

The Spiritual: Its History, Meanings, and
Performance Practices as Demonstrated in Two
Settings for SATB Choir

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The Spiritual: Its History, Meanings, and Performance
Practices as Demonstrated in Two Settings for SATB Choir

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Justin Ryan Nelson

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ABSTRACT

JUSTIN R. NELSON. The Spiritual: Its History, Meanings, and Performance Practices as Demonstrated in Two Settings for SATB Choir (Under the direction of DR. KORRE FOSTER.)

Spirituals are a vital part of the standard choral repertoire. Originating in the songs of slaves and now presented in concert form, spirituals have moved from the plantation to the concert hall. Choral conductors must address many questions regarding performance practices associated with the spiritual. These questions include the origins of spirituals, use of dialect, movement, appropriate choral timbre, and issues dealing with tempo, phrasing, and rhythm. Also included in this study are conductor's guides to two spirituals: "I Want to Die Easy" arranged by Roland Carter and "Look What Dey' Doin to Jesus" arranged by Richard Jackson. These conductor's guides address the aforementioned questions regarding performance practice as well as include biographical information on the arrangers. Sources for this study include journal articles, books, and doctoral dissertations written by experts in the field of choral music. Sources also include interviews with Dr. Rollo Dilworth, Dr. Felicia Barber, Dr. André Thomas, and Dr. Roland Carter, all respected experts in the field of choral spirituals. Future study could include other performance practices associated with spirituals such as the use of body percussion and musical forms found in spirituals such as call and response patterns.

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CHAPTER I

Origins of the Spiritual

The genre of the spiritual was born out of a seemingly “perfect storm” of human rights injustice. The enslavement of an inherently musical people and their search for a way of coping with the harshness of their reality led to the creation of one of the greatest musical treasures America has to offer—the African American Spiritual. From the fields of the south to the concert halls of the world, the spiritual has evolved from simple melodies sung on the plantations and in camp meetings to a genre of choral music that is rich with tradition and meaning for all peoples.

The Enslavement of A Musical People

Out of one of the most tragic times in American history comes the genre we now know as the spiritual. Beginning in 1619 and lasting until 1860, the slave trade forcibly brought Africans from the western coast of the African continent to the eastern coast of the United States. According to Eileen Southern, the conditions slaves faced even before they reached the coast of the southern United States was deplorable; “They [slaves] were to continue to come for more than two hundred years, brought at first in small groups (called “parcels”), then later by the shiploads, clamped in irons and wedged into foul vessels so closely together that there was hardly enough room for movement.”¹ In *From Slavery to Freedom*, Franklin and Moss, describe

¹ Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 3.

the journey to the United States endured by slaves:²

There are records of ships as small as 90 tons carrying a compliment of 390 slaves in addition to crew and provisions. The practice of overcrowding slaves became so common that the British Parliament felt compelled to specify that not more than five slaves could be carried for every 3 tons of the burden of a ship of 200 tons. This regulation, like so many others, was not enforced. More slaves meant greater profits, and few traders could resist the temptation to wedge in a few more. There was hardly standing, lying, or sitting room. Chained together by twos [sic], hands and feet, slaves had no room in which to move about and no freedom to exercise their bodies even in the slightest.

Conditions on slave ships were so deplorable that it is estimated that only around half of the slaves that were captured actually became workers on plantations. Diseases such as smallpox and dysentery killed many slaves during the journey. Many slaves committed suicide by jumping overboard and many others were permanently injured from struggling against their chains.³ Slaves were usually captured from the western coast of Africa, from the people of the “empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Kanem-Bornu, and the Mossi, Hausa, and other states.”⁴ Although the actual figure is unknown, some have estimated that between ten to fifteen million slaves were brought to the United States.⁵

From the ships where they were packed like cargo into small holds, slaves were aliens in a new and strange place, stripped of their culture, instruments, and dignity and were unable to speak the language of their captors. In the United States, they faced the auction block of one of the many slave traders throughout the southeastern United States. They were bid on as if they were nothing more than livestock. Family groups found themselves separated, sold to different

² John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th ed. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1994), 37.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*. 3.

⁵ Ibid., 20.

plantations, parents separated from children, husbands separated from wives. Howard Thurman, in his book *Deep River* describes the inhumanity of slavery:

But it must be intimately remembered that slavery was a dirty, sordid, inhuman business. When the slaves were taken from their homeland, the primary social unit was destroyed, and all immediate tribal and family ties were ruthlessly broken. This meant the severing of the link that gave the individual African a sense of *persona*. There is no more hapless victim than one who is cut off from family, from language, from one's roots.⁶

The slave's arrival on a plantation offered no relief from this injustice—usually only backbreaking labor. It was expected of one slave to pick 150 pounds of cotton a day. However during harvest season, many slaves were expected to do much more. For example, “In 1830, fourteen Mississippi slaves each picked an average of 323 pounds of cotton in one day.”⁷ Slaves that did not work as hard as the master or overseer wanted would face the inhumanity of the lash. Beatings on plantations were a common occurrence. Many slave owners believed that “Africans were a childlike race and should be punished just as children were punished. . . . Almost none disclaimed the whipping as an effective form of punishment, and the excessive use of the lash was one of the most flagrant abuses of the institution.”⁸

Slaves were also expected to live in nothing more than sheds or huts and survive on slim rations. Cabins often had only dirt floors, walls that failed to keep the elements out, and usually no windows. Weekly food supplies for the typical adult slave was “about a peck of meal and three to four pounds of meat [usually salt pork].”⁹ Booker T. Washington describes lean times on the plantation when he had to eat Indian corn that had been boiled for cattle feed: “At the times when I had failed to get any other breakfast, I used to go to the places where the cows and pigs

⁶ Howard Thurman, *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*, (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1975), 35.

⁷ Franklin and Moss, 129.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 129.

were fed and make my breakfast off the boiled corn, or else go to the place where it was the custom to boil the corn and get my share there before it was taken to the animals.”¹⁰ Clothing for the slave consisted of clothing made from “jeans, linseys, kerseys, and onasburgs for the men and calico and homespun fabrics for the women. Shoes, called ‘Negro brogans,’ were not provided except for the winter months.”¹¹ The fabrics used in slave clothing were heavy and of a very coarse texture much like burlap or twill.

Slaves needed a way to cope with the harsh reality of their cruel existence. One of the ways slaves dealt with their reality was to make music, much as they did in their homelands. Music is of paramount importance in the African culture. Bruno Nettl advises, “It cannot be denied that Africans, on the whole, do participate in musical life much more—and more actively singing, playing, composing, dancing—than do members of Western civilization. . . Music in Africa can be said to have a greater or more important role than it does in Western civilization.”¹² In this foreign land, slaves used music as a psychological tool to process their struggles for freedom and survival. W. E. B. Dubois called spirituals sorrow songs; they were “music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways.”¹³ According to Hall Johnson, slaves brought from Africa: ¹⁴

¹⁰ Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education: Begin Chapters From My Experience*, (New York, Doubleday, Page and Company: 1911), 7, accessed October 8, 2015, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/washeducation/washing.html>.

¹¹ Franklin and Moss, 129.

¹² Bruno Nettl, *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents* (1965): Quoted in Thomas, *Way Over in Beulah Lan’: Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual* (Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2007), 5.

¹³ W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1961), 183.

¹⁴ Hall Johnson, “Notes on the Negro Spiritual,” (1965), quoted in *Readings in Black American Music*, comp. and ed. Eileen Southern, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 271.

1. Fine natural VOICES, developed by centuries of habitual singing out-of-doors.
2. An unerring sense of DRAMATIC VALUES, —words and music—due to the wide variety of their functional songs.
3. A dazzling facility in IMPROVISATION and EMBELLISHMENT.
4. Above all, and underlying all, a supreme understanding of the basic laws of RHYTHM—with all its implications and potentialities as applied to music.

They discovered in the New World—

1. A more serviceable MUSICAL SCALE—with longer range but smaller intervals.
2. A Wider view of music structure by the use of the METRICAL PHRASE.
3. The sensuous delight of rich HARMONY and exciting COUNTER-POINT.
4. Lasty, the powerful, unifying psychological effects of GOOD PART-SINGING.

This combination of the slaves' natural musical ability, Western musical concepts, and the slaves' need to comment on their struggles gave birth to the spiritual. Benjamin May, former president of Morehouse College describes the birth of the spiritual as a tool for assimilation, "The creation of the spiritual was no accident. It was a creation born of necessity, so that the slave might more adequately adjust himself to the conditions of the new world."¹⁵ Assimilation was basic for the slave's survival in this new land.

With President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation ending legal slavery in the United States in 1863 and with the end of the Civil War in 1865, African Americans were finally free. Thankfully, former slaves passed their songs down to younger generations and musicologists such as William Allen (1830-1889), Charles Ware (1840-1921), and Lucy Garrison (1842-1877) collected their songs. These songs are the basis for many modern concert arrangements of spirituals.

¹⁵ Benjamin, May, quoted in André Thomas, *Way Over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*, (Dayton OH, Heritage Music Press: 2007), 5.

From the Field to the Concert Hall

Spirituals were originally heard in the fields on southern plantations. Slaves sang for many reasons while working. Richard Crawford comments, “Communal work songs help workers [slaves] fulfill their tasks by pacing their activity, coordinating their movements, and rallying their spirits.”¹⁶ According to Frederick Douglass, slave owners even expected their slaves to sing. Douglass explains, “A silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers. ‘Make a noise,’ ‘make a noise,’ and ‘bear a hand,’ are the words usually addressed to the slaves when there is silence amongst them. This may account for the almost constant singing heard in the southern states.”¹⁷ Slaves also sang in order to pass along secret messages to other slaves. In *Black Song*, John Lovell, Jr., shares:¹⁸

Russell Ames and others have recorded how Harriet Tubman used “Go Down Moses” to call up her candidates for transportation to free land; she also used “Wade in the Water” to warn her friends how to throw bloodhounds off the scent. Nat Turner used “Steal Away” to call his conspirators together. “The Chariot’s A-Comin’” was a clear reference, via “singing telegraph,” to the overhanging shadow in the neighborhood of a conductor for the Underground Railroad. “Good News, Member” reported by the same great telegraph that a runaway slave had reached freedom. “Foller de Drinkin’ Gou’d” (the drinking gourd was the Big Dipper in the sky) was a musical and poetic map of one line in the network of the Underground Railroad.

Ironically, many slave owners used their slaves’ singing as a way to keep track of their locations on the plantation as well as a way to assess the slaves’ moods.

In addition to the singing of spirituals on plantations, spirituals were sung in the slaves’ worship services. However, V. F. Calverton is quoted as saying “there is more, far more than the ordinary Christian zeal embedded in Negro spirituals. They are not mere religious hymns written or recited to sweeten the service or improve the ritual. They are the aching, poignant cry

¹⁶ Richard Crawford, *An Introduction to America’s Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 250.

¹⁷ Frederick Douglass, quoted in Crawford, *An Introduction to America’s Music*, 249.

¹⁸ John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and The Flame* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), 196.

of an entire people.”¹⁹ Slave worship services were different than those of the white Christians. Often times, slaves were not allowed to congregate at all. On many plantations, the slaves held clandestine worship services. According to Southern, many “scholars refer to the religious community of slaves that existed outside the formal church as ‘the invisible institution’ or ‘the invisible church.’”²⁰ In these services there would be singing of mostly improvised songs, dancing a ring-shout, and testimonies offered by members of the congregation. If one of the slaves could read, there might be a reading from the Bible. If no one could read a slave would offer an “exhortation based on a passage of the Bible that he had memorized.”²¹ It was in these worship services that the songs of the field became the songs that we know as the spiritual.

The first collection of slave songs was compiled by William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison and published in 1867 under the title *Slave Songs of the United States*. The first publication of this book contained only melodies and texts transcribed from slaves living off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina at the end of Civil War. According to Thomas, “the editors [*Slave Songs of the United States*] felt they had a finite amount of time to collect this music, sharing in the preface their feelings that many of the slaves were hesitant to sing these old spiritual songs and that the spiritual would soon be superseded by the new style of religious music that was imitative of white people.”²² Thankfully due to the work of Allen, Ware, and Garrison, spirituals have survived. And, thanks to contributions of arrangers such as Harry Burleigh, Nathaniel Dett, Moses Hogan, and countless others, spirituals have successfully transitioned from the fields of slavery to become one of America’s greatest

¹⁹ V. F. Calverton, “The Negro and American Culture,” quoted in Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in The United States*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1953), 25.

²⁰ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 179.

²¹ Ibid., 179-180.

²² Thomas, *Way Over*, 13.

musical treasures. Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949) is credited with being one of the first arrangers of spirituals. Burleigh had a great reverence for spirituals and is quoted as saying, “Spirituals are the only legacy of slavery of which the race can be proud. Into the making of these spirituals was poured the aspirations of a race in bondage whose religion, intensely felt, was their only hope and comfort. They rank with the great folk music of the world.”²³

From all accounts, Burleigh was a fine baritone vocalist.²⁴ He attended the National Conservatory of Music in New York during the tenure of Antonín Dvořák. According to Thomas, “It was Burleigh who introduced him [Dvořák] to the spiritual. They became friends and often Burleigh would copy manuscripts for Dvořák. When Dvořák arranged the song ‘Old Folks at Home,’ Burleigh was the soloist for the performance.”²⁵ Dvořák was a great supporter of Burleigh and his encouragement may have led to the arrangements Burleigh would later create. Just before the New York premiere of his Symphony No 9, Dvořák is quoted as saying, “I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States.”²⁶ Burleigh later created many arrangements of spirituals for both solo voice and chorus.

In addition to Burleigh’s work to bring spirituals to the forefront of American music, the Fisk Jubilee Singers did much to help establish the spiritual as a part of the standard choral repertoire. Following the Civil War, Fisk University in Nashville was organized to educate freed slaves. One of the school’s faculty members, George L. White, gathered a group of Fisk students

²³ Harry T. Burleigh, quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 23.

²⁴ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 271.

²⁵ Thomas, *Way Over*, 21.

²⁶ Antonín Dvořák, “Dvořák on Negro Melodies,” *The Musical Record* (Boston) July 1893, p. 13, quoted in Southern, *The Music of*, 267.

to sing at a national teachers' convention that was held in Nashville in 1870. Their performance, which focused on spirituals, was received so well that they embarked on a tour in the fall of 1871. During this and subsequent tours, which encompassed the Northeast as well as the British Isles and Europe, the Fisk Jubilee Singers raised over \$150,000 between 1871 and 1878 to help fund the fledgling school.²⁷ The amount that the Fisk Jubilee Singers raised in the 1870s would be worth between three and three and a half million dollars today. According to Southern, "They went on to sing at places in the United States that had never before heard folk music of black America, before crowned heads of Europe, and before the common people in Germany, Switzerland, and Great Britain. Everywhere the Singers 'carried their audiences by storm' and won acclaim from the critics."²⁸ The Fisk Jubilee Singers carried the songs of slaves far from the humble beginnings on Southern plantations and helped to codify, along with countless others, the spiritual as a part of the standard choral repertoire.

Early arrangements of spirituals varied greatly in texture and harmonization. Some early arrangers, such as Harry T. Burleigh, chose to set the spirituals in a simple and straightforward way. One author describes Burleigh's solo arrangement of "Deep River" in the following way: "The piano accompaniments in his arrangements rarely overpower the simple melodies but rather set and sustain a dominant emotional mood throughout the song. Chromatic harmonies are used within the basically diatonic coloring, but discreetly, so as not to destroy the balance between piano and vocal line."²⁹ Burleigh said that in his arrangements, his desire "was to preserve them [spirituals] in harmonies that belong to modern methods of tonal progression without robbing the

²⁷ Crawford, 258-259.

²⁸ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 229.

²⁹ Ibid., 271.

melodies of their racial flavor.”³⁰ Harry Burleigh’s work advanced the status of the spiritual from folk music to concert music. R. Nathaniel Dett comments, “Burleigh was preeminent in advancing the art of serious Negro music.”³¹

Dett (1882-1943), unlike Burleigh, resisted using African American traditional music as a basis for composition. According to Dett:³²

The Negro people as a whole cannot be looked to as a very great aid in the work of conserving their folk music. At the present time they are inclined to regard it as a vestige of the slavery they are trying to put behind them and to be ashamed of it. Moreover, the prevailing manner of presenting Negro music to the public—the ‘coon’ song of vaudeville or the minstrel show—has not tended to increase appreciation of it, either among the Negro or white races.

According to Anne Key Simpson, Dett, after hearing a performance of Dvorak’s *American Quartet* performed at Oberlin College, began considering the use of traditional music as a basis for classical music.³³ Dett remarked about the performance, “Suddenly it seemed I heard again the frail sweet voice of my long-departed grandmother, calling across the years; and, in a rush of emotion, which stirred my spirit to its very center, the meaning of the songs, which had given her soul such peace, was revealed to me.”³⁴

Dett’s compositions utilizing folk music material fall into two categories. One category is characterized by what Thomas describes as Dett’s attempt at writing “harmonizations that are

³⁰ Harry Burliegh, quoted Southern, *The Music of*, 271.

³¹ R. Nathaniel Dett, “Negro Music,” *International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians*, quoted in John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song*, 196.

³² R. Nathaniel Dett, “Helping to Lay Foundation for Negro Music of Future,” *Black Perspecitve in Music* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1973) 64-69. Previously published in *Musical America* (July 8, 1918), quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 25.

³³ Anne Key Simpson, *Follow Me: The Life and Music of R. Nathaniel Dett* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1993) 21-22, quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 25.

³⁴ R. Nathaniel Dett, quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 25.

simple and authentic, based on the singing of these songs by the Hampton students.”³⁵ Despite Dett’s “simple and authentic” treatment of these spirituals, he was often criticized for over polishing these works. George Pullen Jackson, when referring to some of Dett’s arrangements, wrote:³⁶

R. Nathaniel Dett has done excellent editing of the textual material he inherited from the earlier Fenner Hampton compilation (1874) of songs recorded from oral tradition and borrowed from the Fisk collection; and his tunes are musically handled—perhaps too musicianly, for with their inappropriate and over-generous Italian expression, directions, and other artifices, one sees that they are polished up for the technically refined concert stage, a treatment which makes the song less valuable to those who would learn something of Negro folk music as it really was.

The second category is marked by the use of a spiritual theme with which Dett constructs a composition. His “Listen to the Lambs” is a prime example of this type of writing.

Moses Hogan (1957-2003) is credited as being “the composer/arranger who revitalized the performance of spirituals.”³⁷ Hogan, like Burleigh, was a well-trained musician who was schooled in some of the finest conservatories in the United States and has left a wealth of choral music. As a result of his training and his background in an African-American Baptist church, his arrangements are inspired by spirituals but do not necessarily reflect what he heard while attending church as a child.³⁸ Unlike Burleigh’s straightforward arrangements of spirituals, Hogan’s arrangements can be challenging even for the best choirs. Unfortunately Hogan died in 2003 at the age of forty-five. Thankfully we have many recordings of his works performed by his two professional choirs, the Moses Hogan Chorale and the Moses Hogan Singers. According to Isaiah R. McGee in his dissertation entitled “The Origin and Development of Prominent

³⁵ Thomas, *Way Over*, 26.

³⁶ George Pullen Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals: Their Life Span and Kindship* (New York: Augustin, 1944) 141-142, quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 27.

³⁷ Thomas, *Way Over*, 72.

³⁸ Ibid.

