

**Genesis of a Music School**

It was her tenures as music department chair at Albany State College in Georgia and Wilberforce University in Ohio that gave her the determination to start her own independent school in California.

This independent school was founded in 1951, grew from a studio in her living room into a substantial institution offering state-approved bachelor and master degrees in music and faculty drawn from the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and jazz musicians of the area. Eubanks was willing to explore uncharted musical territory and was responsive to specific needs of the students and the communities from which they came. Curriculum emphasized an integrated approach using critical analysis and analytical methodologies to gain knowledge and understanding of the essential nature and history of society. Its museum containing musical instruments were collected during Eubanks’ travels. Her willingness to explore the unknown and responding to specific needs is illustrated by her settings of Vietnamese folksongs for violin and cello with piano accompaniment, composed for three of her Vietnamese students. Also as a child she gained a life long affinity for Chinese operas from attending live performance in the Chinatowns of San Francisco, Chicago, New York and later resulted in her tone poems “Heavy Snow” and “By the Riverside” set to Chinese poetry by Yan Chen for piano and solo baritone/bass (1984). Later, in March 2003 while in Japan at a Piano conference, she had the pleasure of meeting Professor Yang Ming of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and head of the Piano Department and she fondly remembered that time, however brief, talking with him about music.
The School Year

The academic year consists of 3 trimesters of 15 weeks each permitting one to complete a 2-year program in 1 ½ years and a 4-year program in less than 3 years. Facilities: 1961-2002:
The main campus was located in the View Park/Baldwin Hills area and the auxiliary location near downtown in the Crenshaw district. The main campus included classrooms, rehearsal and practice studios, small recital halls, student store, library, listening room, museum displaying musical instruments and artifacts, administrative offices, and parking lot. The auxiliary facility at Crenshaw included the auditorium, practice and rehearsal studios, and offices. Figures 2-3 [not shown] describes the certificate and degree program, and the music curriculum.

The Library contained music scores, books, periodicals, music programs, sound recordings, museum artifacts, filmstrips, motion picture films, and slides. Students could access local university and public libraries including those in Inglewood, Long Beach, Pasadena, and Glendale public Libraries, UCLA, University of Southern California, California State Universities at Long Beach and Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Arts library.

Financial and in-kind support

The John Wheatt Memorial Building Fund was established in 1973 in honor of late board member and assistant director. Plans for new facilities were drafted but never implemented and was designed by architects Paul Williams and board member Lester Bankhead for a multilevel 3-million dollar structure. Scholarships were offered, and full and partial assistantships, and other financial support were available through loans and through government vocational rehabilitation and social security benefits.

Graduates included performers, arrangers, composers, teachers and administrators. Eubanks was affiliated with the Korean Philharmonic Orchestra and the Korean Opera Company located nearby in Koreatown, founded, funded, and directed by Raymond Cho. The company was supported by his business in real estate. Cho, a professional flutist from Seoul, Korea, undertook this endeavor partly to maintain his connection with Eubanks. As he was former Dean at Eubanks for 20 years from 1982 to 2002. This may also be a reason Eubanks attracted a fair number of Asian-American and Asian students. Conservatory teachers included Ray Eubanks, John A. Boliver, Marc Taslit, Walter Zooi, Janet Andrews (Dance), and Gay Ross-Clunis (piano, piano pedagogy, music history).

Observations and final comments

1. Its tenacious founder and director had a broad-based education coupled with numerous visits abroad. Her choice for a school in Los Angeles seemed a natural fit for its geographical and cultural diversity and the school is part of this environment in a community that supported them. “Minorities within minorities” concept applied to Eubanks’s multi-racial faculty who taught in the African-American Crenshaw district sizable numbers of Asian-Americans and Asians from Southeast and East Asia. The school’s View Park/Baldwin Hills/Crenshaw locations for over 40 years are one of the most affluent areas in the USA having an African American majority. This was not unusual as Los Angeles contains homogeneous enclaves juxtaposed amongst heterogeneous mixes of ethnicities and cultures.

With Jonathan Eubanks, notable photographer and Rachel’s brother whom I met in the 1980s is now interim director as a new director was not willing to carry on Eubanks’ original

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1 United States federal government program that provides retirement income, health care for the aged, and disability coverage for eligible workers and their dependents.
mandate and as a Bank of America branch manager, he wanted to put in his own staff and wanted Eubanks to become a business oriented vocational school retaining the Eubanks name because of its cache.

