

Spirituals Concert Program

Didn't It Rain	(1913-1972)	Margaret Bonds
My Lord What A Mornin'	(1866-1949)	H.T. Burleigh
Honor, Honor	(1888-1970)	Hall Johnson
Witness		Hall Johnson
Steal Away		H.T. Burleigh
Behold That Star		H.T. Burleigh
He's the Lily of the Valley	(b. 1925-)	Alice Parker
Ride On, King Jesus		Hall Johnson
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot		H. T. Burleigh
I Know the Lord Has Laid His Hands on Me		H. T. Burleigh
The Lord's Prayer	(b. 1910-)	Will Reed
God is a God	(1931-1987)	Wendell Whalum
Intermission		
Deep River		H.T. Burleigh
His Name So Sweet		Hall Johnson
Sweet Little Jesus Boy		Robert MacGimsey

	<i>(b.1898-)</i>	
I Got To Lie Down		Hall Johnson
Wade in the Water		Edward Boatner
City Called Heaven	<i>(1898-1981)</i>	Edward Boatner
In Bright Mansions Above	<i>(b. 1950-)</i>	K. Lee Scott
He's Got the Whole World in His Hand		Margaret Bonds

Program Notes

Didn't It Rain

The music of Margaret Bonds, a brilliant mid-twentieth century composer, is now finally getting the recognition it deserves. Bonds provides a fresh setting for this classic spiritual. Like many of the spirituals, "Didn't It Rain" appropriates an Old Testament story to capture the feelings and struggles of the enslaved African community. Like the biblical figure Noah, enslaved Africans felt a special bond with God, and they felt confident that in time God would protect the righteous and punish the wicked. "Didn't It Rain" makes lighthearted fun of all those hypocrites (including, symbolically, many slaveholders) who receive their just desserts as they drown in the flood.

My Lord, What a Mornin'

Harry T. Burleigh, who was a student of the European composer Antonin Dvorák, was one of the first composers to arrange spirituals for solo performance in concert settings. In the early part of the twentieth century, some of Burleigh's arrangements were made famous by such concert artists as Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson. In this very beautiful setting of the old spiritual "My Lord, What a Mornin'," Burleigh captures the wonder and reverence of this song. This spiritual is frequently mistaken to be a joyful celebration of "morning." In actuality, it is a reverential expression of "mourning," and specifically the experience of awe surrounding Judgment Day, when all people on Earth will ultimately face God.

Honor, Honor

Hall Johnson provides a majestic setting for this wonderful spiritual, which is one of the most multi-layered of all the slave songs. "King Jesus lit the candle by the waterside," the song exclaims, and all the "children," newly baptized, are now in a position to honor Jesus, the "Dying Lamb," for the rest of their lives. This is a song about conversion, renewal, faith and hope. Spirituals like this also provided a grounded preparation for the enslaved African's ongoing battle against mistreatment and injustice. In fact, it is very likely that this song also gave clandestine instructions (e.g., "look for the candle by the waterside") for families escaping on the Underground Railroad. Even today, the song's vividly poetic lyrics and driving rhythms make it impossible for anyone within hearing range to remain uninspired. This is a song that demands both attention and action.

Witness

The African tradition of storytelling contributed to enslaved Africans' readiness to embrace the many colorful stories of the Bible, especially the many stories of the Old Testament. In this now famous arrangement of this old spiritual, Hall Johnson gives a majestic flavor to the witness of faith expressed by the original enslaved composer. In hearing this song, there can be no questions about the deep faith of the singer, even in circumstances where most people would find it impossible to feel anything close to the joy that is evident here. This is not a naïve faith, but rather one that is anchored in a grounded spirituality, one that assists in the ongoing fight against injustice.

Steal Away

Burleigh provides a majestic setting for yet another classic slave song. This famous spiritual is often cited as the best example of a signal song, used as a means of clandestine communication in the enslaved African community. The song was variously used as a signal that a secret worship service was about to occur, or as a signal of imminent plans for escape on the Underground Railroad. In her own writing, the famous Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman reports boldly singing a similar signal song within hearing of her slave master's house the night before she escaped.