Professional Black Choirs in the United States,” Hogan “published over 70 works and was an editor for the new Oxford Book of Spirituals. . .Hogan’s arrangements have become greatly used by choral musicians world-wide.”³⁹

Conclusion

Slaves created spirituals as a coping mechanism in order to deal with the cruelty of the slavery that was forced upon them. Taken from their homeland on the western coast of Africa, slaves came from tribes that had a long history of creating music. Music was a part of every aspect of their lives—work, play, courting, celebration, mourning, and worship.⁴⁰ Finding themselves in a new environment where they lived under the rule of another race, slaves began creating music in songs. With the influence of Christianity in the United States, slaves began using parts of the biblical narrative, primarily the Old Testament, to create a genre of music known as the spiritual. These songs have survived and have been arranged into choral works that are heard in concert halls all around the world. Arrangers, such as Harry Burleigh, R. Nathaniel Dett, and Moses Hogan, have taken spirituals and have elevated them to a level of artistic expression that could have been scarcely imagined by most slaves of the mid-nineteenth century.

³⁹ Isaiah R. McGee, “The Origin and Historical Development of Prominent Professional Black Choirs in the United States” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2007), 106, accessed September 12, 2014, <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3662&context=etd>.

⁴⁰ Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books: 1993), 3.

CHAPTER II

Use of Dialect

When performing spirituals, singers and choral conductors must consider the use of dialect. Oxford Dictionaries.com defines dialect as “A particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group.”⁴¹ When discussing spirituals, the dialect used is sometimes referred to as slave dialect. Felicia Barber has researched the linguistics of slave dialect and refers to the dialect as African American Vernacular English (AAVE).⁴² In his dissertation “Guidelines for the Classical Singer of Non-classical American Song,” Jonathan Wayne Pilkington describes dialect in the following way:⁴³

“Slave dialect,” as several authors refer to it, was a result of the acquisition of a new language by the African slaves. Just as many twenty-first century Americans have difficulty pronouncing certain sounds that are foreign to the English language, the slaves had difficulty pronouncing some of the sounds as they were learning English. When the spirituals were written down, the collectors or arrangers of the songs wrote the words as they heard them. For example, “the Jordan River” might have been written down as “de Jerdin Ribbah.” This does not indicate any lack of intelligence on the part of the original singer, and it does not indicate any disrespect on the part of the person who transcribed the song. It should be viewed as merely an effort to record the original, authentic character of the song.

The development of AAVE was an attempt for slaves to communicate in a new language with other slaves as well as with slave owners. James Weldon Johnson describes the birth of dialect as a “result of the effort of the slave to establish a medium of communication between himself and his master. This he did by dropping his original language, and formulating a

⁴¹ “Dialect,” Oxford Online Dictionaries, accessed Nov 19, 2014, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/dialect>.

⁴² Felicia Barber, interviewed by the author via phone, August 7, 2015.

⁴³ Jonathan Wayne Pilkington, “Guidelines for the Classical Singer of Non-classical American Song,” (DMA diss., University of Georgia, 2014), 43, accessed Nov. 2, 2014, https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/pilkington_jonathan_w_201405_dma.pdf.

phonologically and grammatically simplified English.”⁴⁴ It is important to note that dialect was not consistently used throughout the south or even on nearby plantations. When gathering songs for *Slave Songs of the United States*, Allen, Ware, and Garrison noted that “different plantations have their own peculiarities, and adepts profess to be able to determine by the speech of a negro what part of an island he belongs to, or even, in some cases, his plantation.”⁴⁵

Despite the variations in dialect throughout the south and among plantations, there are some concepts for using dialect that are somewhat standardized. One rule is that of phonetic decay in which some final consonants are dropped. For example, dropping the final “g” or final “d” in some words, so *morning* becomes *mornin’* and *world* becomes *worl’*.⁴⁶ Another concept is the dialect of *de* [di] for *the*. According to James Weldon Johnson, “It is pronounced *dee* [di] when it precedes words beginning with a vowel sound, and *duh* [də] before those beginning with a consonant sound. In this it follows the rule for the article *the*.”⁴⁷ Rosephanye Dunn-Powell offers the following guidelines for using dialect in the performance of spirituals:⁴⁸

Vowels

1. The article “a” is normally pronounced [ə].
2. The diphthong [aɪ] is pronounced [a]. Example: “sky,” is pronounced [ska].
3. When the letter “a” precedes or follows a hyphen, it will be pronounced [ə].
Example: In the phrase “I’ve got a home in-a dat rock,” the pronunciation is [ɪnə].
In the phrase “Keep a-inchin’ along,” the pronunciation is [əɪntʃɪn].
4. When “a” or “e” lies between two consonants in the last unstressed syllable of a word, it will be pronounced as schwa [ə]. Example: “Beulah” is pronounced [bjulə].

⁴⁴ James Weldon Johnson, “A Note On Dialect,” *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* (1925): preface, quoted in Moses Hogan, ed., *The Oxford Book of Spirituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), xvii.

⁴⁵ William Francis Allen, Charles Picard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States*, (1867; repr., New York: Oak Publications, 1965), xxiii.

⁴⁶ Anton Armstrong, quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 183.

⁴⁷ James Weldon Johnson, xviii.

⁴⁸ Rosephanye Dunn-Powell, “The African-American Spiritual: Preparation and Performance Considerations,” *Journal of Singing* 61, no. 5 (May/June 2005): 472-473.

5. In final syllables ending in “er,” the *r* is dropped and the “e” is pronounced [ə].
Example: “Peter” is pronounced [pɪdə].

Consonants

1. Generally, final consonants will be unspoken or lightly articulated. Example: The word “blind” is pronounced [blaɪn]. The *d* may be lightly articulated by gently stopping the tongue against the roof of the mouth.
2. Final consonants may be strongly articulated when indicated by the arranger or for dramatic purposes.
3. In words ending in “ing,” the *g* is dropped. The resulting syllable is [ɪn]. Example: “going” is pronounced [ɡoɪn].
4. An interior *t* is often pronounced as [d]. Example, “city” is pronounced [sɪdɪ].
5. The combination *th* as in “that” is pronounced as the single consonant [d].
Example: “that” is pronounced [dæt].
6. The combination *th* as in “thick” is pronounced as the single consonant [t].
Example: “thick” is pronounced [tɪk].
7. The article “the” before a word beginning with a vowel is pronounced [di].
8. The article “the” before a word beginning with a consonant is pronounced [də].
9. Generally, clear distinctions between the beginnings and endings of words are blurred. Most vowels and consonants are elided with the preceding or proceeding vowel or consonant. Also, the consonant ending a word or syllable is delayed and sung with the beginning consonant of the next word or syllable. Example: “My soul’s been anchored in the Lord” is pronounced [ma sol sbɪnɛ:ɪnkə dɪn də lɔd].

Following these rules will aid the singer in appropriately using dialect in performance. See Figures 2.1 and 2.2 for examples of standard English pronunciation verses AAVE pronunciation.

Figure 2.1. “My Lord, What A Morning,” Standard English Pronunciation.

My Lord, what a morning [mɑ:ɪ lɔ:ɪd wʌt ə 'mɔ:ɪn ɪŋ] when the stars begin to fall. [wɛn ðə stɑ:ɪz bɪ'ɡɪn tu fɔl]

Figure 2.2. “My Lord, What A Morning,” AAVE Pronunciation.

My Lord, what a morning [ma lɔ dwɑ də 'mɔn ɪn] when the stars begin to fall. [wɪn də stɑz bə'ɡɪn tə fɔl]

Dr. Dunn-Powell also offers the following advice on preparing the spiritual for performance. While her comments are directed towards vocal soloists, they certainly are applicable to the choral setting. First, vocalists and conductors should research the song, its historical background, the composer, the stylistic elements, and the culture of slavery. Secondly, study the text, its meaning as well as possible hidden messages that other slaves would have understood. Thirdly, speak the text repeatedly while using dialect. Just as in preparing an art song in a different language, singers must work to put stress on the appropriate syllables.

Finally, the conductor, should be able to “feel” the music and be able to communicate this to the choir and, ultimately, the choir to the audience.⁴⁹ The use of dialect must ultimately lead to the communication of the meaning and drama of the song to the audience. James Weldon Johnson offers the following comments regarding interpretation:⁵⁰

I think white singers, concert singers, can sing Spirituals—if they feel them. But to feel them it is necessary to know the thought about their origin and history, to get in touch with the association of ideas that surround them, and to realize something of what they have meant in the experiences of the people who created them. In a word, the capacity to feel the songs while singing them is more important than any amount of mere artistic technique. Singers who take the Spirituals as mere “art” songs and singers who make of them an exhibition of what is merely amusing or exotic are equally doomed to failure, so far as true interpretation is concerned.

Appropriateness of Dialect

Today’s choral conductor has the choice of using dialect or standard English when performing spirituals. The most striking reason to use dialect is that it adds authenticity to the performance. Anton Armstrong, conductor of the world-famous St. Olaf Choir observes, “those who attempt to bring the greatest integrity and some aspect of authenticity to the performance [of spirituals] seem to favor the use of slave dialect.”⁵¹ André Thomas also favors the use of dialect to add authenticity to performances. He offers:⁵²

Just as the use of dialect in literature allows a writer to present a more complete picture of a character, the use of dialect within a concert spiritual helps to create a stylistically appropriate performance of these arrangements. It is similar to the use of German Latin when performing Latin texts set by Mozart. This was the language that was in Mozart’s ear when he composed; why not try to recreate that?

⁴⁹ Dunn-Powell, 471.

⁵⁰ James Weldon Johnson, quoted in Dunn-Powell, 471.

⁵¹ Anton Armstrong, quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 183.

⁵² Thomas, *Way Over*, 89.

By trying to recreate the dialect the composer would have had in their ear, the choir can add much drama and authenticity to the performance of the spiritual.

Despite these reasons to use dialect, some conductors may feel uncomfortable with the use of dialect. Pilkington states:⁵³

Due to the racial history of the United States, particularly the blackface minstrelsy of the nineteenth century, singers may be uncomfortable using the slave dialect in performances of spirituals. White singers may fear that their performance might be viewed as a mockery or a caricature, and black singers may fear that their performance will place them in a stereotype that they would rather avoid. Either fear is legitimate, and each singer should decide how much, if any, of the slave dialect they are comfortable using.

Historically, some choirs such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, chose not to use dialect when performing spirituals. John Graziano writes:⁵⁴

The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Hampton Students, avoided the use of dialect when they performed spirituals as part of their programs. The Fisk Singers' book *The Story of the Jubilee Singers* (Marsh 1880) and their later recordings (after 1909) offer their repertory in standard English. . . Undoubtedly, the use of standard English in these publications and in public performances reflected a desire to demonstrate that African Americans were educated and could speak and sing in standard English.

In addition to wanting to sound educated, many African-Americans chose not to perform spirituals with dialect because of the derogatory caricatures of slaves created by performers in minstrel shows that depicted life on the plantations.⁵⁵

Despite the legitimate misgivings a choral conductor may have regarding the use of dialect when performing spirituals, its use can add much authenticity to the performance of a spiritual. André Thomas offers the following thoughts:⁵⁶

⁵³ Pilkington, 43.

⁵⁴ John Graziano, "The Use of Dialect in African-American Spirituals, Popular Songs, and Folk Songs," *Black Music Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): 261, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4145494>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Thomas, *Way Over*, 90.

If you are hesitant to include any dialect because, as I've heard often from conductors, you 'don't want to make blacks sound ignorant,' 'don't want to disrespect this culture,' or 'don't want embarrass or otherwise make uncomfortable the black students in my choir,' I offer a respectful, 'just chill out folks.'

I think of dialect as adding a little seasoning to the piece. And just as when making dinner, if the 'seasoning' brings attention to itself, it is probably too much. Along those same lines, the dialect shouldn't be forced or overdone, and unwritten accents certainly shouldn't be added on those words. Most importantly, though, all of us strive to create positive experiences for our singers, so if anything I did ran counter to that, I would certainly stop.

Moses Hogan also used dialect to create a more stylistically appropriate performance of the spiritual. According to Loneka Battiste, members of the Moses Hogan Chorale remember how Hogan approached the use of dialect in spirituals:

Richard [former member of Moses Hogan Chorale] remembered, 'He wanted to produce a sound that was respectful of the culture.' Joshua [another former member] appreciated Hogan's attention to dialect and how he sought to maintain authenticity. 'He [Hogan] didn't try to make something sound other than it would have been sang [sic] in the fields, you know. He kept those sounds and . . . the way people talked during that time.'⁵⁷

Working towards stylistically authentic performances will add yet another facet to a performance of an African American spiritual. Choral conductors need not worry about using dialect if they approach its use in an honest, informed, and respectful manner.

Conclusion

Today's choral conductor must be comfortable performing music in many different genres and languages. The spiritual, just as other genres of choral music, brings opportunities for choirs to offer stylistically authentic performances. One way the choral conductor can add authenticity to the performance of spirituals is through the use of dialect. Choral conductors

⁵⁷ Loneka Wilkinson Battiste, "'Music Down In My Soul': Achieving a Sound Ideal for Moses Hogan Spirituals" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2014), 123, accessed Jan. 12, 2015, <http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-11082014-001347/>.

must make sure the use of dialect is done with care and respect. Spirituals using dialect must be performed with the same care one would take to effectively sing music in any foreign language. Dunn-Powell suggests “that non-black singers approach the performance of the spiritual in the same manner they would approach a French *mélodie*, German lied, or English folk song.”⁵⁸ The text of the song must be studied and practiced in order to find the natural stress of the words and the use of dialect should be used to add another layer of authenticity to the performance.

According to Pilkington, “Understanding the history and feeling the emotion of spirituals are the first steps for a singer who chooses to sing them, and this can guide all aspects in the preparation of a spiritual for performance.”⁵⁹ This understanding should be the goal of the choral conductor who wishes to offer both choir members and audience an authentic performance of a spiritual.

Finally, choral conductors would do well to follow the advice given by André Thomas regarding the use of dialect. He states that “if the ‘seasoning’ [use of dialect] brings attention to itself, it is probably too much.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Dunn-Powell, 471.

⁵⁹ Pilkington, 50.

⁶⁰ Thomas, *Way Over*, 90.

CHAPTER III

Subtext and Symbolism in Spiritual Lyrics

Spirituals have a wealth of symbols and subtext contained within their stanzas. Use of subtext is one of the ways slaves used to express common themes in spirituals. Lovell, in *The Social Implication of the Negro Spiritual*, states that there are three central themes found in spirituals: “(1) a desire for freedom; (2) a ‘desire for justice in the judgment upon his betrayers’; and (3) ‘a tactic battle, the strategy by which he expected to gain an eminent future’.”⁶¹ African American slaves used subtext to express these themes without the knowledge of their captors. Author Lauri Ramey states, “In most African American literature, subtext is an enormously significant presence, as it is in the lives of the authors and the characters they depict. One says one thing and means another, and which message is the real meaning is often discernable, by design, to the ‘self’ but not to the ‘other’.”⁶² It is in this technique of “double voicing” that subtext and symbolism are most used in spirituals.

Using the inspiration of Biblical narratives taken primarily from the Old Testament, slaves carefully chose lyrics that expressed their desire for freedom. Drawing from the stories of the Hebrews and their struggle for freedom under the oppression of Pharaoh, slaves identified with the Hebrews and their bondage. Arthur Jones states, “The stories of the Old Testament held particularly special meaning. . . . The stories of the Hebrew children became their stories. In their spiritual imagination they lived and breathed the experiences of such biblical heroes as David,

⁶¹ John Lovell, “The Social Implications of the Negro Spiritual,” in Bernard Katz (ed.), *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 128.

⁶² Lauri Ramey, “The Theology of the Lyric Tradition in African American Spirituals,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70, no. 2 (June 2002): 355, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1466466>.

Daniel, Moses and Joshua, all engaged in divinely inspired battles for freedom.”⁶³ These were not merely songs of religious piety as many captors thought. These were songs that spoke of a coming day when slaves, like the Hebrew people, would be led to freedom and delivered from their captors. Charshee Charlotte Lawrence-McIntyre states, “Slaves viewed themselves as God’s children, the chosen people of their time, analogous to the Israelites of ancient Bible times.”⁶⁴ Marvin V. Curtis affirms, “Although the song text was religious in character, it included social, political, and theological overtones. Much of the meaning was purposely embedded in the religious text to thwart those outside the community from understanding the true meaning.”⁶⁵ Consider the text of the spiritual “Go Down, Moses.”⁶⁶

When Israel was in Egypt land,
Let my people go;
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go.

“Thus saith the Lord,” bold Moses said,
Let my people go;
If not, I’ll smite your first-born dead,
Let my people go.

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land.
Tell ole Pharaoh,
Let my people go!

A surface reading of this text is a retelling of the Exodus story. A look into the subtext of these lyrics reveal a captive people that believed God would indeed deliver them from the hands of

⁶³ Jones, 42.

⁶⁴ Charshee Charlotte Lawrence-McIntyre, “The Double Meanings of the Spirituals,” *Journal of Black Studies* 17, no. 4 (June 1987), 396, accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.jstore.org/stable/2784158>.

⁶⁵ Marvin V. Curtis, “African-American Spirituals and the Gospel Music: Historical Similarities and Differences,” *The Choral Journal* 41, no. 8 (March 2001): 12, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://www.jstore.org/stable/2355686>.

⁶⁶ *Songs of Zion*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 112.

their enslavers, the southern Pharoses. Who would this new “Moses” be? This new Moses could be seen in the person of Abraham Lincoln or perhaps in the person of Harriet Tubman.

According to the Library of Congress online article “African American Spirituals,” “A spiritual that was certainly used as a code for escape to freedom was ‘Go down, Moses,’ used by Harriet Tubman to identify herself to slaves who might want to flee north.”⁶⁷ Israel is a symbol for the slaves, and Egypt land is the south.

Slaves also used subtext to express a desire for God’s judgment against those that had enslaved them. They also did this is a coded language. Recognizing the hypocrisy of the slave holders, slaves saw the disconnect between a belief system that taught love of other humans and the rule of divine will, and a people that would abuse and enslave another race.⁶⁸ One spiritual speaks to this contradiction and God’s judgment on the captors:⁶⁹

I got a robe,
You got a robe,
All God’s children got a robe.
When I get to Heaven gonna put on my robe,
Gonna shout all over God’s Heaven, Heaven, Heaven!
Everbody talkin’ ‘bout Heaven ain’t going there,
Heaven, Heaven.
Gonna shout all over God’s Heaven.

Slaves believed that eventually owners and overseers would face judgment for their crimes—
“Everbody talkin’ ‘bout Heaven ain’t going there.” According to Jones, “Unbeknownst to slave holders, who thought songs like this to be playful and frivolous, the slave composer of this song used poetic subtlety to poke fun at the hypocrisy of the uncomprehending outsider, rejoicing in

⁶⁷ “African American Spirituals,” Library of Congress, accessed Sept. 10, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495#item-article>.

⁶⁸ Jones, 7.

