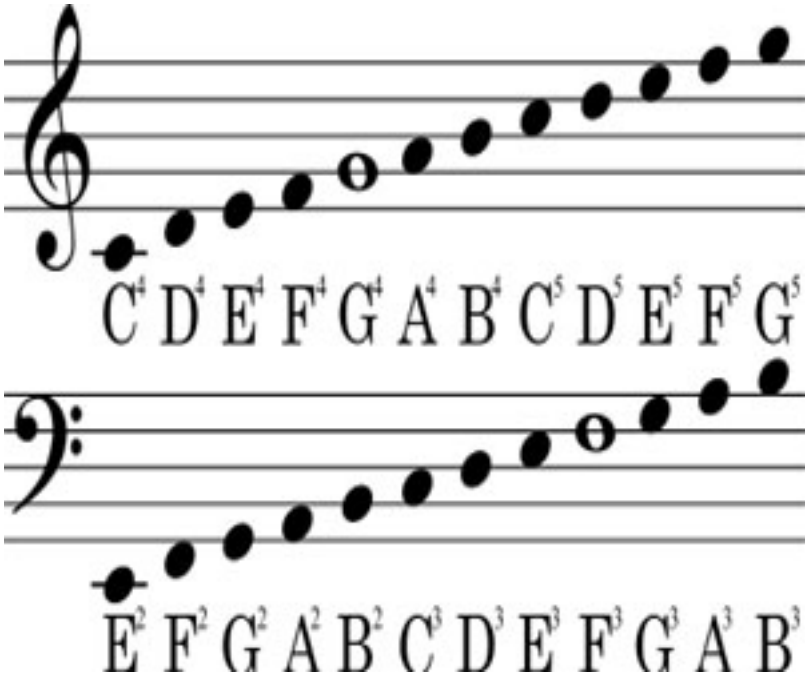

These are just a few of the musicians that I feel make an impact on music in Cleveland. If I didn't call your name, please know it don't mean you are nobody or that I have no love for you. Charge it to my lack of space.

By JAMES W. WADE III
Staff Reporter

In honor of Black Music Month, we are taking time to honor some great music in the Gospel music area.

Gospel music, at its essence, is sacred music. Gospel music was born uniquely inAmericaat the end of the 19th century. The close connection to the gospels (the books of the New Testament) gave Gospel (meaning, "good news") its name.

The gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John offer many references to the goodness and mercy of God. The subject matter of Gospel music centers on the personal, spiritual, or communal faith regarding Christian life.

It also provides a Christian alternative to commercial, secular music.

So, no matter if you like music by the late, great Thomas Dorsey or by Kirk Franklin, I hope you get the message that the song is written to save your soul. Lately, I have had much respect for Rodney Hubbard who has bridged the young and seasoned musicians with his projects.

So many young musicians come up playing by ear and with no interest in the old church hymns that their style is just fast and bumping and shouting. Have you ever gone to Greater Abyssinia Baptist Church and heard Finley Lanier play the pipe organ?

Not many have mastered this.

Every service I go to that's steeped in old school songs, I seem to visualize Earl McElrath stomping a hole in the floor as he plays his heart out on the piano. McElrath reminds me of my father when he played the piano regularly. He had a style and stomp that I would love.

Connections in music have been around for a long time. During the early years, when many musicians would meet in Helen Turner Thompson's mother's bookstore, you would hear most coming in to practice their music for their church rehearsal.

My father James W. Wade II is one of the best musicians around, but you know I would not say anything any different. Organists like JT Highball and his younger version Michael Dotson would play with style and feeling, and I have heard many talk about a man named PEE WEE, who was one bad musician.

While growing up, I think the singing groups The Evangelistic Team and Leviticus were two of the baddest groups. I also have to give credit to groups like the Burton Singers and Rev. Melvin Kennibrew and his group. While groups have revolved from the days of the Raymond Raspberry Singers, the Prestonians and the Wade Singers, you have seen the mantel passed.

Michael Hairston formed Inspirational Voices of Peace (IVP), and has been doing it along with Derrick Lockett and the Gospel Ensemble. Both groups are full of energy. Do you ever wonder what it would be like to have a Barbara Levy and the late Betty Nolan in the same choir?

I would have loved to hear Lucretia Bolden and the late Minnie Benson doing a duet. Growing up in Temple Baptist Church, on any given Sunday, you could hear the late Rev. Leon Lawrence and Carolyn Kirkwood singing and sounding like Rev. James Cleveland and Aretha Franklin.

When you talk of Gospel music you have to journey with me to Star Bethel and the Robinson Sisters, who, to this day, can still have you following them as they walk down the aisle singing Traveling Shoes while Nawassa Brown beats the piano.

Talking about the piano, I can not forget the legendary pianist and composer Dr. Rev. C. Ronald Williams II (Pastor Ron), who has been doing music for a long time. Pastor Ron is also known for the Voices of Konionia.

Over at Cleveland Church of Christ (Citadel of Hope), I must acknowledge June Haughton and David Crawford who keepEast 105th Streetrocking with the choir that spreads across the whole church.

Now while many love the style of the Church of God in Christ, you have so many to choose from. But one of my favorites is Steven Golden. This brother, like Rodney Hubbard is a beast on an organ.

While having Black Music stores like Ribbins Bookstore on East 116th, where everyone came for all your church needs, and where the late Gertrude Ribbins was a musician and a woman everyone had to love. She was such a joy to sit around, laugh and talk to. I spent days in the office with this family enjoying their friendship.

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As I close, I could not forget my good friend, Leonard Burks who always seems to bring you music with a twist. Even though Burks doesn't do the big choir anymore, he always seems to have a group of a few friends — 8 to 20 — who bring it.

Burks does all types of music, but is probably best known for his style of doing those great hymns of the church. Burks along with Michael Dotson, Carlton Fellows, Bishop Redmond and the great voice of Lenny Champion will always be on my list of Cleveland's greatest groups.