Behold That Star

There are not many spirituals on the theme of Christmas, but this is one of the most beautiful and striking, employing the imagery of the North Star, lighting and guiding the way for those seeking to find Bethlehem and the Baby Jesus. Burleigh does a magnificent job in highlighting both the beauty and simplicity of this wonderful spiritual.

He's the Lily of the Valley

The Jesus of Christianity was easily embraced by enslaved Africans who were familiar with multiple deities in the African religious traditions from which they descended. Like the intimate deities of African religions, Jesus was a deity with whom African captives could walk and talk, and in whom they could confide their deepest secrets. Jesus, for slaves, could often be pictured via beautiful imagery, including the vivid image of a precious Lily of the Valley, symbolizing freshness, beauty, and new life.

Ride On, King Jesus

In contrast to "Lily of the Valley," this spiritual provides another image of Jesus, that of deliverer or conquering king, a fitting companion for those engaged in the long and difficult struggle to obtain their freedom from slavery. This is one of composer Hall Johnson's most famous arrangements, and it makes the original slave composer's message crystal clear. With Jesus on my side, "No man can hinder me!" This is as true for my faith as it is for my determination to be free.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

"Swing Low" is one of the most famous of the songs clearly identified by many ex-slaves as a "signal song," pointing the way to secret places and events on the Underground Railroad as enslaved people sought to escape to freedom. While people in bondage could certainly imagine a chariot that would carry them to heaven after death, the image of an earthly chariot that would lead them to freedom, in this life, was even more appealing. Harry Burleigh, who was both a composer and a singer, captured in this arrangement both the deep spirituality and the triumphant spirit of this classic slave song.

I Know the Lord Has Laid His Hands on Me

Beginning in the late 18th century and continuing in the early 19th century, African Americans in bondage began converting to Christianity in large numbers for the first time. In the midst of their conversion experiences they created songs that expressed their intense joy at developing a personal connection to their true master, the Lord God. In the Africanized Christianity that evolved from these experiences, the relationship they developed with the divine was deeply intimate. The old West African ceremony, called the laying on of hands, acquired a new meaning in their fresh experience of literally being touched by the Holy Spirit. Burleigh, as usual, captured the wonder and magic of this kind of religious encounter in his arrangement of this wonderful spiritual.

The Lord's Prayer

It is certainly not surprising that enslaved Africans who converted to Christianity were in awe of the prayer to God that Jesus taught to his followers. There are a number of song versions of The Lord's prayer that emerged from the slave community. The melody in this version was created by people in bondage in the West Indies.

God is a God

Wendell Whalum is a legend at Morehouse College in Atlanta. His influence on composers, singers, and conductors of spirituals is profound, and this arrangement gives us a glimpse of why. He had the ability to provide simple yet powerful concertized settings for spirituals, honoring both their beauty and their power. *God is a God* is a favorite of many concert artists.

Deep River

Like "Steal Away," this is one of the most famous of the signal songs. While it clearly expresses the faith and desire of true believers to go "home" after death, it also utilizes the symbolism of the River Jordan to signal plans to escape from bondage and "cross over" to freedom. Singers from Paul Robeson to Jessye Norman have carried the message of this beautiful song in concerts around the world.

His Name So Sweet

Like "Lily of the Valley," this spiritual expresses the poignant intimacy of the enslaved African's relationship with Jesus. This is no abstract deity, but rather a real life companion with whom one can share one's deepest worries and concerns. "Do you love Jesus?" the singers asks, and the answer is clear and automatic: anyone who sips from the fountain of faith knows first hand how sweet it (he) is.

Sweet Little Jesus Boy

This now-classic song is actually not a slave spiritual, but rather an original composition by Robert MacGimsey, written in the form and style of a spiritual. This song too (like "His Name So Sweet") expresses the singer's precious, intimate relationship with Jesus. The fact that "Sweet Little Jesus Boy" has become a Christmas favorite in churches, community settings and concert halls around the world speaks volumes about MacGimsey's effectiveness in capturing the power of the slave song genre.