⁶⁹ Songs of Zion, 82.

the confident knowledge that the final judgment of the divine ruler would prevail.”⁷⁰ The slave would sing this song with a smile on his or her face while the Christian slave master was unaware of the feelings his slaves held. One spiritual states, “Got one mind for the boss to see; Got another mind for what I know is me.”⁷¹ Slave owners were often unaware of the feelings their slaves held towards them. Cone states that “another ingredient of slave ethics was deception. To survive in an oppressive society, it is necessary to outsmart the oppressors and make them think that you are what you know you are not. It is to make them believe that you accept their definitions of black and white.”⁷²

Slaves also used subtext in order to secretly work towards their freedom. These spirituals fall into two groups, signal songs and map songs. According to the website “Sweet Chariot: The Story of the Spirituals,” “in a signal song, a singer or group of singers communicated in code that a certain event—such as a planned escape from a plantation—was eminent. In a map song, the lyrics actually contained elements of a map that directed people to significant points of escape along the routes of the Underground Railroad.”⁷³ Nat Turner used the signal song “*Steal Away to Jesus*” to call fellow slaves to secret meetings when planning a revolt in Virginia.⁷⁴ The Library of Congress’ article on African American Spirituals states:⁷⁵

Spirituals are also sometimes regarded as codified protest songs, with songs such as “Steal Away to Jesus,” composed by Wallis Willis, being seen by some commentators as

⁷⁰ Jones, 8.

⁷¹ John Lovell, “The Social Implications”, 129.

⁷² James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and The Blues* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 26.

⁷³ “Spirituals As Coded Communication,” *Sweet Chariot: The Story of the Spirituals*, accessed Sept. 10, 2015, <http://www.spiritualsproject.org/sweetchariot/Freedom/coded.php>.

⁷⁴ “Music,” *Pathways to Freedom: Maryland and the Underground Railroad*, accessed Sept. 10, 2015, <http://pathways.thinkport.org/secrets/music2.cfm>.

⁷⁵ “African American Spirituals,” Library of Congress.

incitements to escape slavery. Because the Underground Railroad of the mid-nineteenth century used terminology from railroads as a secret language for assisting slaves to freedom, it is often speculated that songs like “I Got My Ticket” may have been a code for escape. Hard evidence is difficult to come by because assisting slaves to freedom was illegal.

These signal songs gave slaves a way to operate without raising the suspicions of the slave masters. Escape to the north was one of the few options a slave in the south had for freedom, and the use of signal songs was one of the few tools slaves had with which to communicate safely. According to one source, “Since the struggle for freedom was such a salient part of daily life experience of enslaved people, it was critical for them to have a safe means of communication with each other, and their songs were an essential tool in this effort.”⁷⁶

Map songs are also a type of coded songs. In spirituals such as “Wade in the Water” and “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” slaves were given clues as to how to navigate to the north where they could find freedom. Jones states that “Follow the Drinking Gourd” “directed runaway slaves to keep traveling in the direction of the Big Dipper.”⁷⁷ “Wade in the Water” was originally composed for the Christian ritual of baptism. However, Harriet Tubman used “Wade in the Water” with improvised lyrics to signal to runaway slaves that their safest form of travel was in the creeks and the rivers because bloodhounds trained to track fugitives would lose the scent in the water:⁷⁸

Jordan’s water is chilly and cold,
God’s going to trouble the water,
It chills the body but lifts the soul,
God’s going to trouble the water.

Wade in the water,
Wade in the water, children.

⁷⁶ “Spirituals As Coded Communication,” *Sweet Chariot: The Story of the Spirituals*.

⁷⁷ Jones, 45.

⁷⁸ Jones, 50-51.

Wade in the water,

If you get there before I do,
God's going to trouble the water,
Tell all of my friends I'm comin' too . . .

In addition to the use of subtext, spirituals are rich with symbolism. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines symbolism as “the art or practice of using symbols especially by investing things with a symbolic meaning or by expressing the invisible or intangible by means of visible or sensuous representations.”⁷⁹ As in the use of subtext, symbolism used in spirituals was often veiled so that those outside of the slave community would not understand the true meaning of the lyrics. According to Cone, “Slaves lived in a society without any political, economic, or personal security, and they had to camouflage their deepest feelings.”⁸⁰ Therefore, the symbolism found in spirituals was more than a literary device; it was a survival mechanism.

One symbol that is often seen in spirituals is “heaven.” In spirituals this term takes on many layers of meaning. One meaning is “the home for the faithful which has been prepared outside of history for God’s righteous servants. It’s the place of the great camp meeting in the Promised Land.”⁸¹ While most slaves understood this meaning and they certainly looked forward to this place, “heaven” had a much more immediate meaning. *Pathways to Freedom* states, “The slaves’ final goal was Canada, north of the U. S. border. Slavery was not permitted there, and American laws that allowed people to capture runaway slaves had no effect.”⁸² Other terms that can be used interchangeably with “heaven” include “Promised Land” and “Canaan.” Frederick

⁷⁹ “Symbolism,” Merriam-Webster Online, accessed September 7, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/symbolism>.

⁸⁰ Cone, 40.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸² “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” *Pathways to Freedom: Maryland and the Underground Railroad*, accessed Sept. 10, 2015, <http://pathways.thinkport.org/secrets/gourd1.cfm>.

Douglass stated that “A keen observer might have detected in our singing of ‘O Canaan, sweet Canaan. I am bound for the land of Canaan,’ something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach north—and the north was our Canaan.”⁸³

Another prominent symbol is the person of Jesus. Slaves identified with Christ as the suffering servant. In Jesus, the slaves saw someone who had done no wrong, yet was beaten and abused by those in power. According to Jones, “In their actual life experiences, enslaved Africans must have recognized the parallels between the crucifixion of Jesus and the hangings, whippings, and other violent abuses experienced by members of their own community.”⁸⁴ In Cone’s *The Spirituals and the Blues*, he speaks of Lovell’s interpretations for Jesus: “References to Satan, Jesus, and heaven [are] concrete possibilities for earthly freedom. Satan was ‘the people who beat or cheat the slave,’ and King Jesus was ‘whoever helps the oppressed and disenfranchised or gives him a right to his life.’ ‘Hell [was] often being sold South,’ and ‘Jordan [was] the push for freedom.’”⁸⁵

Conclusion

The anonymous authors of many slave songs used a rich tapestry of symbolism that would only be fully understood by those in the slave community. Symbolism and subtext were used as a means of survival and as a means of obtaining freedom. Slaves could sing about things and understand the true meaning while keeping the veil of secrecy well in place. The use of subtext in spirituals allowed slaves to pass along messages or give clues to their clandestine

⁸³ Frederick Douglass, *Readings in Black American Music*, Eileen Southern, ed., (New York, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.:1972), 87.

⁸⁴ Jones, 30.

⁸⁵ Cone, 15.

meetings and activities that worked toward freedom. It allowed them a safe and effective way of communication without arousing suspicion in their captors. An effective performance of spirituals must take into consideration both the surface meaning of lyrics as well as the overtones of unrest that are clearly there. A performance that only examines one aspect is incomplete.

CHAPTER IV

Movement

The choral tradition has long dictated that singers stand tall and often without much movement while performing. This is in direct contrast to instrumentalists who tend to move freely while they create music. Mary Ellen Pinzino states that for the chorister, “The whole body is the vocal instrument.”⁸⁶ Composer and conductor Helen Kemp was famous for using the phrase, “Body, mind, spirit, and voice, it takes the whole person to sing and rejoice.”⁸⁷ This phrase certainly reflects the singing of the slaves. For slaves, much like their African precursors, there was no singing without movement. In many African languages the word for music does not just mean music; it also means movement.⁸⁸ African tribes incorporate music with movement into every activity—work, celebration, and worship. According to John Lovell, Jr., “The African characteristically transforms acoustically or sensually received impulses into kinetic energy, that is, movement or motion.”⁸⁹ Slaves brought this movement in response to sound to the new world and continued to move as they sang the songs that became the spirituals. According to Rollo Dilworth:⁹⁰

Movement should be a part of every single spiritual that is performed. People often argue with me on that, then they ask why? Well that’s because when spirituals were conceived the slaves were moving when they sang them. That doesn’t mean we have to move in the

⁸⁶ Mary Ellen Pinzino, “Awakening Artistry in the Choral Rehearsal,” *Come Children Sing.com*, accessed December 20, 2015, http://www.comechildrensing.com/pdf/other_articles_by_MEP/1_Awakening_Artistry_In_the_Choral_Rehearsal.pdf.

⁸⁷ Helen Kemp, “An Interview with Anton Armstrong,” *Augsburg Fortress.org*, http://www.augsburgfortress.org/worship/anton_armstrong.jsp.

⁸⁸ Rollo Dilworth, interviewed by the author, Philadelphia, July 18, 2015. (See Appendix B).

⁸⁹ Lovell, 44.

⁹⁰ Dilworth, interview.

same way when we're performing a spiritual. But we cannot stand perfectly still because the movement that helped to create this music was very much inherent in the genesis of this music.

Therefore, choral conductors should incorporate movement into both the rehearsal and performance of the spiritual in order to create a more stylistically authentic experience for both the audience and performers. Dilworth goes on to say, "For us to separate the two [music and movement], I think again moves us a little bit further away from the mark of authenticity."⁹¹

Slave songs are direct descendants of the songs of Western Africa. In Africa, music is not just relegated to the role of entertainment as it is in some Western European societies. In contrast, music in Africa is a part of every aspect of their lives. According to A. A. Agordoh in his book *Studies in African Music*, he describes music's uses in African cultures:⁹²

Music is used for initiation ceremonies, rituals and sacrifices, death and funerals, for work, hunting and for healing. In the political organisation, the functions of music are apparent in songs sung in praise of chiefs and wealthy men. In the field of social organisation, functions of music for *rites de passage* [author's italics]—birth, puberty, marriage and death are apparent. Music is also as a social control—there is music to criticize those in authority. . . . There are work songs not only dealing with labour but also accompanying rhythmic work by groups, and making it easier. In economic life, songs function as an aid to co-operative labour e.g. in canoe paddling and hauling up of fishing nets in Africa. Songs are used as a historical device. . . . There is also copious use of music during traditional worship.

Lazarus Ekwueme has a similar view of African music: "Music serves the black peoples of the world in all facets of human life from the cradle to grave, or, more colloquially, 'from the womb to the tomb.'"⁹³ Agordoh goes on to say, "More than elsewhere, music [in Africa] is associated with dance."⁹⁴ Slaves brought these functions and the association of music with dance to the

⁹¹ Dilworth, interview.

⁹² A. A. Agordoh, *Studies in African Music* (Ho: New Age Publication, 1994), 28.

⁹³ Lazarus E. N. Ekwueme, "African-Music Retentions in the New World," *The Black Perspective in Music* 2, No. 2 (Autumn 1974): 129, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1214230>.

⁹⁴ A. A. Agordoh, 26.

Southern plantations. According to Dilworth, “They [spirituals] were not performed standing still in a concert hall, you know. Originally, they were, of course, conceived and composed and performed out in the fields and during labor-intensive activities for the most part. Also, they were certainly composed during camp meetings when labor was not the primary focus.”⁹⁵

Spirituals were often sung during hard labor to help coordinate movement as well as a distraction from the task at hand. According to Ekwueme, these work songs were vital to the survival of the slave:⁹⁶

The wonder that he survived the ordeal of slavery and colonialism and still triumphantly endures today the torture of forced labor in many places becomes less bewildering when it is realized that a lot of his sustaining capacity comes from the power of his song. Music becomes particularly helpful when a group of people work together and team-work is needed. Not only does music act as a diversion—nay a distraction—from the burden of the work, but also it contributes to the coordination of energy in the unified team-work in that action is tied up with the rhythm of the song, be it paddling a canoe, tugging at ropes, laying a rail, or slashing cane.

In one historical account written by Fredrika Bremer in *Homes from the New World*, she speaks directly of watching and hearing African Americans work on the steamer Belle Key as it traveled on the Ohio River:⁹⁷

The negro up aloft on the pile of fire-wood began immediately an improvised song in stanzas, and at the close of each the negroes down below joined in vigorous chorus. It was a fantastic and grand sight to see these energetic black athletes lit up by the wildly flashing flames from the fiery throats, while they, amid their equally fantastic song, keeping time most exquisitely, hurled one piece of fire-wood after another into the yawning fiery gulf. Every thing went on with so much life, and so methodically, and the whole scene was so accordant and well arranged, that it would have produced a fine effect upon any theatre whatever.

⁹⁵ Dilworth, interview.

⁹⁶ Ekwueme, 128.

⁹⁷ Fredrika Bremer, *Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, (New York: 1853), 174, quoted in Eileen Southern, *Readings in Black American Music* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1972) 115.

From Bremer's first-hand account we can see the inherent dramatic quality of movement with the music.

Slaves also danced in worship. One of the traditional dances that slaves would use was the ring shout. The ring shout has been described M. Shawn Copland:⁹⁸

The spiritual is linked most intimately to the staid shuffling of the ring-shout. A distinct form of worship, the ring-shout is basically a dancing-singing phenomenon in which the song is danced with the whole body—hands, feet, shoulders, [and] hips. When the spiritual was sounded, the ring-shout would begin. The dancers formed a circle and moved counterclockwise in a ring, first by walking slowly, and then by shuffling—the foot just slightly lifted from the floor. Sometimes the people danced silently; most after they sang the chorus of the spiritual as they shuffled. At other times the entire song itself was sung by the dancers. Frequently the best singers and tired shouters stood at the side of the room to “base” the others, singing the body or stanzas of the song and clapping their hands. The singing and dancing would increase in intensity and energy and sometimes went on for hours.

One spiritual that is part of the ring-shout tradition is “Ezekiel Saw de Wheel.” Marvin Curtis and Lee cloud offer this description:⁹⁹

The verse that says, “You’d better min’ my brother how you walk on the cross, your foot might slip and your soul get lost,” gives reference to where the shout occurred and specific instructions of what to do while shouting. The first line of the text in this portion of the song (You’d better min’ my brother how you walk on the cross) refers to the front of the church where the pews are pulled back to the side; a group of shouters forms a circle that moves counterclockwise, and a group of singers forms off to the side to provide the music. With the pews pulled back, the circle is positioned at the point of the church called the “nave” or the “cross” where one aisle intersects the other. The next portion of the text (your foot might slip and your soul get lost) refers to the shouters and church’s belief of differences between sacred and secular dance; secular dance takes the feet up off the ground while sacred dance maintains contact with the earth. . . The references to a wheel in a wheel, as they are correlated with the nature of the shout being in a circle, focus our minds on more than a trivial song; we see a philosophical connection between God and man, and direct contact with the earth. The shout should start with a slow tempo and gradually get faster and faster.

⁹⁸ M. Shawn Copland, “‘The African American Catholic Hymnal’ and the African American Spiritual,” *U. S. Catholic Historian* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 78, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25154768>.

⁹⁹ Marvin V. Curtis and Lee V. Cloud, “The African-American Spiritual: Traditions and Performance Practices,” *The Choral Journal* 32, no. 4 (November 1991): 18, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23548375>.

Curtis and Lee's description of the performance of a spiritual would be a powerful way to present "Ezekiel Saw de Wheel" and other spirituals that are part of the ring-shout tradition such as Dawson's arrangements of "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" and "Ain'-a That Good News!"¹⁰⁰

Another reason to incorporate movement into the performance and rehearsal of spirituals is it lends another dimension to the performance. According to Ekwueme, African cultural expressions often have two distinct parts:¹⁰¹

Whenever there is cultural expression, it consists of at least two parts—an outward visible part (appealing to the visual senses) and an acoustic audible part (appealing to the aural senses). No one, whether in Africa or in the New World goes to a musical event merely to *hear* [Author's italics] black music; people go to *see* [Author's italics] it also.

Performance of a spiritual without movement, no matter how subtle or nuanced, is not a complete performance. Curtis and Cloud offer the following concrete examples as to how movement during performance can make the performance of spirituals more expressive:¹⁰²

In general, knowledge and conveyance of body motions can greatly aid the performance of spirituals. This can be seen, for instance, in "Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child," which is a lament. Its tempo should be as a gentle rocking, with arms folded across the chest. Another lament is "By an' By." This should be performed as if sadly singing to oneself. A contrast to this is "Great day, the righteous marching" which should lead the conductor to use a march-like tempo in performance. Another example is "Ain't no grave can hold any body down, when the bright trumpet sounds I'll be getting up and walking 'round." Tempos for these marches should reflect the shuffle-step of the African-American church tradition: the foot slides along the floor and creates the drama that is associated with the sound of large marching units. Such a march is not, by any means, like that of a drum and bugle corps.

Rollo Dilworth adds to this thought by saying:¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Lloyd, "Shout All Over God's Heaven!" How the African-American Spiritual Has Maintained Its Integrity in the Face of Social and Musical Challenges," *The Choral Journal* 45, no. 1 (August 2004): 20, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23555217>.

¹⁰¹ Ekwueme, 137.

¹⁰² Curtis and Cloud, 20.

¹⁰³ Dilworth, interview.

I think we as choral directors have to give our singers permission and license to perhaps conceptualize themselves in an organic kind of movement experience—not to the point of distraction—but certainly to a level that says “I’m not only engaging the mind, but I’m engaging the body in this music-making experience.”

The movement associated with a spiritual can also give the conductor guidance towards an appropriate performance tempo. Curtis and Cloud remark:¹⁰⁴

The spirituals are based upon various functions in everyday life. Consequently, they should be sung in tempos appropriate to those functions and their attendant moods. The work song used to accompany the chopping down of a tree with axes, or to pick cotton, cannot be any faster than the work entailed in routine chopping or picking. The tempo should reflect the activity.

Arranger Dilworth describes the use of movement in a work song:¹⁰⁵

If I’m doing this, “Keep your hand on the plow, Hold on,” now there’s no mistake that the spiritual sounds the way it sounds and grooves the way it does because you can imagine a slave being behind a mule, grabbing on to the handles of the plow and digging in, getting their leverage, because if they didn’t when that mule took off they were going to go flying over the tope of it. So you can imagine this grip and this kind of sinking into the soil. And that’s probably how that song was composed. So I’m not saying that when a choir sings that spiritual that they must engage in this, but think of how much more powerful it will be if they did.

Movement that is appropriate to the original use of the song can add much depth and understanding to the performance. Dilworth goes on to say, “We have to think about again the genesis of this style of music. And in understanding it fully in terms of its development, we know that the movement was an integral and inherent part of the composition process.”¹⁰⁶

Conductor Judith Willoughby states the following: “If it is hard *not* to move, tap, or clap, then it’s probably appropriate for some of the up-tempo spirituals.”¹⁰⁷ Some movement, however, is

¹⁰⁴ Curtis and Cloud, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Dilworth, interview.

¹⁰⁷ Judith Willoughby, quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 192.

not appropriate for use when performing spirituals. A movement such as finger snapping is more appropriate in gospel or jazz music.¹⁰⁸

Even if not used in the performance of a spiritual, movement should be used in the rehearsal and learning process. Since slaves wrote spirituals as they moved in worship or in work, movement in the rehearsal can help singers to experience the flow of the music. In an article by Susan Muller, she states “It [physical movement] offers a natural experience of the underlying pulse that is the driving force of the music, and yet keeps this pulse in perspective as existing beneath and within larger sweeps of melody and rhythm.”¹⁰⁹ Mary Ellen Pinzino writes, “Movement in the choral rehearsal can activate musicality, build music skills, develop vocal technique, and stimulate energy in singers of all ages. Every musical nuance can be represented in movement.”¹¹⁰ Unlike music from Western European traditions in which melody is the most important element of music, African musical traditions and its descendants, including spirituals, gospel, and jazz, are much more rhythmically driven.¹¹¹ Movement in rehearsal is essential for singers to experience the rhythmic drive of spirituals.

