Music sets many moods for students

Black musical groups have developed at Ohio State since 1970 to provide students with music that has grown from the black experience in America. The OSU Gospel Choir was founded earlier this year by black students who wanted to express themselves musically and religiously, said Sherwin Hayes, a junior from Jefferson and chairman of the choir.

Robert Floyd, a sophomore from Marion, who directs the choir, said the group is spiritually stimulating to its members. "In singing the words you think of them, this helps you religiously," he said. Floyd also does the musical arrangements for the group.

The Gospel Choir sings every Sunday at the interdenominational service of the Black Student Christian Fellowship in the conference room of the Ohio Union. The group has also sung at several area churches, Hayes said. He said many other schools have gospel choirs and the group hopes to travel to those schools for future performances.

There is also a choir for students interested in secular choral singing. The OSU Black Choir was originally organized to perform for the United Black World Week in 1971. Response to the performance was good and after the show the members decided to establish a permanent choir, said Aaron Bailey, a junior from Cleveland and chairman of the choir.

Membership has grown to 65 from the original 30 members, Bailey said. Bailey said the choir, accompanied by a rhythm section, performs many types of music. Their repertoire includes everything from spirituals to the latest contemporary tunes, he said.

Participation in the choir is accredited by the School of Music. Members receive one credit hour per quarter for singing in the choir.

The choir went to Atlanta Friday to perform at the Black College National Gospel Extravaganza, Bailey said. The choir has also performed in Washington, D.C., Detroit, and around Ohio. Julius James, a 1971 graduate of Ohio State, directs the choir.

Four members of the choir have formed a rhythm and blues ensemble. John Mitchell, a senior from Cleveland, said the ensemble, Love Maximum Inc., was organized by soloists from the choir. Ensemble members continue to sing with the choir, he said.

Other members of the ensemble are James Taylor, a senior from Cincinnati, and Dwight Steele, a sophomore from Cleveland. Mitchell said the group is looking for a replacement for another member who dropped out of the group to devote more time to school.

The group has worked professionally, performing at Indiana University, Hiram College in Hiram and in Columbus, Mitchell said.

Mitchell said the ensemble performs songs by popular groups such as the O'Jays and the Spinners. "We haven't recorded yet, but we're working on some original material," he said.

The group has performed with the OSU Jazz-Rock Ensemble. The Jazz-Rock Ensemble was organized to provide another dimension to jazz groups at Ohio State, said Willie Sullivan, assistant professor of music and director of the ensemble. He explained that the other two jazz ensembles play primarily big band jazz and his group plays a variety of music. Sullivan is also assistant director of the marching band.

"We do things by jazz artists Maynard Ferguson and Herbie Hancock and other things by Chicago and the Tower of Power," he said.

Sullivan said the group stays away from avant-garde jazz because "people wouldn't understand it. To enjoy abstract artists you have to understand what they are doing," he said.

Sullivan said the ensemble helps educate students in jazz. "People know we'll play rock and come to hear it. We expose them to some jazz too," he said.

The 25 member ensemble includes saxophones, trumpets, trombones, vibes, a rhythm section and five vocalists.

The group, formed in late 1973, has performed in the Ohio Union, Marshon Auditorium and at schools around Columbus, Sullivan said. The group will perform in Philadelphia and Nashville this spring.