I Got To Lie Down

Despite the persistent faith and confidence of people in bondage, as seen so clearly in songs like "Witness," the back breaking work of slavery - surrounded by the perennial cloud of involuntary servitude - was exhausting. There were times when a person just felt like it would be better to die than to endure all this. Expressing these feelings in songs like this was a kind of precursor to the blues songs that followed in post-emancipation Black culture. As in the blues, the ability to sing right into the center of one's sorrows lays the ground for renewal and transcendence.

Wade in the Water

In many ways, "Wade in the Water" is the prototypical spiritual which, like "City Called Heaven," communicates on several different levels. Most people today know it as a baptismal song, but it was also employed by Harriett Tubman on the Underground Railroad to remind those escaping from slavery that they should be sure to "wade in the water" in order to throw approaching bloodhounds off their scent. On a deeper level, "Wade in the Water" calls on all of us to explore the "waters" of our inner spirits as we seek guidance in transcending seemingly impossible life crises.

City Called Heaven

Chicago composer Edward Boatner was one of the important figures in the development of the twentieth century concert spirituals genre, which brought together the slave folk song tradition with elements of the European art song genre. This is one of Boatner's most beautiful arrangements. "I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow, tossed in the wide world alone. No hope have I for tomorrow; I've started to make Heaven my home." Like so many spirituals, the message here is received, and communicated, on multiple levels. Heaven is the internal spirit, here and now. Heaven is the land of freedom, in the North. Heaven is a home in Mother Africa, for repatriated slaves. Heaven is also a life

in Heaven after death. The connection, or anticipation, of any or all of these dimensions of Heaven helps the singer to persevere, to struggle, to resist and to maintain a solid sense of self as a child of God.

In Bright Mansions Above

In contrast to a life in which one barely has enough to eat and where the slave quarters can hardly be described as richly adorned, this very beautiful spiritual encapsulates the aspirations of African captives, whose deep faith permitted them to picture a life very different from the one they experienced in bondage. And what a wonderful image it must have been, to picture oneself living in a manner befitting royalty, "In bright mansions above."

He's Got the Whole World in His Hand

Bonds' arrangement of "Whole World" has been given worldwide exposure by such singers as Kathleen Battle and Florence Quivar. Building on the ubiquitous presence of a distant but omnipotent High God in the religious belief systems of virtually all of the west and central African ethnic groups from which North American slaves were captured, this song expresses the awe with which folks in the African community regarded the image of the God they honored and prayed to as they encountered the crucible of slavery. Bonds' arrangement revives the combination of reverence and joy that one can imagine in the first renderings of this song among enslaved people.

Program notes for this spirituals concert were written by Dr. Arthur Jones. He is the author of the book *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals* and is the founder of The Spirituals Project in Denver, Colo. The Spirituals Project is a broad-based initiative to explore the many, varied dimensions of African-American spirituals as art form, tradition and tool; and to invite all people to experience the joy and power of this dynamic music and gift from African-Americans to the world. Anthony Brown is collaborating with The Spirituals Project in preparation for their forthcoming PBS documentary film, *Sweet Chariot: New Voice of the Spirituals*.

International baritone, Anthony Brown is well established as a performer of opera, oratorio, art song, contemporary works and spirituals. The Seattle Times has called him a "warm and noble baritone who sings spirituals with the same care a singer lavishes on German *Leider*." The New York City Concert Review recently called him "a singer of real accomplishment." A consummate actor in all genres, Mr. Brown brings the audience into the world of the music he is singing.

Much in demand as a concert artist, he has appeared with orchestra and in recital in Europe, the United States and Canada. He has appeared as an oratorio soloist performing Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*, Handel's *Messiah*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. His operatic performances have included principal roles in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and *Don Giovanni*, Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. He has collaborated with Seattle based pianist Lisa Bergman producing two compact disc recordings. The first release was in 1995 and was entitled *Spirituals*. His second recording, *Embracing American Song*, was released in February of 1999. In 2002 he released his third recording in collaboration with the Spirituals Project Choir. It is entitled *Toil and Triumph*. His fourth CD is titled *Each Other's Light* recorded in 2006. His most recent recording, *How Can I Keep From Singing* was released in the September of 2013.

Mr. Brown has used music as a way to promote peace and good will around the world. Recent tours include China Japan and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brown is currently artist-in-residence at Hesston (Kan.) College.