Conclusion

Movement in performance and rehearsal of spirituals is appropriate. African American spirituals originated in African tribes who moved as they created music. They moved at work, at play, and in worship. These traditions came to the United States with them. Movement, even

¹⁰⁸ Curtis and Cloud, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Susan Muller, “What Dancers Can Teach Pianists,” *Music Educators Journal* 70, no. 5 (Jan. 1984): 54, accessed Nov. 14, 2015, <http://www.jstore.org/stable/3400771>.

¹¹⁰ Mary Ellen Pinzino, “Awakening Artistry in the Choral Rehearsal,” Come Children Sing.com, accessed Dec. 20, 2015, http://comechildrensing.com/pdf/other_articles_by_MEP/1_Awakening_Artistry_In_the_Choral_Rehearsal.pdf.

¹¹¹ Johnson and Johnson, *American Negro Spirituals*, 28.

subtle movement, can add another element to the performance of this music and bring us even closer to authenticity.

CHAPTER V

Choral Timbre

Choral timbre encompasses many elements of singing including vocal resonance, use of or lack of vibrato, articulation, and vowel uniformity and shape. These elements can be manipulated to obtain an unending spectrum of choral colors or timbres. One timbre for all music will not do. Today's choral conductor must consider many questions when approaching the appropriate timbre for an African American spiritual. "What sounds are appropriate for this composition?" "What sounds will help communicate the meaning of the music and text to the audience?" "What sounds would have been sung by the composer of this anonymous spiritual?" "What are the limitations of this particular choral ensemble?" All these questions must be considered when approaching any spiritual. There is very little information about the timbre used by the slaves. Hall Johnson, who grew up hearing former slaves sing, was known for "pulling the music from the throats of his singers."¹¹²

Vocal Resonance

Chiaroscuro is often the term used to discuss vocal placement or resonance in singing classical music. Linked with the *bel canto* style of singing, *chiaroscuro* is the balancing of *chiaro*, brightness and clearness of the voice, with *oscuro*, the dark and warm qualities of the voice. Laurier Fagnan describes *chiaroscuro* as "a sort of acoustical yin-yang that [is] pleasing

¹¹² McGhee, 27.

to the ear and true in pitch.”¹¹³ Choristers have a spectrum of vocal timbres available to them by manipulating the *chiaro* and *oscuro* elements of the voice.

Rollo Dilworth describes the resonance he wants to hear from a choir as “just in back of *chiaroscuro* but not all the way back to the point that it’s what I consider throatiness.”¹¹⁴ Roland Carter describes his ideal choral timbre as “a dark timbre but I don’t want a weighty timbre.”¹¹⁵ In her dissertation Loneka Battiste states that “an ideal choral tone for Moses Hogan spirituals was described by former members of his ensembles and expert choral conductors as warm, rich, round, dark, and heavy, with lighter sounds used for fast pieces and darker sounds used on slow pieces.”¹¹⁶ André Thomas also prefers that the sound be “warmer and richer.” He goes on to say, “I would warm up the sound, which means I must give more space in the mouth, more pharyngeal presence, but I would not have it so openly dark that the pitch would suffer.”¹¹⁷ The basic timbre deemed appropriate for the singing of spirituals may be somewhat darker in color than the typical timbre appropriate for the singing of much choral music.

The use of one choral timbre for all pieces on a program could be boring and ineffective. Choral timbre should mirror the meaning of the text. According to Thomas:¹¹⁸

Most importantly, though, the tone quality must match the message of the text and reinforce the arranger’s intent. Because of the harmonic language involved in Moses Hogan’s “Ev’ry Time I Feel the Spirit,” for example, a brighter vowel might be utilized. A similar approach would be taken with Larry Farrow’s setting of “Ev’ry Time I Feel the

¹¹³ Laurier Fagnan, Research Report: “*Chiaroscuro* Resonance Balancing: The *Bel Canto* Answer to Choral Tone and Intonation Problems,” *The Choral Journal* 49, (November 2008), 52, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23556992>.

¹¹⁴ Dilworth, interview.

¹¹⁵ Roland Carter, interviewed by the author, Clarksville, Tennessee, May 15, 2015. (See Appendix A).

¹¹⁶ Loneka Wilkinson Battiste, “‘Music Down In My Soul;’ Achieving a Sound Ideal for Moses Hogan Spirituals” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2014), 180-181.

¹¹⁷ André Thomas, interviewed by the author, by phone, July 6, 2015. (See Appendix D).

¹¹⁸ André Thomas, *Way Over*, 93.

Spirit.” This would be in absolute contrast to Stacey Gibb’s setting of “Way Over in Beulah Lan’.” In this selection, a darker vowel would be better suited. . . . Think about popular African American singers—from Nat King Cole to James Brown to Aretha Franklin to Beyoncé. The differences in the tonal quality of their voices are striking. That same variety exists within our great body of spirituals. Exploit that variety in your interpretations by letting there be meaningful contrasts influenced by the text.

Conductors must be able to guide their choirs into producing a choral timbre that will be effective in communicating with the audience. Moses Hogan varied his ensemble’s timbre depending on the qualities of the music. According to Battiste, “Participants felt that Hogan did not seek to create one particular tone for his choral groups, but desired to produce tones that would reflect qualities needed in various pieces.”¹¹⁹ This variation in timbre allows choral musicians and audiences to experience a full spectrum of choral sound.

Vibrato

In the African American spiritual vibrato can be used. Jonathan Wayne Pilkington states the following:¹²⁰

The great singers of spirituals sing them in a way that is full of emotion and expresses the message within the songs, whether the message is joyful or sorrowful. Whether singers are trained opera singers or “untrained” gospel singers, they generally sing with vibrato. While the vibrato may not be on every note, as singers are encouraged to do in classical singing, there is typically no obvious restraint of vibrato, unless an occasional tone is sung straight for an expressive reason. Although vibrato is generally present, it should simply be an element of free vocal production, and it should never distract from the text.

Thomas agrees that vibrato should be used in the performance of spirituals. However, he cautions that the use of vibrato should not be “so out of control [that] there’s no center in pitch.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Battiste, 108.

¹²⁰ Pilkington, 40.

¹²¹ Thomas, interview.

In contrast Moses Hogan preferred a limited amount of vibrato to be used in his choral ensembles. Battiste reports the following from two of Hogan's former singers, Larry and Louis:¹²²

Larry: [Hogan wanted] A very pure, straight, minimized vibrato tone...that's one of the main ways he achieved such a great blend and obviously that's where most of the sound comes from, because people were able to blend their voices to make each section sound like one voice. And he would say that from time to time, "I want you to sound like one person." So we were able to do that. But then it sounded like hundreds of that one person.

Louis: The limited use of vibrato was necessary because of the density of Hogan's chords, "The little bit of vibrato that you were allowed to have, that made for that clean sound because a lot of vibrato in those chords, those crunched chords and things like that...you just wouldn't get the impact that he was trying to achieve.

Pilkington offers the following thoughts on limiting the use of vibrato: "Quickly moving syllabic passages may be frequently sung without vibrato, because it would likely sound too effortful to allow vibrato on each note. One example of when a singer might choose to eliminate vibrato on a sustained note is when the pitch creates a dissonance with the accompaniment [or other vocal parts], especially if it helps to express the text."¹²³

Conductors and choirs should explore the use of vibrato in the singing of spirituals. Vibrato should be used to heighten beauty of the vocal line and the drama of the music and text. However, care should be taken that vibrato does not destroy the center of pitch, nor does it interfere with the delivery of the text.

Articulation

In choral music, articulation encompasses diction, word stress, and the amount of legato in the singing. Just as in the performance of choral music from the Western European tradition,

¹²² Battiste, 127.

¹²³ Pilkington, 40-41.

the manner in which choirs articulate sounds when performing spirituals greatly influences the timbre of the choir as well as the level of communication a choir can achieve with an audience.

The articulation of consonants in spirituals must be considered carefully. The use of AAVE dialect will change the way sounds are articulated. However, singers must be careful that the articulation of dialect does not become so affected that it could be seen as creating a caricature of the spiritual. Hall Johnson, who grew up hearing former slaves sing spirituals, states that the articulation of dialect “should neither be unduly exaggerated in the hope of being more entertaining nor, still worse, ‘purified’ into correct English—for any reason whatsoever: Either process would utterly spoil the artistic integrity of the performance.”¹²⁴ André Thomas offers the advice that the articulation should never bring attention to itself.¹²⁵ Barber suggests that in many performances of spirituals, the articulation is just “too crisp—as opposed to being soft and rounded off.”¹²⁶ Roland Carter offers, “If it interferes with the flow of the music, don’t do it.”¹²⁷

Word stress must also be carefully considered in the performance of spirituals. Unimportant words should not be accented or stressed. An example of this is the exaggeration by many choirs of the article “the.” In an attempt to sing “the” in the AAVE dialect, [di] or [də], many singers will mistakenly accent this word. Thomas recommends that singers not “put all the energy on an article or preposition. What happens is that you bring so much attention to the

¹²⁴ Hall Johnson, *Thirty Negro Spirituals Arranged for Voice and Piano* (New York and London: G. Schirmer, 1949), 4, quoted in Lourin Plant, “Singing African-American Spirituals: A Reflection on Racial Barriers in Classical Vocal Music,” *Journal of Singing* 62, no. 5 (May/June 2005): 459.

¹²⁵ Thomas, interview.

¹²⁶ Felicia Barber, interviewed by the author, via telephone, August 7, 2015. (See Appendix C).

¹²⁷ Carter, interview.

article the noun is overshadowed, and so then the piece sounds affected.”¹²⁸ Carter also suggests that conductors should not accent syncopated rhythms. He states, “A syncopation is not a dynamic accent and does not require to be reemphasized. And if you over do it. . . it just flows against the pulse.”¹²⁹

In many spiritual arrangements, especially those by Moses Hogan, the articulation of consonants becomes a text-painting device. One example of this is Hogan’s arrangement of “Battle of Jericho” (See Figure 5.1). Battiste states that the “Consonants used in the tenor and

Figure 5.1. “The Battle of Jericho,” mm. 3-6, arr. Moses Hogan.

The musical score for "The Battle of Jericho" by Moses Hogan, measures 3-6, is presented for Soprano/Alto and Tenor/Bass voices. The score is in 4/4 time and features a call-and-response structure. A boxed section highlights measures 3-4, where the Soprano/Alto voice sings "Josh - ua fit the Bat - tle of Jer - i - cho" and the Tenor/Bass voice responds with "Josh - ua, the Bat - tle, Josh - ua, the Bat - tle, Josh - ua, the Bat - tle, and the". The lyrics continue with "walls come tum - ba - lin'".

¹²⁸ Thomas, interview.

¹²⁹ Carter, interview.

bass sections are pitted against consonants sung in the soprano and alto sections to create the feeling of a battle.” Hogan describes the text painting:¹³⁰

I envisioned a battle. And I envisioned perhaps opposing forces. And I asked in my interpretation, though the “t’s” were not prevalent in many instances, when you interpret the singing of the spirituals, but I asked for the “t” sound in the word *battle*, and the “sh” sound, *Joshua fit the battle of Jericho*. When you have the juxtaposition of the “sh” sounds and the “t’s” going with the regular “t”, you have got these opposing forces. So that is what I envisioned. That is why the rhythm is really strong. But at the same time, always knowing the melody is still present. And I wanted that to be present within this dialogue, opposing forces of the battle.

In instances of text painting, conductors should adjust the articulation to highlight the effect of the text.

Vowel Shape and Unification

The timbre of a choral ensemble is tied directly to the choir’s ability to unify the vowel sounds on which they sing. According to Kenneth Phillips, “The beauty of the vocal tone is the vowel.”¹³¹ Poor vowel alignment can also result in intonation issues.¹³² Since the text of spirituals, even those written in dialect, are essentially English, many conductors will have choirs use American English vowels. Felicia Barber, who has researched the linguistic aspects of AAVE, uses American English vowels, which she describes as “warm and round.”¹³³ However, some conductors would rather their choirs use Italianate vowels. Battiste suggests that “One effective way of training choirs to produce a unified vowel sound is to study Italian vowel

¹³⁰ Moses Hogan, interview with K. Romney, (2002), unedited transcript, quoted in Battiste, 123.

¹³¹ Kenneth Phillips, *Directing the Choral Music Program* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 243.

¹³² Phillips, 236.

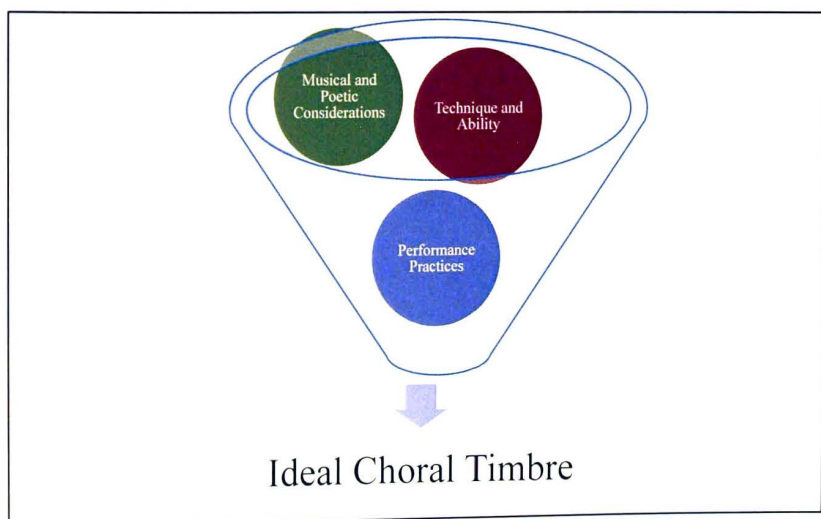
¹³³ Felicia Barber, e-mail message to the author, January 7, 2016.

sounds and use them in singing spirituals.”¹³⁴ Carter agrees stating that he typically asks choirs to use Italian vowels.¹³⁵ In her article, “The African-American Spiritual: Preparation and Performance Considerations,” Rosephanye Dunn-Powell transcribes several common words which are often found in spirituals. She uses the Italian “ah” sound, [a], as well.¹³⁶ See Appendix A for more examples of Dunn-Powell’s transcriptions. Regardless of the vowels used, they must be unified throughout the choral ensemble.

Conclusion

The ideal choral timbre for an African American spiritual, or any piece of choral music, will not be the same for each group. A conductor must consider the ensemble’s abilities and limitations, the musical and textual meanings of the piece, an understanding of performance practices relevant to the piece (See Figure 5.2). By manipulating vocal resonance, the use of

Figure 5.2. Ideal Choral Timbre.



¹³⁴ Battiste, 185.

¹³⁵ Carter, interview.

¹³⁶ Dunn-Powell, 473-475.

vibrato, articulation, and vowel unification, conductors and choirs can explore a wide palette of vocal colors and produce a more expressive choral experience for audience and performers, alike. The conductor must be careful in the manipulation of the choral timbre so that vocal faults, such as intonation or visible tension in singers, do not occur. The manipulation of the elements of choral timbre should only serve the communication of the textual and musical meanings to the audience and not serve to draw attention to the elements themselves.

CHAPTER VI

Rhythm, Tempo, and Phrasing

Rhythm

Rhythm is the dominant element of the African American spiritual. According to Robert Herrema, “Rhythm has always been an important feature of the music of the American Negro—it is not that all other music lacks rhythm, but it is a fact that the Negro has emphasized rhythm.”¹³⁷ The rhythmic elements of the spiritual include the predominance of simple meters, the shifting of strong beats from beats one and two to beats two and four, and a use of polyrhythms or cross rhythms. The conductor must realize that African American spirituals are not inherently European and should not be approached as thus.

Most spirituals are written in a “simple and pragmatic duple meter.”¹³⁸ This use of duple meter stems from the influence of the body’s movement in the creation of spirituals.¹³⁹ The use of duple meter also allows for the layering of polyrhythms. Sharp states, “Early shouts and hollers demonstrated the Africanism of a free rhythm, pragmatic work rhythms; foot tapping and hand clapping dictate a regular duple pulse, enlivened by syncopation and another Africanism, polyrhythms.”¹⁴⁰ Eileen Southern describes polyrhythms in spirituals:¹⁴¹

Against the fixed rhythms of the pulse, the melodies moved freely, producing cross-rhythms that constantly clashed with the pulse patterns. It has become conventional to notate the cross-rhythms of slave melodies as syncopation, but in reality, the phenomenon

¹³⁷ Robert D. Herrema, “Choral Music by Black Composers,” *The Choral Journal* 10, no. 4 (January 1970) 15, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.apsu.edu/stable/23543248>.

¹³⁸ Sharp, 96.

¹³⁹ Trice, 17.

¹⁴⁰ Sharp, 96.

¹⁴¹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 195.

is more complex than that. While it is true that in some songs there is syncopation because of the shifting of melodic accents from strong to weaker beats, in other songs the melodies are moving in different rhythms than those of the basic pulse. What results is no longer simple syncopation but rather polyrhythms or multimeters.

The placement of polyrhythms on top of a steady pulse is one of the primary characteristics of the African American spiritual. Figure 6.1 shows rhythmic figures built upon the steady pulse of the Bass II part. Polyrhythms and complex rhythms became ever more popular in concert

Figure 6.1. Rhythmic notation of "Elijah Rock," mm. 36-37, arr. Moses Hogan.

The musical score for "Elijah Rock" (mm. 36-37, arr. Moses Hogan) is presented in 4/4 time. It features six staves: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, Tenor, Bass 1, and Bass 2. The Soprano 1 part has a simple melody with the lyrics "Ah". The Soprano 2, Alto, Tenor, and Bass 1 parts have more complex, syncopated rhythms. The Bass 2 part provides a steady pulse. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: Soprano 2: "com-in' up Law - dy, com-in' up Law - dy, com-in' up Law - dy, com-in' up Law - dy."; Alto: "rock E-li - jah, rock E-li - jah, rock E-li - jah, rock E-li - jah."; Tenor: "Hal - le-lu-jah Je-sus, Hal - le-lu-jah Je-sus, Hal - le-lu-jah Je-sus, Hal - le-lu-jah Je-sus."; Bass 1: "rock, E - li-jah rock, E - li-jah rock, E - li-jah rock, E - li-jah."; Bass 2: "Oh E - li - jah, Oh E - li - jah, Oh E - li - jah, Oh E - li - jah."

arrangements of spirituals after the formation of several professional choral ensembles dedicated to the performance of spirituals. Hall Johnson was one of the conductors of these early

professional choirs. According to Lloyd, “Johnson sought to bring the palpable sound of the community singing of the slave songs on the plantations to the concert hall by involving a larger number of voices in more complex counterpoint.”¹⁴² Due to the complexity of the polyrhythms in spirituals it is necessary that they be performed accurately or the intensity of the musical affect will be lost.

Performers of spirituals must be aware of many rhythmic pitfalls. Like most music with African roots, the strongest beats in spirituals occur on beats two and four. This is unlike music of the Western European tradition in which the strong beats occur on one and three.¹⁴³ This shift in the metrical feel is one of the elements that creates the rhythmic momentum in spirituals. Carter approaches the metrical feel of spirituals as having as few pulses per measure as possible. He describes the metrical feel as being like a circle and only having one or two, at most, strong pulses per measure. According to Carter, too many strong beats create a plodding feel in spirituals.¹⁴⁴

André Thomas describes another pitfall common in the performance of spirituals as wearing the “rhythm on your shirtsleeve.”¹⁴⁵ In an attempt to help choirs correctly perform complicated rhythms, conductors can let the rhythm become angular and “over-emphasized.”¹⁴⁶ He goes on to say that the result is “an unconvincing performance at best and a caricature of the original at worst.”¹⁴⁷ Carter advises that choirs not accent syncopations.¹⁴⁸ According to

¹⁴² Lloyd, 19.

