

Cites October 19th Benefit Concert As Example of New Outlook on Music

By Abdul Basit Naeem

Time was — not too long ago—when the U.S. Muslims (followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad), to the best of my knowledge, totally shunned music.

A NUMBER of early "returnees" (i.e., converts) to Islam and members of the "lost-found . . . Nation of Islam in the wilderness of North America" were accomplished musicians.



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Several of them had at one time or another played with "name" bands; quite a few others were rapidly climbing up the professional ladder when they found themselves heeding the Messenger's "final call" and joined the Muslims.

While eager, to give their all in behalf of their cherished cause (i.e., of eventually obtaining unfettered freedom, justice and equality for the 22 million American so-called Negroes), they were unable to contribute of their valuable talents. Music, as a

form of collective or public entertainment, had no place in the then-infant Muslim movement's scheme of things.

The taboo was "automatically" lifted with the release in 1958 (or '57) of the Muslims' own 45 rpm album, "White Man's Heaven is Black Man's Hell." The record, which tells the true and sorrowful tale of black man's suffering and depravation since the days of slavery, ending with the advent of the latter-day Messenger (Muhammad) and the promise of Islam, now is recognized widely as a best seller in its own right.

BOTH MUSIC and musical entertainment (inclusive of highly interpretive African ethnic dances) have since then played an increasingly significant role in the presentation of American Muslims' overall social and cultural program.

The newest of their endeavors in this direction, I might add here, is scheduled to take place Thursday evening, Oct. 19, at the 369th Armory in New York City. Billed as a "gigantic Benefit Concert" (all proceeds would go to the establishment of an educational center for the

Harlem community), it will feature such top-rated artists as The Shirells, Ruby and the Romantics, Joe Tex and his orchestra, Pucho and Latin Soul brothers, etc.

The Muslims themselves will be represented in the vibrant, exciting "Quartette Shahid," among others. Another special attraction at the star-studded affair will be the undefeated (but unjustly and arbitrarily deposed) heavyweight boxing champion of the World, Brother (Minister) Muhammad Ali, in an exhibition bout.

EXACTLY why the gracious and noble Muslim leader, Honorable Elijah Muhammad, removed or relaxed the erstwhile ban on the use of music, this, of course, I cannot say—though I trust the Messenger will someday, when he deems it proper or necessary, enlighten us all on the matter. However, as for the reason (or at least a part of the reason) why the said restriction existed in the first place, I believe it has all along been unconcealed and crystal-clear to me.

I had found the logic and understanding of same a

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good while back in an Urdu-language verse from the poetry of the great Muslim philosopher-seer (of Pakistan), the late Allama Muhammad Iqbal. It read:

“Allow me to reveal to you
Just how a people reach
their destined station . . .

They first strive for
freedom or defense
with the ‘appropriate
devices’ . . .

Turning to means of
entertainment (rejoicing)
only afterwards . . .”