2. Eubanks, like its community, melded traditional and contemporary idioms of music, theater, and dance. Teacher Sophia Katsnelson said “it was like a community school” where 3 generations of students from one family attended. Courses in church music and gospel reflected the importance of the church that also provided social services to communities. Students took advantage of Eubanks’ close proximity to Hollywood film studios. Professionals who worked at these film studios taught courses at Eubanks in music arranging and scoring for motion pictures and television.

The concept of bi-musicality not only expanded the students’ musical experience, but it also taught social responsibility as related in the following two examples. One was observed worldwide via satellite in 1992 the riots and interracial conflict between African and Korean Americans in Los Angeles’ south central district. Amidst this chaos, the Eubanks Conservatory set an extraordinary example by demonstrating that Eubanks and Cho, an African American Director and Korean American Dean, could work together bound by a mutual commitment to educate young people about music. People who knew her found that she expressed her emotions and feelings more through her music, rather than in speech. An example of Eubanks’ response to the riots is found in her 2-movement Sonata for piano [It will be performed October 23, 2009 by Maxine Franklin]. The first movement predominantly lyrical, is in allegro-sonata form and the second, more angular and percussive and sectional. The two movements are tied together by the use of close half and whole step motives that appear in the melodic material. Here are two brief excerpts from that concert taken from the first and second movements. As you will hear, the second movement expresses utter chaos, hopelessness, and despair in using a musical language that is atonal and polytonal.

The second example reveals a connection between Eubanks and the Yared Music School in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In 1972 while a teacher from Yared was giving me a lesson, there was a knock at the door and two women on a US State Department tour were told to contact me. One was Rachel Eubanks whom I met for the first time and learned about her school. It was also the first time Rachel heard about Yared. 20 years later in the early 1990s, I discovered a major composition of Rachel’s based partly on her experiences in Ethiopia called Symphonic Requiem (1980) a 45-minute 4-movement work for orchestra and 4 solo voices using Tibetan and Indian bells and Ethiopian sistrum for special effects. The first movement employs pitch changes using microtonal increments, a device derived from a practice used in the Ethiopian Orthodox Mass. Source material for the Requiem include Gregorian plainsong, Ethiopian Orthodox Mass, African-American spirituals, and Tibetan Buddhist chant. Tibetan chant was used to create a calm, solemn mood expressing the eternal sound of “aum,” or the eternal, divine essence of man. The universality of this philosophy is the reason she combined western and eastern musical themes and instruments.

3. The Eubanks Conservatory of Music and Arts survives because it: (1) incorporated a diverse student body and curricula to accommodate them; (2) utilized local, state, national, and international resources; (3) until recently had been accredited by the State of California, (4) and made the concept of bi-cultural musicality part of the curriculum that proved effective and strategic. Eubanks has been reconstituted in the wake of Rachel’s death in April 2006 by Jonathan Eubanks who is carrying out his sister’s original mandate and her music legacy by securing funding sources, having the curriculum revised, hiring new instructors and on my
recommendation to include possible student interns from nearby colleges and universities, and increasing student enrollment. The Eubanks Conservatory in the late 70s and 80s had 500 students. Although currently, courses and class size have been reduced with correspondingly less incoming revenue, the school is moving forward to a new building owned by the parents of one of Rachel’s students at 4830 S. Crenshaw Blvd. close to the old location at 4928 S. Crenshaw. The founder and first director had been at the helm for over five decades and was its centerpiece and major force.

A fitting end is to quote an excerpt from the 1975 Eubanks catalog stating the essence of what Eubanks is all about: ECMA considers education in the broader realm of the arts and sciences to be vital to the development of today’s musicians who must be equipped to make a significant cultural contribution to the society as performers, composers, teachers and researchers in the arts. They must thoroughly understand the essential nature and history of that society in order to make creative and responsible decisions concerning their part in it. Hence our program brings together an integrated perspective on cultural history, including the development of its customs, values, and social institutions. The study involves development of critical and analytical approaches to knowledge, the study of modes of inquiry and characteristics of the disciplines in the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences.

The Eubanks’ program will continue to evolve from its local origins focusing on community concerns as well as international interests, a perspective that validates a global oriented music education curriculum having local roots.

Epilogue
August 2009: Jonathan Eubanks is currently CEO/Director of Administration and Tom Banks, a percussionist, is Director of daily operations.

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Appendices [not shown]
List of photographs [not shown]
Figures [not shown]

Photographs (only #1 is included in this version)
1. Rachel 1996 (ref. Helen Walker-Hill)
2. Rachel 1940
3. Rachel 1950
4. Rachel 1960s
5. Rachel 1980s in front of the school’s North Hall
6. Raymond Cho 1980s
7. Recital1_1983
8. Recital2_1983
9. Recital3_1983