¹⁴³ Barber, interview.

¹⁴⁴ Carter, interview.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas, *Way Over*, 94.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

He [Roland Carter] addresses that difficulty by teaching his choirs the difference between dynamic accents (those articulated with an accent marking) and those that occur naturally, agogic (achieved by holding a note longer) and tonic (one occurring on a higher note) accents. He feels that approaching the latter of the two in a natural manner without over doing them lends a greater feeling of authenticity to the piece.

Thomas describes the rhythm of spirituals as having a roundness or smoothness to them. This is not to be confused with the swing feel often associated with jazz. Unless the arranger has marked that the section is to be performed with a swing feel, the use of swing should be avoided in the performance of the spiritual. According to Carter, “So many people approach spirituals with the idea, ‘Oh, we gotta swing it. Put just a little before the beat.’ I think that is deadly...For the most part we [arrangers] have written down what we wanted and if you want to do your arrangement, then do your own arrangement.”¹⁵⁰

Tempo

Conductors must carefully choose a tempo for the performance of a spiritual. This choice begins with the arranger’s suggested tempo. However, this is only a beginning point. The tempo must be seen as a tool used to help communicate the story, and like most elements of a spiritual should not draw attention to itself. “A song’s tempo depends on the text, function, mood, and the physical circumstance of its performance,” states Trice.¹⁵¹ One of the most prevalent mistakes conductors make in regards to the tempo of spirituals is taking a tempo that is too fast.

The first step in discovering the performance tempo of a spiritual is to consult the

¹⁴⁸ Carter, interview.

¹⁴⁹ Battiste, 169.

¹⁵⁰ Roland Carter, quoted in Battiste, 169.

¹⁵¹ Trice, 17.

arranger's markings. Many arrangers place very clear tempo marking on their scores and these should be followed. This tempo marking can be adjusted slightly to better accommodate the acoustical qualities of the performance space as well as the choir's technical limitations. Anton Armstrong warns conductors not to take pieces with complex rhythms any faster than marked. According to him, "When we see more highly intricate rhythms, we forget the tempo, rushing even already-fast tempos. We need to give intricate rhythms more space to occur. It is like Bach; when we see more black notes, we need to sing slower."¹⁵² Felicia Barber describes this slowing down of tempos when performing pieces with complex rhythms as "a slow groove, getting into a slower groove."¹⁵³ Roland Carter learned a technique for discovering the correct tempo for a spiritual from Hall Johnson. According to Carter, Johnson described spirituals as all having the same tempo or pulse.¹⁵⁴ Carter explains:¹⁵⁵

He [Hall Johnson] established what he called a "rocking chair rhythm"...an understanding that there is only one, two pulses at most within a measure of music and this works...in the spiritual...You rock forward and down and back...So between fast or slow there's still that overall, "*umph*, 2, 3,4, *umph*" that goes through most spirituals.

As described earlier, Carter also works to only have one or two heavy beats per measure.

Conductors must be careful to consider the activity that would be associated with the spiritual being performed. Was this spiritual a work song? Was this spiritual used in worship? Since spirituals were tied so directly with the daily activities of the slave, the tempo would be influenced by the activity performed. Curtis and Cloud state, "The spirituals are based upon various functions in everyday life. Consequently, they should be sung in tempos appropriate to

¹⁵² Anton Armstrong, quoted in Thomas, *Way Over*, 192.

¹⁵³ Barber, interview.

¹⁵⁴ Carter, interview.

¹⁵⁵ Carter, quoted in Battiste, 167.

those functions. . . The tempo should reflect the activity.”¹⁵⁶ Rollo Dilworth says that clues in the text can offer insight into what activity would be associated with some spirituals: “The reason I look at the text is because that will often give me a context [to] begin to think about what the tempo may have been. For example, the spiritual ‘Walk Together, Children,’ . . . well, I pretty much know what tempo to take that piece because the slaves were likely walking around in the fields when they conceived it.”¹⁵⁷

Conductors have many components to balance when choosing a performance tempo. They must consider the arranger’s markings, complexity of the rhythms, harmonic rhythm, acoustical properties of the performance space, functionality of the music, meaning of the text, and the technical limitations of the performing ensemble. Conductors should resist the urge to take these songs too fast as that destroys the inherent dramatic quality of the music and can create a less than artistic and authentic performance.

Phrasing

Spirituals often present text in repeated phrases resulting in an *aba* form. These repetitions should be phrased in such a way that builds to the climax of the phrase. Repetitions that are performed in a stagnant way rob the spiritual of the emotional impact inherent in this music. Roland Carter describes the effective performance of repeated phrases by comparing the repetition to his mother calling him:¹⁵⁸

I’m a big person about repeated phrases in that composers and arrangers repeat things for a purpose...I remember growing up and my mother calling me and I’m not responding and she would call and if I didn’t respond, ‘cause I knew she wanted me to do something,

¹⁵⁶ Curtis and Cloud, 20.

¹⁵⁷ Dilworth, interview.

¹⁵⁸ Carter, quoted in Battiste, 170.

Conclusion

Rhythm, tempo, and phrasing work together to provide the driving force of the spiritual. The rhythmic aspects of spirituals have roots in the music of Africa. Care should be taken that these often-complex rhythms are performed correctly without over-emphasizing syncopations. Also, the use of a swing feel should be avoided unless indicated in the music by the arranger. The tempo of the music should be carefully considered and movement away from the arranger's indicated tempo, especially to a faster tempo, should occur if the choral ensemble struggles to sing well at a slower tempo. Conductors should also be aware of the phrase structure found in spirituals and how the creation of a hyper-phrase can help to build drama and excitement in the performance.

CHAPTER VII

A Conductor's Guide to "Look What Dey Doin' to Jesus" arranged by Richard Jackson

Richard Jackson has written an arrangement of this spiritual that tells the story of Christ's crucifixion. This piece, scored for SATB choir and soloists, is no longer in print but is included in *The Oxford Book of Spirituals* edited by Moses Hogan. Dramatic and challenging, this spiritual setting is appropriate for advanced choirs.

Subtext and Symbolism: A Discussion of the Text

The following is the text of "Look What Dey Doin' to Jesus." Bold type indicates text sung by soloists.

- Section I Oh, look what dey doin' to Jesus, spi'n in His face an' 'vilin' His name.
Look what dey doin' to Jesus. Lordy, Lordy, what a shame.
- Dey put dat blin' fol' on His head,** My Lord, my Lord.
Dey lead Him roun' to Herrod. Lordy, Lordy what a shame.
Dey mashed dem thorns down on His head, My Lord, my Lord.
Dey whipped Him till He was nearly dead. Lordy, Lordy what a shame.
- Section II Oh, look what dey doin' to Jesus, spi'n in His face an' 'vilin' His name.
Look what dey doin' to Jesus. Lordy, Lordy, what a shame.
- Dey nailed His han's an' pierced His side.** My Lord, my Lord.
But still my Lord made not a cry. Lordy, Lordy what a shame.
Dey hung Him high an' stretched Him wide. My Lord, my Lord.
An' on dat cross my Lord did die. Lordy, Lordy what a shame.
- Section III (Soprano/Alto) (Tenor/Bass)
Oh, look what dey do. Oh, look what dey do
Oh, look what dey do, to my Jesus, duh Savior.
crucify my Lord upon Calvary.
- Lordy, Lordy, what a shame.

The text for “Look What Dey Doin’ to Jesus” is a retelling of the crucifixion narrative of Christ. Slaves were often drawn to the crucifixion story of Christ. According to Cone, “They [slaves] were deeply moved by the Passion story because they too had been rejected, beaten, and shot without a chance to say a word in defense of their humanity. In Jesus’ death black slaves saw themselves, and they unleashed their imagination, describing what they felt and saw.”¹⁶⁰ The Gospel of Luke most likely inspired this text, since it is the only gospel that remarks that Jesus was blindfolded by the Roman guards.¹⁶¹ In this spiritual the choir takes on the role of onlookers or the Greek chorus who are watching the narrative unfold and responding appropriately. As they watch the tragedy before them, they respond repeatedly “Lordy, Lordy, what a shame.” The bulk of the storytelling is left to the soloists giving this song the familiar call and response form found in many African American spirituals.

Since the texts found in spirituals often have meanings that extend beyond the realm of religion, this text recounting the crucifixion could easily be seen as recounting the abuse experienced by many slaves, telling of how the African American race was so brutally treated, especially in the Southern United States, and how they were seen as little more than farm equipment. Cone describes this symbolism:¹⁶²

Through the blood of slavery, black slaves transcended the limitations of space and time. Jesus’ time became their time, and they encountered a new historical existence. Through the experience of being slaves, they encountered the theological significance of Jesus’ death; through the crucifixion, Jesus makes an unqualified identification with the poor and the helpless and takes their pain upon himself.

The person of Jesus could easily be substituted in this story for any slave, their child, their parent, their spouse, or their friend. The slaves, who stood by and witnessed these horrific

¹⁶⁰ Cone, 47.

¹⁶¹ Lk 22:64 (NIV).

¹⁶² Cone, 49.

events, could only, much like Jesus' followers, shake their heads and exclaim, "What a shame." The slave masters that would carry out these beatings, and the Roman soldiers that crucified Christ, did so in a very public way. In this public manner, slaves and Christ's followers were assured of their fate if they did not do as they were told. They were powerless at the hands of the masters.

Another interesting element to this text is the remark that Jesus did not cry out during crucifixion ["But still my Lord made not a cry"]. According to all three of the synoptic gospels, Jesus did cry out immediately before death. Luke 23:46 (KJV) states, "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." Similar accounts are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. In many spirituals that deal with the crucifixion of Christ, he is often reported as not responding to his accusers. Arthur C. Jones writes that element of silence "illustrates the fact that the theology revealed in the spirituals is not fundamentalist religion; rather, the core symbolism, as it speaks to the life of an oppressed people, is embraced and utilized as material for songs."¹⁶³ This stoicism of Christ can be seen in "Look What Dey Doin' to Jesus" as well as spirituals such as "He Never Said A Mumbalin' Word." Jones goes on to describe this symbolism:¹⁶⁴

In this particular case [regarding "He Never Said A Mumbalin' Word"], the most important symbolism is embodied in Jesus the stoic, paralleling the ability of African people to endure stoically the physical and emotional agony of slavery. They could be beaten, raped, sold away from family, forced to "breed," and finally killed at the whim of their oppressors; the abuse they experienced was a crucifixion every bit as real as the one suffered by Jesus. Although they could not control the outward circumstances of their abuse, they could control very definitely the extent to which they acknowledged their pain. To be silent was one powerful form of resistance.

¹⁶³ Jones, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 31-32.

The slave's silence was one of their few avenues of retaliation against their captors. Howard Thurman, in his book *Deep River: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*, refers to this silence as "the silence of a great hatred."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Thurman, 38.

Use of Dialect

Jackson's arrangement makes extensive use of AAVE. See Figure 7.1 for an IPA transcription of the text found in "Look What Dey Doin' to Jesus."

Figure 7.1. IPA Transcription, "Look What Dey Doin' to Jesus."

Oh, look wh at dey doin' to Jesus,	[o lək wə dəɪ 'du:ɪn tə 'dʒi zəs]
spi'n' in His face an' 'vilin' His name.	['spi? ɪn hɪz feɪs æn 'vaɪ lɪn hɪz neɪm]
Oh, look what dey doin' to Jesus,	[o lək wə dəɪ 'du:ɪn tə 'dʒi zəs]
Lordy, Lordy, what a shame. Hoo	['lɔ di 'lɔ di wə də ʃeɪm hu]
Dey put dat blin' fol' on His head,	[dəɪ pʊ də 'blaɪn fəl ən hɪz hed]
my Lord.	[maɪ lɔd]
Dey lead Him roun' to Herrod.	[dəɪ lɪd hɪm raʊn tə 'he rəd]
Lordy, Lordy, what a shame. Hoo	['lɔ di 'lɔ di wə də ʃeɪm hu]
Dey mashed dem thorns down on His head	[dəɪ mæʃ dem θɔrnz daʊn ɔn hɪz hed]
Dey whipped Him till He was nearly dead.	[dəɪ wɪpd hɪm tɪl hi wəz 'nɪr li dɛd]
Look what dey doin' to mah Lord Jesus,	[lɔk wə dəɪ 'du:ɪn tə mɑ lɔd 'dʒi zəs]
Lordy, Lordy, what a shame. Hoo	['lɔ di 'lɔ di wə də ʃeɪm hu]
Dey nailed his han's an' pierced His side.	[dəɪ neɪld hɪz hænz æn pɪrst hɪ saɪd]
But still my Lord made not a cry.	[bʌt stɪl maɪ lɔd meɪd nədə kraɪ]
Dey hung Him high an' stretched Him wide.	[dəɪ haŋ hɪm haɪ æn streɪtʃt hɪm waɪd]
An' on dat cross my Lord did die.	[æn ən dæt krɔs maɪ lɔ di daɪ]
Oh, look what dey do, crucify my Lord	[o lək wə dəɪ du 'kru sɪ faɪ maɪ lɔd]
duh Saviour, upon Calvary.	[də 'seɪ vjə ə'pən 'kæl və rɪ]

Many of the final consonants in this spiritual should be softened. For example in the word "what" when followed by "dey," the *t* can be completely eliminated creating [wə dəɪ] instead of [wət dəɪ]. These eliminations have been expressed in the IPA transcription. However,

there are times, such as in mm. 33-38, that the final consonants can be used to heighten the energy in rhythmic passages by moving them through the rests and placing them on the next note. See Figure 7.2 for an example. In this example, the final consonants of the words have been moved to the beginning of the next syllable of text. Although diphthongs have been included in the IPA transcription, the second vowel sound in words such as “doin” [du:ɪn] should be negated as much as possible or left out completely. In the case of the latter, “doin” would be pronounced [dun].

Figure 7.2. Rhythmic Reduction of “Look What Dey Doin’ to Jesus.” mm. 33-35, arr. Richard Jackson.

The image shows a musical score for two voice parts: Soprano/Alto Voices and Tenor/Bass Voices. The music is in 4/4 time. The Soprano/Alto part has a melody with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Tenor/Bass part has a similar melody, often in counterpoint. Below the notes are the lyrics and IPA transcriptions.

Sop./Alto Voices

Oh, look what dey do, oh, look what dey do, cru-ci - fy my Lord
 [o lʊ kwɑ dɛ du o lʊ kwɑ dɛ du kru-sɪ - fɑ mɑ lɔd]

Tenor/Bass Voices

look what dey do to my Je - sus, duh
 [lʊ kwɑ dɛ du tu mɑ dʒi - zəs dɔ]

Use of Movement

Beginning at m. 33 and continuing until the end, movement is appropriate for this spiritual. This section is characterized by polyrhythms between the tenor/bass parts, soprano/alto parts, and the solo and soprano obbligato lines. A gentle rocking or step on beats two and four can help to energize and clarify the rhythms in this section. This movement can also help to intensify the building tension of the story, which climaxes on the third repeat of mm. 33-39. On each repeat of these measures, the movements should intensify. After taking the third ending, the movements should become less intense and stop completely on beat four of m. 44.

While rehearsing this piece, it is imperative to encourage singers to move in an organic way. Movement that grows from the music will aid in the learning process. This organic movement will also assist singers who may get stuck in the intellectual realm of pitches and rhythms and help them to step into the emotional realm of music. Movement will help singers perform with less physical tension and freedom resulting in better intonation and energized singing.

Choral Timbre

Vocal Resonance

The resonance needed for this spiritual is a balancing act between the dark and bright aspects of the singing voice. In “Look What Dey Doin’ to Jesus” a darker timbre could be used. However, care must be taken to not let the sound become throaty or the intonation to suffer. Due to the low tessitura of the choral parts in this spiritual, singers may find it more successful to sing with a brighter and more forward sound. This brighter placement with the warmer pharyngeal space of the vowels will create a sound that is easier to project and sing in tune. Soloists should be encouraged to explore vocal colors that mirror the meaning found in the text. Directors would be wise to allow singers to explore their entire range of available vocal colors while encouraging singing with a healthy vocal technique.

Vibrato

Vibrato can be used in this spiritual to heighten the drama and give the vocal lines forward energy. However, singers should use vibrato in a way that gives forward movement to the musical line and does not distort pitch.

Articulation

Jackson makes use of both staccato and marcato markings in this arrangement. See Figure 7.3. The accents in Jackson's arrangement should be followed with great care. The staccato markings occur at mm. 3 and 18 on the final syllable of the word "Jesus." This marking

Figure 7.3. "Look What Dey Doin' to Jesus," mm. 1-3, arr. Richard Jackson.

The musical score is for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. It is in 4/4 time and one flat key signature. The lyrics are: "Oh, look what dey doin' to Je - sus, spi - n' in His face an'". The score includes dynamic markings (p for piano) and articulation markings (accents and staccato) on the final syllable of "Jesus".

is a device which will create space between the final *s* of "Jesus" and the initial *s* of "spi'n'."

The marcato markings should be executed by stressing the initial consonants in words such as "look," "doin'," "my," and "Lord" while not accenting the final consonants of the words.

Following the accent, the sound should fade quickly. Often times in this spiritual, as in m. 7 in

the soprano, alto, and tenor parts, the note that is accented is lower in pitch than the note following it which should not be accented. The second note must be softer than the accented note for the accents to be heard clearly. Throughout this spiritual the sound of “hoo” is used to accompany solo passages. Sharply aspirating the *h* and then fading the sound before the onset of the next “hoo” will help to keep rhythmic integrity intact as well as forward momentum of the piece.

Jackson has marked that when singing the word “shame” that the choir should close the vowel to an *m*. Despite Jackson’s notation that the choir closes to the *m* on the second eighth note, the choir should go directly to the *m* and shorten the second eighth note so that the accent on the word that follows can be prepared by a break in the sound. In the last measure of this spiritual, again on the word “shame,” the choir should go directly to the *m* sound and on the conductor’s cue, produce a shadow vowel using a schwa which can then be allowed to fall in pitch as Jackson has notated.

In measures 12 and 28, Jackson has notated a glissando downward on the release of the word “Lord.” This glissando should occur on the vowel of “Lord” and precede a very light articulation of the final *d*. These vocal slides should not be as long or pronounced as glissandi found in jazz or gospel music. However, the slides occurring in “Look What Dey Doin’ to Jesus” should be shorter and resemble sighs of deep emotional resignation.

Vowel Shape and Agreement

Whether the conductor chooses to use AAVE or Standard English, the vowels must be unified throughout the choir for a quality choral sound to emerge. One way to achieve vowel unification in spirituals is to chant the text on a static chord using the rhythms found in the

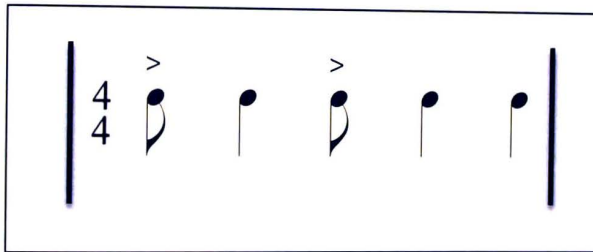
arrangement. By removing the difficulty of pitches changing, singers can focus more closely on vowel sounds as well as their manners of articulation.

Rhythm and Tempo

Rhythm

This spiritual contains a rhythmic figure that appears in all voice parts throughout the song. See Figure 7.4. This syncopated figure should not be executed in a way that creates an angular feel. Also, a feeling of swing is to be avoided. Giving full value the eighth notes will help achieve precision without losing what André Thomas calls a “roundness” of the rhythm.

