

## MTNA National Conference 2024

Atlanta, Georgia

March 18, 2024



Scan for audio/video about Kerr  
or to order Concert Scherzo score.

### In Search of a Lost History:

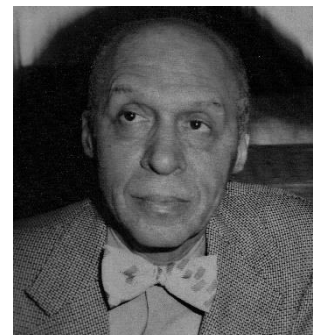
### The World and Music of Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr.

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### Thomas H. Kerr Jr. Biographical Information

- Dates: 1915 - 1988
- Born in Baltimore, Maryland
- Attended Frederic Douglass High School, where he studied with W. Llewellyn Wilson, a Baltimore-born African American conductor, musician, and music educator.
- Denied entrance to Peabody Institute because Black students were not allowed to attend.
- Attended Howard University briefly, then Eastman School of Music.
- At Eastman he studied piano with Cecile Genhart.
- Earned three degrees BM in piano, theory, and MM in theory, and graduated with honors.
- First position was Instructor of Piano and Organ at Knoxville College in Tennessee (HBCU).
- Taught at Howard University (HCBU) as Professor of Piano and Chair of the Piano Department (1943-1976).
- Served as the organist at Plymouth Congregational Church in Washington, D.C. for 35 years.
- As pianist, performed widely in the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. area, and on the Black Concert Circuit.
- Two children, Judith, and Thomas III, from first marriage with Norma McAlister Kerr.
- 2nd marriage to Hortense Reid Kerr, professor of piano at Howard University.

### Compositional Output

- His catalogue lists over 150 works for piano, organ, voice, chorus, and chamber ensembles.
- No publications during his lifetime.
- Publications to date (1984-2021): Six organ works and four art songs.

### Piano Works (Written between 1937-1970)

No piano works published until 2024. (We are about to change that!)

- 10 complete manuscripts for solo piano
- 4 compositions for piano duo
- 2 compositions (pages missing) for piano duet
- 5 hymn settings for solo piano
- Simplified and pedagogical works

### *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?* - Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos (1940)

- First Kerr work for piano to be published (March 2024)
- Theme and Variations based on the African American spiritual "*Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?*"
- Needed a piece to perform with his duo-piano partner, *Sylvia Olden Lee*, on the "Black College Circuit."
- Performance History
  - Performed by Kerr/Lee duo over 20 times on the Black Concert Circuit
  - Performed by Delphin and Romain Piano Duo in several high-profile concerts during the 1980s including the Kennedy Center, the White House, and Carnegie Hall
  - Performed by Hortense Reid Kerr / Constance Tibbs Hobson throughout the 1980s
  - Performed by the Nyaho/Garcia Piano Duo in several performances since 2021.
  - Recorded by the Nyaho/Garcia Piano Duo in 2022

## Kerr's Musical World

- Sylvia Olden Lee (1917-2004)
  - Kerr's duo-piano partner on the Black Concert Circuit
  - First African American to be employed by the Metropolitan Opera
  - Kerr dedicated *Temporait 1* (unpublished)
- William Duncan Allen (1975-1994)
  - Collaborative pianist to concert artists such as Paul Robeson, Todd Duncan, George Shirley
  - Kerr dedicated *Caprice Carillon* (unpublished)
- Natalie Hinderas
  - Early champion of piano music by Black composers with pioneering LP *Piano Music by African American Composers* released in 1971.
  - Kerr dedicated *Easter Monday Swagger, Scherzino* (publication forthcoming), which she included on the 1971 recording.
- Delphin and Romain Piano Duo (Wilfred Delphin and Edwin Romain)
  - First African American piano duo on the concert scene.
  - Performed Kerr's "Concert Scherzo at the Kennedy Center, the White House, and Carnegie Hall

## Bibliography and Resources

### Thomas Henderson Kerr Jr. Papers

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

US Library of Congress entry: Kerr, Thomas H., Jr.,

### Published Works

- *Anthology of Art Songs by Black American Composers*, ed. Willis C. Patterson, Hal Leonard (1984)
  - Riding to Town
- *African-American Organ Music Anthology*, ed. Micky Thomas Terry, MorningStar Music (beginning date of series: 2000)
  - Volume 1: Arietta
  - Volume 2: Miniature Antiphonal on a Pedal Point
  - Volume 2: Procession of the Gargoyles
  - Volume 5: Frolicking Flutes
  - Volume 6: Reverie for Celestes
- *Second Anthology of Art Songs by Black American Composers*, ed. Willis C. Patterson (2002)
  - Thou Art My Lute
  - In Memorium
  - Soliloquy
- *Anguished American Easter for Organ*, ed. Herndon Spillman, GIA Publications (2005)
- *An Anthology of African and African Diaspora Songs*, ed. Louise Toppin (2021)
  - Soliloquy
- *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? Concert Scherzo for Two Pianos*, eds. Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho. The Frances Clark Center Piano Education Press, (2024)

### Forthcoming Publications

The Frances Clark Center Piano Education Press, eds. Susanna Garcia and William Chapman Nyaho

- *Dancétudes: 7 Vignettes of Dolls and Pets for Piano*. 1959-63 written for his daughter, Judy Kerr to perform for auditions. (Late Intermediate - Early Advanced)
- *Easter Monday Swagger, Scherzino for Piano 1970* (Advanced) written for Natalie Hinderas.

## Recordings of Piano Works

- Natalie Hinderas Pianist Plays Music by Black Composers (1971)  
Reissued on CD 1995: *Piano Music by African American Composers*
  - Easter Monday Swagger, Scherzino
- Nyaho/Garcia Piano Duo: Five by Four (2022)
  - Concert Scherzo: Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?

## Suggestions for Continued Research

- Kerr's Archives. There is an abundance of piano, organ, vocal, and choral music waiting to be brought to light.
- Explore archives for other composers whose works remain unpublished due to racial bias or neglect.
  - [Amistad Research Center](#) (New Orleans, LA)
  - [Center for Black Music Research](#) (Columbia College, Chicago, IL)
  - [Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture](#) (New York, NY)
- Learn about the Black College Circuit and artists that performed in these venues.
- Explore the relationships that developed within communities of color.