Figure 7.4. Prevalent Rhythmic Pattern in “Look What Dey Doin’ to Jesus,” arr. Richard Jackson.



The solo in mm. 33-40 has an improvisatory feel. Typically in spirituals, it is not appropriate to improvise. This is also the case in Jackson’s arrangement. He has written in grace notes as well as melismatic passages that will give this spiritual moments that sound improvised. Therefore, the soloists should not feel the need to add any embellishments to Jackson’s arrangement. That being said, the soloist should not feel obligated to rush through m.

Tempo

The tempo marking for this spiritual is quarter note equals 80 b.p.m. This tempo should not be rushed. The layering of rhythms that begins at measure 33 will “feel” faster than the previous sections. However, the quarter-note pulse should not be faster than the previous sections

Biography of Richard Jackson

Richard Jackson (1964-2001) is known primarily for his spiritual arrangements such as “Crossin’ Ovah,” which won an award from the National Association of Negro Musicians, “Look What Dey Doin’ to Jesus,” and “Rock My Soul.” A graduate of Loma Linda University in California, Jackson was a member of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, Screen Actors Guild, and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists.

Conclusion

Richard Jackson’s arrangement of “Look What Dey Doin’ to Jesus” is a perfect choice of spiritual for the advanced choral ensemble. The tessitura in all parts tends to lie in the middle to low registers of the voice. Jackson uses AAVE in his rhythmic setting of this dramatic text. This text speaks of Christ’s suffering as well as the suffering of the slaves that first sang these words. Jackson’s arrangement is full of opportunities to showcase a choir’s best soloists.

CHAPTER VIII

A Conductor's Guide to
 "I Want To Die Easy" arranged by Roland M. Carter

Roland Carter has arranged this spiritual for SATB choir. Although this arrangement is much less complicated than "Look What Dey Doin' to Jesus" by Richard Jackson, it is equally effective and dramatic. Due to its lessened degree of difficulty, this arrangement is much more appropriate for the high school choral ensemble or church choir.

Subtext and Symbolism: A Discussion of the Text

Text of "I Want To Die Easy"

Section I I want to die easy when I die,
 I want to die easy when I die,
 I want to die easy when I die, Shout salvation as I fly,
 I want to die easy when I die.

Section I' I want to see my Jesus, when I die,
 I want to see my Jesus, when I die,
 Yes, see Him when I die. Shout salvation as I fly
 I want to see Jesus, when I die.

Section II Good Lord, when I die,
 Good Lord, when I die,
 Good Lord, when I die, Hallelujah,
 Good Lord, when I die.

Section I I want to die easy when I die,
 I want to die easy when I die,
 I want to die easy when I die, Shout salvation as I fly,
 I want to die easy when I die.

Section I" When I die, I want to die easy.
 When I die, Oh my Lord.
 Let me die easy. Oh my Lord, when I die.

My Lord.

In this anonymous spiritual text there are many repetitions of the phrase “I want to die easy when I die.” What did this mean for a slave “to die easy”? Spiritual texts commonly have several layers of meanings. On the most superficial layer to “die easy” could perhaps mean to die of natural causes and not at the hand of a vicious slave master or overseer. On another layer one could interpret this as dying in the grace of Christ and without fear of the afterlife. Howard Thurman, in his book *The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*, states that “A quiet death without the seizure of panic, the silent closing of the door of early life, this is the simple human aspiration” of these words.¹⁶⁶ At its deepest core, this idea of dying “easy” can be interpreted as dying as a free man, not as a slave.

Death surrounded slaves on the plantations—death of animals, crops, and most disturbingly, other slaves and family members. Death was all too familiar to those in bondage. Therefore, the word “when” in this spiritual is especially poignant. For the slave it was not a question of “if” I will die but more a question of “when” I will die. Slaves, who often found themselves surrounded by death and suffering, saw death as a beginning of freedom when freedom was not achievable in life. It is not enough for the slave to just die and to be free from this world and its problems and pains. The slave wanted to leave this existence “when” they died as a free person, not bound by anything or bound to anything. Roland Carter understands that this text reaches far beyond the desires of the enslaved African American. According to Carter, “Now, the thing about the music of the spiritual and the love of the spiritual being so universal is

¹⁶⁶ Howard Thurman, *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*. (Richmond, Indiana, Friends United Press: 1990), 20.

that it speaks to everyone is some way. So, everybody has something to bring to these songs. Everybody shares. Everybody wants to be free of something.”¹⁶⁷

The second section of this spiritual is contrasted with the first. The text “Good Lord, when I die, Hallelujah” is set in the parallel major of the first section. This movement from E minor to E major gives this text a more celebratory feel—as if the one enslaved is able to experience some of the joy of freedom, even if it is only experienced in the mind and for a short time. The text then moves back into E minor with a shortened version of Section I.

Use of Dialect

Although the text used in this spiritual does not reflect the use of AAVE, the use of dialect in performance is certainly appropriate. See Figure 8.1 for an IPA transcription of the text found in “I Want To Die Easy.” With the exception of the word “shout,” most final consonants, such as the final *t* in “want” should be softened or eliminated.

Figure 8.1. IPA Transcription, “I Want To Die Easy.”

I want to die easy when I die,

[aɪ wən tə daɪ ˈi zɪ wɪn aɪ daɪ]

Shout salvation as I fly,

[ʃaʊt ˈsæl vɛɪ ʃən æz aɪ flaɪ]

I want to see my Jesus, when I die.

[aɪ wən tə si maɪ ˈdʒi zəs wɪn aɪ daɪ]

Good Lord, when I die, Hallelujah, Good Lord, when I die. My Lord.

[ɡʊd lɔd wɪn aɪ daɪ ha le ˈlu jə ɡʊd lɔd wɪn aɪ daɪ maɪ lɔd]

¹⁶⁷ Carter, interview.

Use of Movement

The slow rocking feel of this song creates an atmosphere that welcomes movement. Any movement used should reinforce the feel of two strong beats per measure. Simple and subtle movements, such as stepping in place, walking around the room, or a gentle rocking motion of the body could add much forward momentum in a performance or rehearsal. These movements should call to mind a slave carrying a heavy load on a long journey. Beginning at m. 42 a change must occur. At this point, the dynamic is suddenly *forte* and the key has shifted from E minor to E major. Larger movements that mirror celebration and that have a momentum that moves up and not down would be appropriate in this section. This upward motion would help to change the color of the voice into something brighter and more jubilant. Any original movements should return after m. 50. In the coda there are several instances where the soprano voices continues to sing while the alto, tenor, and bass voices rest. Movements here could resemble a slave setting down their heavy load—perhaps a heavy bag of grain. On the next entrance, the alto, tenor, and bass voices should pick up their heavy load again and take a few more burdened

steps. See Figure 8.2. During the soprano solo beginning at m. 58, all movement should cease. At the final cadence, any movement that helps the singers experience the swell of sound into the final chord is appropriate.

Figure 8.2. "I Want To Die Easy," mm 50-57, arr. Roland Carter.

50 2 optional D.S. al Coda Coda mp

S I want to die (hm) When I die.

A (hm) Die eas - y. Die

T (hm) Die eas - y. Die

B (hm) Die eas - y. Die

50 2 optional D.S. al Coda Coda

P (hm) Die eas - y. Die

54 rit.

S I want to die eas - y. When I die.

A eas - y. Die eas - y. Hm

T eas - y. Die eas - y. Hm

B eas - y. Die eas - y. Hm

54

P

For directors who do not feel comfortable with choreography, care should be taken so that choristers are encouraged to move the body while singing during rehearsals. This movement will help alleviate tension, energize the choral sound, and help singers to internalize the rhythm.

Choral Timbre

Vocal Resonance

There should be two contrasting vocal colors used when singing this spiritual. Sections I and II of the text should have different sounds associated with them. Section I is characterized by a darker sound while Section II is characterized by a brighter more celebratory sound. The darker sounds, which call to mind a feeling of weariness, should not lose the forward placement. Choirs can experiment with this darker tone by first, finding a bright forward placement through the use of lip trills or by vocalizing on sounds that naturally bring the sound forward, such as [vi]. Once this placement is obtained, more pharyngeal space can be added to darken the sound to the desired color.

Vibrato

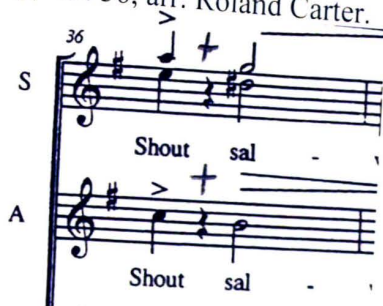
Vibrato can be used in this spiritual in a manner that helps the vocal lines to have forward direction.

Articulation

For the most part, this spiritual should be sung with a beautiful legato. Carter has marked indications of changes away from this legato articulation with staccato or marcato markings. The word “shout” is always marked with either staccato or marcato accents. This is one of the

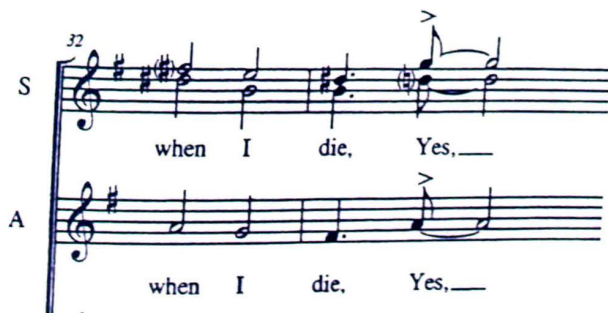
few instances in this spiritual where the final consonant should be clearly articulated and emphasized. The staccato should be interpreted as a separation and not necessarily as a shortening of the note to an extreme amount. The marcato on “shout” found in m. 36 should be executed by sharply accenting the [s] and also giving the pitch the full value. The final [t] should be placed on the following rest. See Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3. “I Want To Die Easy,” m. 36, arr. Roland Carter.



Carter has also marked a syncopated rhythm in m. 33 with a marcato accent. See Figure 8.4. This is the only syncopation that should be accented and should create the effect of an improvised moment of religious fervor.

Figure 8.4. “I Want To Die Easy,” mm. 32-33, arr. Roland Carter.



There are also staccato markings on the alto, tenor, and bass parts at mm. 52, 54, and 56. These should be very gentle and light. The rests Carter has added to the alto, tenor, and bass parts, along with the staccatos on the words “die easy,” will make the momentum of this piece begin to slow as if we are moving closer and closer to death.

Vowel Shape and Agreement

In order to have matching vowel shapes, Roland Carter prefers that his choirs use Italian vowels without diphthongs for the singing of any music.¹⁶⁸

Rhythm, Tempo, and Phrasing

Rhythm

The rhythms found in “I Want To Die Easy” are to be performed without swinging the eighth notes and, with the exception of the previously discussed m. 33, without accenting syncopations. Precision without angularity should be the governing thought when working on the rhythmic aspects of this spiritual.

Tempo

The tempo marking for “I Want to Die Easy” is half-note equals 52 b.p.m. This marking should be followed in the beginning and ending sections that are both in E minor. However, the section written in E major, “Good Lord, When I Die, Hallelujah,” could be taken a bit faster. This faster tempo will help breathe a new life and energy into this section. This energy will help singers brighten the tone and color the voice in a way that is more celebratory and hopeful than

¹⁶⁸ Carter, interview.

the beginning and ending sections of this piece in ABA form. The choir can return to the original tempo of half-note equals 52 after the fermata in m. 50. The soprano one part in m. 58 should be taken at a very free tempo and never seem rushed.

Phrasing

This spiritual displays a variation of the hyper-phrase structure that Rollo Dilworth discussed in Chapter 6. Usually the hyper-phrase structure is in an *aaab* form with the third *a* section becoming the apex of the phrase. See Figure 8.5. “I Want to Die Easy” is characterized by similar phrase structure that builds to an apex in the third section. See Figure 8.6.

Figure 8.5. Typical Hyper-phrase Structure.

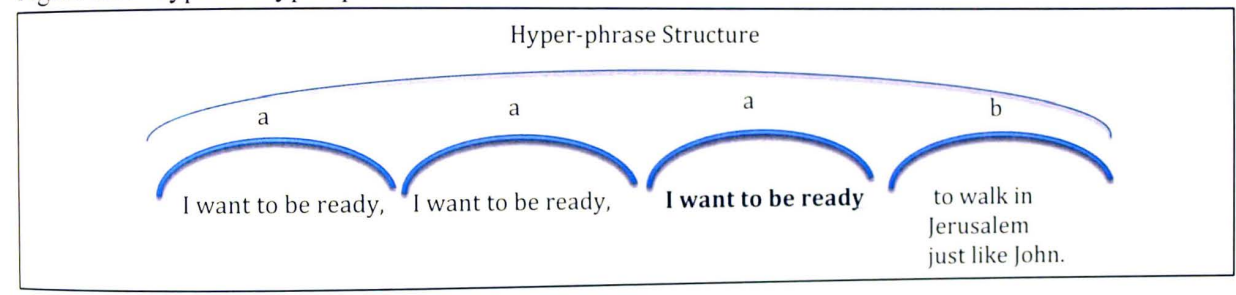
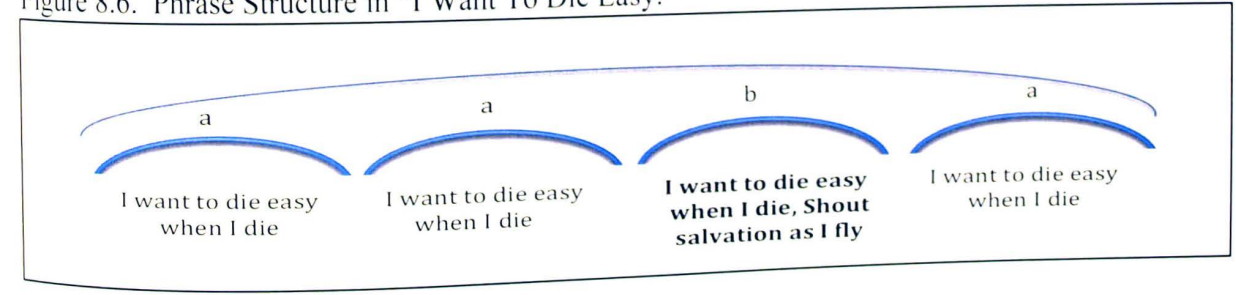


Figure 8.6. Phrase Structure in “I Want To Die Easy.”



Roland Marvin Carter, who according to Battiste “is perhaps the most significant living arranger of African American Choral music and is noted as an authority of the performance and preservation of African American music,”¹⁶⁹ was born in 1942, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Horace Carter, Sr. and Willie Mae Carter. According to his parents, he began playing the piano at age four. He would come home from church and play the tunes he had heard there. At age six, he began studying piano with Alma Stovall and continued to study with her for twelve years. In high school, he began studying music with Edmonia Simmons. It was Simmons, a former student of Robert Nathaniel Dett, who urged Carter to pursue a career as a musician.

Following high school, Carter attended the Hampton Institute in Virginia. Carter says it was Simmons who “literally took me in her car, deposited me on the Hampton campus for my undergraduate studies and that's where I studied and came under the influence of several of Nathaniel's Dett's students.”¹⁷⁰ It was at Hampton that Carter also became interested in Dett's work studying African American Spirituals.

After graduating from Hampton with a B.A. in music, Carter attended New York University. Graduating with a master's degree in music, he also did doctoral work at New York University. However, he left the doctoral program before completing it. He was later awarded an honorary doctorate from Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Carter spent almost twenty-five years as the director of choirs at the Hampton Institute, and also served for several years as the Chairman of the Music Department. Following this he became the Ruth S. Holmberg UTC Foundation Professor of American Music at the Cadek

¹⁶⁹ Battiste, 150.

¹⁷⁰ Carter, interview.

Department of Music and Conservatory at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, a university that, because of his race, he was unable to attend as an undergraduate. He taught at Chattanooga for twenty-three years and served as head of the department from 1989 until 1995.

As a composer, Carter is best known for his arrangement of John Rosamond Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing." This work has been performed all over the world. He has written many arrangements of spirituals such as "In Bright Mansions" and "You Must Have that True Religion" for both choral ensembles and solo voice. He has also written for organ and orchestra. The Chattanooga Symphony Orchestra performed his orchestral composition, *Common Ground*, which is based on tunes from spirituals, as part of its 2001-2002 season.

Carter's work has garnered many awards and recognitions. He is only one of three musicians to be awarded honorary membership into the famed Moorehouse College Glee Club—a distinction he shares with luminaries Robert Shaw and Leonard DePaur. In 2003, the Tennessee Governor's Arts Awards honored Carter as a Distinguished Artist. He was granted honorary membership into Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia and was a member of the charter class of "Signature Sinfonians." He is a member of the National Association of Negro Musicians—a group over which he has presided. His biography appears in *Our Musical Heritage*, *International Dictionary of Black Composers*, and *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*. As a conductor, he has appeared with the Yale University High School Festival (2008), the Houston Ebony Opera Guild (Music Advisor and Principal Guest Conductor), as well as the Chattanooga Choral Society for Preservation of African American Songs.

Recently, the University of Chattanooga Choral Department recorded two volumes of Carter's choral music. He presently serves the congregation of Cascade United Methodist

Church in Atlanta as the director of the Chancel Choir and continues to teach about spirituals in workshops throughout the United States.

Conclusion

Roland Carter's arrangement is an appropriate choice of spiritual for most high school or church choral ensembles. Carter's arrangement is less complicated harmonically, rhythmically, and melodically than Jackson's "Look What Dey Doin' To Jesus." However, it is an inherently dramatic arrangement which allows a wider color palette than Jackson's arrangement. Vocal ranges in this arrangement lie in areas of the voice in which young or less experienced singers can be successful. This arrangement would be suitable piece for working on phrasing due to the hyper-phrase structure prevalent in this work.

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Recorded May 15, 2015

4:00 p.m.

Music/Mass Communications Building

Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN

J. Nelson: And first thing is could you tell me about your training that you've had as a musician? Where you've had that training? Let's start there.

Dr. R. Carter: Okay. Let's start. My very early training was piano studies from the age of six through high school for 12 years with a lady named [Alma Stovall] who was a neighborhood piano teacher in Chattanooga, Tennessee. My parents told me I started playing at the age of four, picking up tunes in church and coming home and climbing up on the piano stool at age four, but I didn't start lessons ... as I remember now until I was six years old. Brothers played. My brother [Vince] was studying piano at the time, my older brother.

So I went to the same teacher that he had. There were always instruments around. I had an aunt who used to play carnivals and she would come to the house and play ragtime stuff, she played in the teens and the 20s and 30s. So my high school music teacher, who was not my piano teacher, but was a great influence on me because she taught me on the side. I had a teacher and she taught me also as I was accompanist and assistant and student back there in high school.

So she was a student of Dr. Robert Nathaniel Dett. So she was insistent that I would go to him where he had been, where she studied. So she literally took me in her car, deposited me on the Hampton Campus for my undergraduate studies and that's where I studied and came under the influence several of Nathaniel's Dett's students. I developed a great interest in his work and that became my big influence in spirituals at Hampton. Did a masters and then did some doctoral studies there but I dropped out of the program probably in the 80s having fun, doing what I was doing.

J. Nelson: So you got your undergraduate at Hampton Institute, right?

Dr. R. Carter: In the Hampton Institute, yeah.

J. Nelson: Fantastic. We're going to jump board just a little bit here. So if I were to use the phrase an authentic performance of a spiritual, an authentic performance of a spiritual, what things come to your mind as a musician?

Dr. R. Carter: Well, let me say I guess I'm hesitant about the phrase authentic performance only because there are so rare recordings, if any, of authentic singing of

spirituals in the field. So understand that when we are ... when I as arranger, I am not trying to capture the authentic performance. Now, there are some people who could probably ... everybody who has arranged or set a spiritual has set out doing different intent I think. I think the one who perhaps may capture the authentic style more than anybody else would probably be Hall Johnson. I think of that as he was a Hollywood person. He used to do all the choruses and the movies with slaves and all of that. And the number of voices and lines he puts in his, I think he grew up at the time that he may have heard some of those things done. But as far as an authentic performance, I would personally be careful to use that in terms of a spiritual because I'm not sure that we can capture what I think authentic.

J. Nelson: Well, that's fascinating that you said that. My next question is can a concert arrangement of a spiritual be authentic or are they too removed from the original sound?

Dr. R. Carter: They are too removed, and only the ones of Hall Johnson would come close to that I think. I think we've done what we call ... in my solo arrangements I like to call them solo art ... spiritual art songs, but I'm not sure ... they're basically choral arrangements. I think if you study all the different composers or arrangers for example, Dawson really did the big concert arrangement. Hall Johnson was a concert but much more with a flare and flavor and I think closer to the authentic. Burleigh did sort of straight forward harmonization's of spirituals. Jester Hairston is a show person. So his spirituals are show pieces.

Lord forgive me, Jester. I mean, there are flavors in his work that are more show because he was the movie Hollywood type person. He came out of the Hall Johnson tradition but he came out in a different kind of tradition. William Grant Still, Nathaniel Dett ... for example, Dett did not consider his works as arrangements. He, for the most part, took thematic material and re-used it emotive or a fragment to write a new piece of music. He really followed the admonition of Antonin Dvorak to American composers so he is really sort of a pioneer for me in terms of the American national kind of school that he undertook.

Now, he has a couple of pieces that ... because I say not arrangements because arrangements for me are pieces that structurally basically remain the same. You don't tamper. You can extend a measure or extend a phrase, but basically the verse chorus verse chorus thing is still there. Dett didn't do that. Even with his piece, Listen to the Lambs, he only uses the call and response, the initial call and response. Everything else in there is [unintelligible 00:10:28].

J. Nelson: So he takes a germ of an idea and just expands on it.

Dr. R. Carter:

Yeah, expands in most of his pieces. So all of these guys, I see Moses did great concert pieces. My spirituals, I think most of mine ... and this is not to put down anybody else's, not all arrangements are spirituals or suitable for worship. I try to do more of a church related or much more for the church choir. That's why my things are not that difficult to do. And at the time, I was doing most of my writing, I was writing for a church music conference. So I knew I had that audience. And some had small choirs, some had big choirs. So my choice of arrangements and style was more worship oriented I think in the long part. So what's authentic here?

J. Nelson:

What if I change that thought process a little bit. If we think to that idea of a historically informed performance, what about that idea of authenticity? That changes it a bit.

Dr. R. Carter:

That changes it a bit. A couple of things. There are two factors that I think are important for me. It has nothing to do with the sound of the choir. The two factors have to do ... the principle one is rhythm and meter and which will impact the other and dialect. Okay. Those are two things that I focus on when I'm talking about stylistic ... I like the word stylistic rather than authentic. A stylistic performance of spiritual. And again, it will depend on the arranger. I think most people probably ... and this came from my experience with Hall Johnson. I had sessions with him back in the 60s when I was going to NYU. I had a couple of sessions with him and just sat and talked with him. But the mistake ... and I think at this point in my life, the mistake that most people make with spirituals is that tempos are too fast and too many beats in a measure. By that I mean ... no, go on.

J. Nelson:

No, no, because I bet you were about to talk about this. So when you say too many beats per measure, You're talking ...

Dr. R. Carter:

That's how it needs to be and Hall Johnson ...

J. Nelson:

And there's no feeling of the meter. It's just a beat, beat, beat, beat.

Dr. R. Carter:

Beat, beat, beat, beat, beat. Yeah. Hall Johnson was a person who believed and I don't know if he's written this anywhere but he explained to me that most spirituals have the same tempo, same pulse. Fast but slow. All right. Almost like a rocking chair. That's the pulse. [Singing] "I got a robe. You got a robe. All God's children got a robe. When they get to heaven, going to put on my robe and shout all over God's Heaven." "Steal away. Steal away. Steal away to Jesus." [Unintelligible 00:15:19] that's too fast. It's finding ... I don't know if you were taught or if you ever had this in terms of the pulse for the renaissance music. How do you determine?

J. Nelson:

Well, what I was taught ...

Dr. R. Carter: I'm old school so you go right ...

J. Nelson: No, that's fine. What I was taught is it has to do with the text, what the text is saying, where the stress of the text lies because in renaissance music, you don't really worry about a bar line. You take in some factors of things like where you will be performing, the ability level of your choir. That's what I got.

Dr. R. Carter: Right, but no. [Holding his index finger on the wrist of the opposite hand]

J. Nelson: Oh, your pulse?

Dr. R. Carter: Your pulse is the pulse that you use. I was taught this a long time ago.

J. Nelson: Wow. See, I told you I was going to leave here smarter.

Dr. R. Carter: No, no, no, no, but it may not mean anything in particular. Now, understand, I think I was a little slow in my example because finding that right pulse is [Singing] "Ezekiel saw the wheel, way in the middle of the"... but if you go [Sings the same phrase rather quickly] if you start doing that rather than ... I teach spirituals with one beat per measure. You strum back and release it. [Singing] "Way up in the middle of the airs. Swing low. Sweet chariot."

J. Nelson: So it's kind of that circular idea again?

Dr. R. Carter: Yeah, circular what Hall Johnson called a rocking chair.

J. Nelson: The rocking chair.

Dr. R. Carter: Yeah, finding that right pulse within that. I think Jester captured that also in a way. Especially in one of his demonstration videos. He was working with I think the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and they were doing his piece "I want Jesus to walk with me." Jester had this thing about when you walk with me, oh walk with me, walk with me, I want you and when he takes a liberty because many of these songs were used to march in from the fields also.

So you see that had to be a rhythm but then this wonderful liberty that he explains when the bag got a little heavy on one shoulder and you want to change sides. It takes a little time in the music to do that before you go back to the march. So that's the elasticity that you give in that circle, that same circle. I use it in my setting for example. I have a setting "I want to die easy." [Singing] "I want to die easy when I die." Step. Step. "I want to die easy when I die." Then that bag gets heavy. "I want to die easy when I die." It's a stretch of moving that cotton bag from one shoulder to another in the march. That was the kind of thing that Jester used to demonstrate. I love that idea.

- J. Nelson: So that idea that there is a concrete reason for a marking in music. It's not just slow down because you can.
- Dr. R. Carter: Yeah. Well, yes, but on the other hand, I have the freedom ... I offered the freedom in my own arrangements because I think I put very few markings in my scores because I like for people to be able to bring something to the music. Now, the thing about the music of the spiritual and the love of the spiritual being so universal is that it speaks to everyone in some way. So everybody has something to bring to these songs. Everybody shares. Everybody wants to be free of something.
- J. Nelson: Sure.
- Dr. R. Carter: And many of these songs are about being free from slavery and be as I tell students from their drug addiction, it can be free graduating from high school. We can all relate to these emotions. One in the crossover. And if we get into those and bring those emotions into it, it doesn't have to just relate to slaves.
- J. Nelson: That's fascinating. We have answered questions all over the place.
- Dr. R. Carter: I'm sorry.
- J. Nelson: No, I love it. I love it. I love it. This is fascinating.
- Dr. R. Carter: You're probably going to throw my interview out once you get to the other four.
- J. Nelson: No, when I talk to everybody else I say you've got some big shoes to fill because I have learned so much. So one of the questions was do you have any suggestions for determining an acceptable performance tempo if the composer or arranger has not indicated a tempo and I think you've answered that.
- Dr. R. Carter: I think so. I think you have it. It has to be with the flow of the music. Now, if it's too fast for the text and that's the other thing. That's too much. You can determine what has to happen.
- J. Nelson: Well, and one of the questions was if you as the conductor disagree with an arranger or composers tempo markings are you okay with just saying I will do what I feel is right?
- Dr. R. Carter: I probably do that to most of the music. I was just having this discussion with Gail [Dr. Gail Robinson-Oturu] today about that. I'm not sure composers know what they really want. Of course, I don't consider myself a composer as such. That's a whole bag that's beyond me. There are people who write everyday, who do that. I don't do that. I write when the spirit hits me. As a

matter of fact, you'd be surprised, most of my arrangements were determined when I was in my late 20s and early 30s.

J. Nelson: Really?

Dr. R. Carter: Most of my work was done during that period. I've written very little ... I've revised some things since then. But it frightens me that I had so much to say as a youngster and little to say now as I'm older.

J. Nelson: Right, who's to say that tomorrow that may not change? You have something else to say.

Dr. R. Carter: Quite honestly, most of my stuff germinated when I was a youngster. One of my most popular things [unintelligible 00:23:54], my first arrangement was done when I was 22 years old. Now, it has evolved over the past 50 years into something else.

J. Nelson: Well, I ...

Dr. R. Carter: And to lift every voice is 40 some years old.

J. Nelson: I hadn't really thought about talking about that but the [End the bright mansions] that you're speaking of, how has that piece changed from the 22 year old to you looking at it today or as a conductor, how have you changed your approach to that?

Dr. R. Carter: I have changed. I've lived longer and when that modulation comes, I'm not sure it was in the first one but when it comes to a major and I chose a major because it's kind of the military marshal key but not so much military as it is marshal. It marches. My interpretation there is that that's when I start marching into the city in that key, in that a major key. But that was new. And then the scripture came at the end of it. If the scripture wasn't there, [unintelligible 00:25:25] in my father's house. That evolved later.

J. Nelson: I find it fascinating to hear how someone who has arranged or written looks at things. Let's go back to dialect for a bit because that's a large chunk of what I'm writing about.

Dr. R. Carter: Okay. Do you feel comfortable with the use of dialect and the performance in scriptures?

J. Nelson: I do. But a person who ...

Dr. R. Carter: But a person who uses it has to understand what dialect really is. Now, my rule of thumb if it interferes with the flow of the music, don't do it. The level at which you do it. If you have to work hard at it, don't do it. I tell people all

the time if my foreparents [sic] had worked as hard as saying dee and duh as many singers do, we probably could've said thee and the by that time. It's not there to interfere with the flow of the rhythm either. I have an arrangement ... I was just looking at it. "I Heard the Preaching of the Elders." [Singing] "I heard the preaching of the elders. And I heard the preaching of the elders." But the line doesn't say I heard thee preaching of the elders. Thee preaching of thee elders. I'm not going to exaggerate those words, but at the same time, I'm not going to voice all the consonants hard at the time. I heard the preaching of the ... you know, I'm not going to do that. It's a dropping why. Most romantic languages and let's take the African languages first--most of the words ended in vowels.

So there were no endings. If we were dropping a G preachin', preaching, do we want to go there if it interferes with the rhythmic flow? And the other thing the [ði] and the [ðə] are really weak articles. The exaggeration of them just floors me, but again, TH did not exist or doesn't exist in my ... and I don't think it exists in any other ... and I don't think it exists in any language other than English. There's not a the in Italian, German, French, Spanish. So it was a hard sound to make. Dialect, everybody has a dialect. We have dialect within the dialects.

So what happens ... I think musically we have to be intelligent about the ... if we're doing a concept of spiritual, then you're going to be concerned also about the unification of the vowel. So that's going to take away from ... that's going to impact the dialect also. Then also you want to be sure that you don't want hard consonants interfering with the flow of the line. And I think those are two things that you want to be concerned with. And to be careful not to ... what do they call it? Boy I can't think of ... don't "Minstrelize" either the rhythm or the dialect.

J. Nelson:

In one of Rosephanye Powell's articles, she's written a lot on dialect and how to approach it for people who aren't familiar with it or don't know how to use it in its best way. And she talks about treating it as you would a foreign language where you spend time with it and you learn which places get stressed, which don't. And then André Thomas says something to the effect of if the dialect is drawing attention to itself, it may be too much.

Dr. R. Carter:

Okay. I like that. I like that. Absolutely. That is absolutely right. If it overshadows the music, again, impacting the flow of the music, it's well done and well said.

J. Nelson:

Do you think it's okay to take an arrangement in which the composer or the arranger has decided to use standard English in it? Is it okay to take that text and sing it with dialect or the opposite way?

Dr. R. Carter:

No, because ...

J. Nelson:

Because there's some that you see both ways.

Dr. R. Carter:

Yeah, you see it both ways but if I wrote I heard the preach of the preaching of the elders. Again, that's going to impact the flow of my music with that kind of articulation. I think that's kind of ... what happens I guess is ... that's a hard one. No, I wouldn't ... that depends upon your approach to dialect. I don't think anybody ... I don't know who would want the articulation of English according to Madeline Marshall and in the singing of a spiritual. Although I like her, I like that old text very much because I think dialect to me ... well, there are two aspects there.

The consonants, the lack of consonants is one aspect of that. And when do you [unintelligible 00:33:04]. But it has to relate to the music. And I think if you can do it ... I almost think it makes sense if people are sensitive to the music. I'm almost sure it is. I've never honestly been a person who has emphasized the singing of dialect or even raised a real concern about dialect in the singing of the spiritual because I sing the style of the spiritual will not allow me to be articulative with final Ts. For example, in my piece I mentioned I wanted to ... you don't sing I want to. Okay. So I naturally lead a song with one T. The T on two, not the T on one. I want to. Not I want to.

J. Nelson:

Sure.

Dr. R. Carter:

So I probably ... I don't know that I sing dialect. I think my choirs have a lazy speech pattern. I don't emphasize the dialect either in a piece or in a piece that does not have. I let the style of the music influence me more. And the unification that I'm seeking from my singers, whatever that takes, if dialect works, if it has an emphasis on the word, but I do more of ... even most of my singing in English. I like to use Italian vowels. Separating [unintelligible 00:35:34] so I'm not that conscious admittedly of dialect when I'm singing spirituals. That may create a problem for you.

J. Nelson:

No. Now, you've taught mostly in Chattanooga, right, and then you taught at Hampton.

Dr. R. Carter:

I taught at Hampton 24 years and then 24 in Chattanooga.

J. Nelson:

Right. I think in the south we may have it a little easier because almost everybody speaks with some kind of dialect in the south.

Dr. R. Carter:

Yeah, dialect exists everywhere in the world. So even now, there are dialects within dialects. That's what I'm saying.

J. Nelson:

We have our southern but in East Tennessee where I'm from ...

- Dr. R. Carter: And your southern black, right?
- J. Nelson: And in East Tennessee where I'm from we sound very different from West Tennessee.
- Dr. R. Carter: Yeah, and the Georgia black might have had a different language from the North Carolina. And certainly if you go down into Charleston area you're going to get even the Gullah dialect that I can't even begin to start with.
- J. Nelson: Let's see. That takes care of those. This is wonderful. I wanted to talk about movement a bit. I know a lot of people when they think of a choir moving, swaying or stepping to music, they think more of a gospel kind of influence. Since a lot of the songs that spirituals were based on had to do with the rhythm of work or the rhythm of moving, like, you were talking about coming in from the fields, do you think it's ever appropriate to have a choir use movement in a performance of the spiritual? And there's one I'm thinking of. And I don't know if you would actually call it a spiritual or not. There's a song, I've got a rainbow tied all around my shoulder. Is that the song? I've got a rainbow tied around my shoulder. It's like a group of prisoners all working together. They get a letter from home and you get the sound of them with their pickaxes on the side of the road.
- Dr. R. Carter: It depends on the song. I'm not a choreographer. So I don't do a lot of that. I have people who do that. I don't mind even personal individual expression within the choir as long as it doesn't interfere with the total expression on the interpretation. I leave the movement probably more to gospel as you suggest. But I probably would do something but I'm not the person to talk to about choreographer. I rarely used it with my choirs.
- J. Nelson: But it sounds like you're saying it needs to be very organic. It doesn't need to be something put on the music. It needs to come from the music.
- Dr. R. Carter: Oh, I think from the music rather than yeah, than not put on the music. I wouldn't stress that at all.
- J. Nelson: All right. What about timbre of a choir? A choral sound. Do you have a ... you don't like the word authentic. Is there a stylistically appropriate choral timbre that you like to hear when a choir is performing a spiritual? Is it a rich thick sound, is it lots of vibrato, is it less vibrato, is it a dark placement, is it a bright placement?
- Dr. R. Carter: That's a difficult one for me because most of my experience ... I guess I like ... I'm scared to say ... well, I'm not scared. I like a dark timbre but I don't want a weighty timbre.
- J. Nelson: I understand.

Dr. R. Carter: I want the vowel shape darker, taller.

J. Nelson: But not pressed.

Dr. R. Carter: But not pressed. I don't know if that makes sense.

J. Nelson: Oh it makes perfect sense in my book.

Dr. R. Carter: Because I always had difficulty and especially ... well, with the choirs, I've had mostly black students when I was at Hampton so my problem was adapting them, taking out vibrato for music ... to do Bach or to have a good mixture when I do Brahms. It's so interesting my experience with Robert Shaw was that his ideal sound, and not necessarily with the spiritual, was the fact that he said to have an integrated choir was the most idea because you had that wonderful blend and it would just work. But for the spiritual, again, I've heard my colleagues, my friends and probably André would have much more to do or to say about this than I because I remember he and Antoine [Amster] having a conversation about the sound of a choir and doing spirituals. And I've never quite ever made that a concern of mine. Maybe that's why I never had a good choir then.

J. Nelson: I doubt you had any bad choirs.

Dr. R. Carter: Well, I've had some bad ones I tell you. I didn't have a particular timbre for spirituals. It just happened. I'm sure that I must have shaken and changed some things.

J. Nelson: Did you notice any difference between the choirs that you had at Hampton Institute and the ones that you had at UTC?

Dr. R. Carter: Well, I didn't do a lot of choral work at UTC. I had the [unintelligible 00:43:37] at UTC and maybe a couple of years I did choirs while we were looking for a choral director. I chose the literature for what I was doing. So I didn't notice a big difference in those students, no. You're causing me to think and work.

J. Nelson: Well, how would you instruct a young conductor or someone beginning their career? What guidelines would you tell them, to give them so they could approach a spiritual successfully? And this can be anything from the preparation to in front of the choir time, what things do you say and do?

Dr. R. Carter: Perhaps one of the first things I would suggest is that a young conductor find collections of spirituals that were gathered prior to the 20th Century. By that I mean the slave songs of the United States.

J. Nelson:

Oh yeah where they used to go around and collecting tunes?

Dr. R. Carter:

Yeah, collecting tunes. What is it? The religious folks song [unintelligible 00:45:28] has had to institute. The first jubilee singer is history which has a wonderful collection of tunes in the end of the history. What I'm saying is that the person should develop an appreciation for the spiritual. In order to perform it, I just want the persons, most conductors to respect the spiritual, respect the music first and then understand the approach, or as I tried to, what the arranger is trying to do. And to understand that these arrangements are not authentic performances of slaves in the field.

They are what they are. And by that I mean you have to bring the same musicality a musician should to the spiritual arrangements. They ain't going to sing themselves although most people think they will. Just give them a spiritual and let them go. No, they will not sing themselves. So you've got to have the musicianship that you would bring to Brahms or Beethoven. You've got to understand the language, the shaping of vowels, consonants, when to explode or when to implode or when to forget. And then I would probably ask them to listen to a lot of spirituals.

Unfortunately we don't have a lot of...we have some field singings of individuals but not really a lot of group singing is done. And much of it is an attempt to recreate what was done and I'm afraid of those. So I guess the main thing is to develop an understanding and one of the books that I would refer you or anyone else to is Black Song.

J. Nelson:

Is that "The Forge and the Flame?"

Dr. R. Carter:

Yeah.

J. Nelson:

That is a fascinating book.

Dr. R. Carter:

It is. To understand and appreciate the spiritual. It's probably the Bible of spirituals.

J. Nelson:

Let's go back to that idea of you would ask them to listen to some spirituals. I know we don't have recordings of those authentic, but are there some composers or conductors or groups that you would tell someone ... for example, if you're singing a German art song and you're a baritone like I am, you're told go listen to Fischer Dieskau. Who would you tell a young conductor, go listen to this person and hear how their choir does it. That will give you a good starting point.

Dr. R. Carter:

I don't know. Dr. R. Carter.

J. Nelson:

Go find Dr. R. Carter on YouTube.

Dr. R. Carter:

I don't know. I have to get back to you on that one. Who is doing the work now? I don't know. I think you've got some fine ... I think Moses did an excellent job with some pieces of other people. He has a couple of recordings that has collections that included some of the really powerful [unintelligible 00:50:04] of spirituals. And I think there's something to learn there with his performances of those people. And you're going to find a lot of those ... unfortunately, we've lost a lot of the old recordings of what I would've ... historically they started black choirs because they had recordings of albums on 12-inch albums and they're hard to find, if they are existing. But you've got the work now. That's hard.

That's hard. Again, it brings me back to the importance of knowing what the arranger had. For example, if I were going to do a Hall Johnson spiritual, I would listen to the recording and I think it's been reissued by a guy named Eugene Simpson of the Virginia State choir. He has a Hall Johnson songbook. He worked with Hall for years. So his recordings of Johnson are fabulous. I understand the Jester worked within the Belmont group in the performance of his pieces. They have a CD on his pieces.

You've got wonderful resources like Damon Dandridge who performs his own pieces. And he and Stacey Gibbs, he and Stacey were in school together. They came from the same high school in Detroit. I think three or four people came out of that school. You've got those guys doing their own work. I don't know how much conducting Stacey is doing these days. Is he doing a lot of conducting?

J. Nelson:

I'm not sure. I know he does writing. That's his thing.

Dr. R. Carter:

So it's hard to find where to do ... I mean, Dawson recorded his own things and those were ... but there is not one place I would say one could go to do them but there are some historic recordings out there.

J. Nelson:

How do you feel about using instruments with spirituals such as ... and I know the bulk of the spiritual literature has been written to be a cappella but there are a handful here and there of pieces that are accompanied with piano.

Dr. R. Carter:

Yeah, there are some. It all depends. I'm not opposed to that at all. I think Dawson has a couple that ... but Dett did some and William Grant still has ... I mean, they are there and I'm not opposed to that. But that's what they were doing with the spirit. That's why I say you can't think of it as your authentic ... the performance of arrangements and settings cannot be interpreted or designated as authentic. Only within the style of the composer. It's only authentic as ... but not in authentic in terms of the genre. Is that right?

- J. Nelson: I think so. Let's see. One of my questions are what books contains information that sheds light ... you talked about the Forge and the Flame.
- Dr. R. Carter: Yes, that's historically from that perspective. I would read lots of ... but things also ... the introductions of Hall Johnson. The intros to the Johnson brothers collections and spirituals and the introduction to the Shawn [work] collection of spirituals, the intro into those ... not the arrangements, not to the arrangements but to the collections. They were put together.
- J. Nelson: I think that's about it.
- Dr. R. Carter: Feel free at any time to get back to me.
- J. Nelson: This came up in a voice class that I was in. Every so often our studio teacher, and I study with Sharon Mabry... get us together in the studio, we perform for each other and give notes and things like that. One of the guys did an arrangement ... I know it was either "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" or it was very familiar. I don't know why I can't think of it. I'm not sure. But anyway, at the ending, he took quite a bit of liberties improvising around ... and my thought was I don't know if that's appropriate. For me, it's not appropriate and what I suggest is that that person has to understand the difference. It depends on whose piece it was because some guys will write and allow that kind of stuff in there. It's important to understand the difference, as you well know, in the gospel and the spiritual.
- Dr. R. Carter: That was my thought.
- J. Nelson: And the improvisation process is ... the ornaments and decorations are quite different.
- Dr. R. Carter: So gospel ornaments are more direct.
- J. Nelson: There is one thing that just came to mind. You talked earlier about rhythm. When you look at a notated rhythm in a spiritual, is that ... I hope I'm asking this question correctly. Is that rhythm to be taken literally as what's printed on the page or is it to be taken as more ... I am wording this so poorly. Should it be more about a feeling of the rhythm or more about I can divide this and this and make it all square?
- Dr. R. Carter: If it's an arrangement, I think I would take it as the person wrote it. I hear people talk about swing and that's something I assume has gotten beyond me because I write precise rhythms. I think other people probably do too. Or they will indicate that it's permissible to do that. Yeah. I would try to adhere pretty much to ... the problem in doing syncopation and rhythms, you've got to understand and that's another part about the rhythm thing. If people understand the type of accents there are and appreciate.

There are three distinguished accent types: agogic, tonic, and dynamic. There's an accent called an agogic accent. An agogic is like a syllable that is accented simply because it's held longer. The tonic accent is the one simply because it's a higher note. It jumps out at you. And then the dynamic accent is the reinforced one. A note ... a syncopation is not a dynamic accent and does not require to be reemphasized. And that's what happens. Because of its rhythmic placement it makes it syncopation. And if you go and overdo it, the same train, that kind of reminds me ... no, that doesn't work. The syncopation itself, it just flows against the pulse.

J. Nelson:

I think that's maybe what I was wanting to get to in a roundabout way. I was taking the wrong train. Thank you for your time. I have found this fascinating.

Recorded July 18, 2015

2:00 p.m.

Boyer College of Music and Dance
Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

J. Nelson: The first thing I'd like to know is: When you hear the phrase "authentic performance of a spiritual," what ideas come to your mind? What does that term or that phrase mean to you?

Dr. R. Dilworth: Well, I think that there are a number of stylistic characteristics that come to mind. There are some very specific things that I think about. One is I think about vocal tone. I think about the delivery of the text, and that could take on a couple of different layers. I certainly think about rhythm as being the primary driving concept. Because music of African and African-American origins, rhythm is actually the primary component, as opposed to melody, although melody can be important. But unlike the music of the Western classical tradition, rhythm is often the driving feature, even in a slow piece of music.

I think about the intent behind the delivery of the music. I think about the desire on the performer's part to provide us with accurate, historical context. And certainly I think about the outward expression of the music. I think about how one has to present oneself, especially when it comes to the emotion and the emoting behind the emotion in the performance of the piece. And I could certainly talk more about all of those things at some point.

So those are really some of the guiding principles, I think, when I think about authentic performance practice, specifically to the spiritual, but to other styles, as well. Specifically to the spiritual, for this.

J. Nelson: Do you think it's a wise thing to look for an authentic performance of a spiritual? Because I've heard from some in the choir profession that the spirituals are somewhat removed from where they started. So maybe "authentic" isn't the correct phrase, but in more of a stylistically appropriate performance?

Dr. R. Dilworth: I think that one can strive for authenticity in a number of ways. Yes, the spiritual is very much removed from its original context in that they were not performed standing still at a concert hall, you know. Originally, they were, of course, conceived and composed and performed out in the fields and during labor intensive activities for the most part. Also, they were certainly composed during camp meetings when labor was not the primary focus. We know that, for sure.

And so in order to strive for authenticity, we don't necessarily look to put the music in that particular context, again. However, there are a couple of schools of thought when it comes to authentic performance practice, and I'm specifically referring to vocal tone, dialect. There are sort of two schools of thought. One school of thought is that we should strive vocally to recreate a much more I would say natural vocal tone. And some people sometimes say "raw" vocal tone. And then there's a school of thought that, no, because we are, you know, trying to put the piece in more of a concert tradition, that we should strive for a more polished, at least semi bel canto kind of vocal tone when we're performing the piece. And there are people who try to go for a mixture of the two.

There are people who believe that – many people who are on sort of the more natural, raw, in-the-field kind of sound, which the slaves would have employed – they would not have been striving for anything that we think of as sort of bel canto, Western, European classical.

There's this notion that the dialect has to also be very much the way the slaves would have sung it. Well, even that has its issues because depending upon whether you were a slave in Alabama, or Tennessee, versus someone who was in more Georgia, South Carolina, you may have pronounced things a little bit more differently just because of your own tribal traditions and what sort of limitations may have been placed on you in terms of your ability to assimilate the English language into your own native tongue and whatever lexicon from which you drew your own vocal native vocabulary, and whatever sort of phones and phonemes you were able to master through muscle control in your own language, versus what you are now trying to assimilate. So there are all sorts of issues with what it really means to be authentic.

But I think if we go back to those sort of six principles earlier that I talked about, these are certainly, in my mind, concepts that will at least move us in that direction. Because if you think about it, even with classical music, how authentic can you really be? We simply strive to move in that direction as best we can.

J. Nelson:

Have you read Bruce Haynes' book, "The End of Early Music?"

Dr. R. Dilworth: I have not.

J. Nelson:

Yeah, he is very much an advocate for historically performed performances, and he leaves no one untouched in that. He dresses down performers, conductors, the whole nine yards. He gets everybody in. Let's go to this idea of dialect for a little while. You've already addressed, or brought up, the issue of the geographical placement of the person having a lot to do with their

dialect. But when you prepare a spiritual, if it's one that you've arranged or another one, how do you handle the use of dialect?

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, that's a good question. Well I know a lot of people have different opinions about this as well. Depending upon what the spiritual is, actually, I will most likely use some dialect. And in very general ways I will think about, for example, the use of the letter T. When singing a spiritual oftentimes ... let's think about the placement of that letter. And this is my own system ... that T, or any letter for that matter, can occur in three different positions. It can either be at the beginning of a word, and I call that the initial; and it can be in the middle of the word somewhere, and I call that the internal; and then it can be ... if it's at the end of the word I call it the final.

So an initial T is often sounded as we would if we were saying, "Take me to the water," but notice when I sang the word "water" that's an internal T, and I did not say "water" [wa:ter] I said "water" [wa:də] So internal T's are often dentalized and softened and tapered to more of a D kind of sound. And if it were a final T it would also be pretty much the same. So that's how I handle it, and so I use that framework to discuss dialect with my singers. And we talk about, for example, the letter R and we talk about final "ing's" and whether we're going to say "going to," "gonna," or "goin' to" or some other, depending upon, again, regionally what would have been more accurate.

It varies with me greatly. Most of the spirituals that I arrange for modern day I don't go that far with the dialect. But the more general subtle things – such as the initials, internals and finals when it comes to "ing" or the letter T, the letter R, for example, those things I do want my singers to experience. And I help them to understand that this is not something that would be offensive to African Americans because many African Americans, if they have roots in the South, still speak that way in some cases. And also we want to help our audiences to understand that African Americans as they were attempting to assimilate the English language into whatever language that they had been speaking, their native tongue, they were approximating as close as possible. And so the fact that African Americans say "dis" and "de" instead of "this" and "the" has nothing to do with their intelligence level. It has everything to do with the fact that the "th" sound, as we know it, hardly anywhere in any language or dialect on the African continent exists. I mean you might come close with Zulu, a "th" sound, but even that's more of a "tuh" as opposed to a "th" sound as we know it.

So once we began to understand that these ways of saying these words were the approximations as they would have said it, and as people would have heard it being said or sung, helps us to be more authentic. The same rationale goes for people who choose to sing the Mozart Requiem with a Germanic Latin. Well there's lots of debate about that, but I have colleagues who say to me, "That's the way Mozart would have heard it, and that's the way the

people would have sung it.” They would have sung it with that accent, if you will, a German accent on Latin. And so you can argue the pros and cons of it, but there is some intentionality toward authenticity there. And the same is the case with the African American spiritual, at least it’s my belief.

J. Nelson: There’s a lot of correlation there between the African American, what we call slave dialect, and the Haitian Creole.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Absolutely.

J. Nelson: You know how the French, when they left them, they assimilated their French as best they could.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Exactly, and that mixture ... and some people either, in a positive or in a pejorative way, refer to it as sort of a patois, but that’s exactly right. And to be honest with you, some of that also crept into African American dialect. When you think of certain words that occur ... that you see in spirituals, for example, that’s very possible. So absolutely, there’s just sort of a mixture there.

J. Nelson: Well do you feel like it’s ever appropriate to do a spiritual, or to perform a spiritual, with Madeline Marshall style of English diction? Is that something you would see as appropriate, or would it leave you thinking there’s a color of sound missing there? How would you approach that?

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, personally I would probably say that something would be missing. There are choirs that choose to do that, and there are certainly people who have arranged the spiritual absent of any dialect and have chosen the sort of the standard form of the English language as we know it and insist that their choirs sing in that particular way. And to me that’s not necessarily inappropriate. But I do think that we have enough evidence and enough performance practice scholarly writings that would perhaps inform us to move in a direction a little bit more closely connected with the way this music was probably performed.

And again, there’s a whole continuum there in terms of what the possibilities might be, and no one really knows for sure if you’ve gotten all the way to the mark. But I think that there are certainly stylistic nuances that we should perhaps pay attention to, as we would if we were performing something from the early music repertory or if we were performing something from the operatic repertory or if we were performing something from ... if we were performing a Portuguese folk song. I mean the same is true. I mean there are people who choose to use Anglicized versions of certain languages, and I say, “Okay, well you can think of that, but can we move closer?” And so I think that’s my argument.

J. Nelson:

Okay. I think you've answered about three questions there. I love conversations like that. I'm going to talk a bit about movement. I know most people, most choral directors when they think of movement such as anything as simple as a step to a side or a [square] we mostly think of that in the gospel realm. And I know you've written a lot of music for both gospel and choirs. And I actually got to hear two of your pieces Thursday night at the National Cathedral. The Children of the Gospel sang and it was fantastic.

Dr. R. Dilworth:

Wonderful, yes. I just worked with them about a month ago – well in early May – and they did a combined choral set with the Strathmore Children's Chorus, and they did "Walk in Jerusalem," "Take me to the Water" and a couple things. So they may have done –

J. Nelson:

Yeah, that's the two they did.

Dr. R. Dilworth:

Yeah, that's great.

J. Nelson:

It was extremely enjoyable. Do you think there are movements appropriate to spirituals, or would you use that?

Dr. R. Dilworth:

Yes, I would. It's sometimes challenging to incorporate movement into a choral setting because there are other considerations that one has to think about in terms of if they're wearing tuxedos and formal gowns and if they're on risers versus being on the floor. So there are other considerations that one must think about. But my feeling is that movement should be a part of every single spiritual that is performed. People often argue with me on that, and they ask why. Well that's because when spirituals were conceived the slaves were moving when they sang them. That doesn't necessarily mean we have to move in the same way when we're performing a spiritual. But we cannot stand perfectly still because the movement that helped to create this music was very much inherent in the genesis of this music.

In fact, you can't go anywhere on the African continent, to my knowledge – and I've asked a lot of friends from different parts of the continent – to tell me what the word is for music in their native tongue. And they always follow it up by saying, "Well this word doesn't just mean music. It also means dance. It also means movement." So movement and music are intertwined. They're tethered at the hip in African culture. So for us to separate the two I think again moves us a little bit further away from the mark of authenticity as we try to approach it. And again, we'll never quite get all the way there. So I think that that's important. Now let me say this. I don't think that the movement has to be very pronounced all the time.

But let's just think about this. Your recorder's not going to be able to get this because it's going to be visual. But if I'm doing this, "Keep your hand on the plow. Hold on," now there's no mistake that that spiritual sounds the way it

sounds and grooves the way it does because you can imagine a slave being behind a mule, grabbing on to the handles of the plow and digging in, getting their leverage, because if they didn't when that mule took off they were going to go flying over the top of it. So you can imagine this grip and this kind of sinking into the soil. And that's probably how that song was composed. So I'm not saying that when a choir sings that spiritual that they must engage in this, but think of how much more powerful it be if they did. And so I think we have to think about again the genesis of this style of music. And in understanding it fully in terms of its development, we know that the movement was an integral and inherent part of the composition process. So I think it's important for conductors and choirs to strongly consider movement. And we may not know what the exact movement is, but think about the emotion that's tied up in every single one of those pieces. I can't imagine performing a spiritual and being able to credibly and artistically bring out the emotion without motion. I just don't see it. I could be wrong on that, but that's been my contention for a long time.

[Off topic]

J. Nelson: Everything I've read kind of mirrors what you've just said. But you are there first choral director I've talked to that has said yes to [unintelligible 00:21:38]. Some have said, "I'm not really comfortable with movement. I'm not a choreographer." And the same one that said that also said, "But if it's an organic movement, why not?"

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, absolutely. And it can be. It can be. I think we as choral directors have to give our singers permission and license to perhaps conceptualize themselves in an organic kind of movement experience – not to the point of distraction – but certainly to a level that says I'm not only engaging the mind, but I'm engaging the body in this music-making experience. And to be honest with you, Justin, I wouldn't knock movement in a classical piece or in a Baroque piece or a renaissance piece or even a modern piece of music for that matter because this is the instrument. And if we look at instrumentalists, all the time, they are – the good ones who are making the millions a year – they are physically engaging with that instrument in order to bring about what they believe is a heartfelt, artistically sound experience, product I should say. And so why do we, as singers, not do that. It's the same thing with any genre of music, but the spiritual we just have to – I think so.

J. Nelson: Wonderful. This is tied to that. I wanted to talk a bit about tempos. Some older spirituals that I have seen don't give a tempo mark. Now as a conductor, what guides your thinking when you look at a spiritual without any guidance or with very little guidance? How do you address ... this is the performance tempo?

Dr. R. Dilworth: Sure. Well the first thing I look at is the text. The second thing I look at is the harmonic rhythm, and I often let those two concepts guide me, first and foremost. But the reason I look at the text is because that will often give me a context for while I can begin to think about what the tempo may have been. For example, the spiritual "Walk Together Children" ... well I pretty much know what tempo to take that piece because the slaves were likely walking around in the fields when they conceived it. "Walk together children. Don't you get weary. Walk together children. Don't you get ..." That's probably about the tempo because if they indeed were moving around that is the tempo that most likely would match that kind of ... sort of casual. It certainly wouldn't be hurried. So I think about those kinds of considerations when I'm looking at tempo. Now certainly there's a margin there, or maybe a range that I have to think about based upon the number of singers in my choir, the acoustical properties of space, and so those things obviously go into play as well. But in general, I try very hard to look at those two things – the text and the harmonic rhythm are extremely important to me.

J. Nelson: As a conductor...you have two unique roles. You're a conductor and an arranger. But as a conductor do you ever look at a tempo marking and just go, "That's not a good tempo for this piece?"

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yes, I do. And I realize that tempo markings...it depends on whose tempo marking it is. If it's Randall Thompson's tempo marking I knew he knew exactly what tempo he wanted because he was very meticulous in his writing. But in most cases I think the tempo markings are a guide. And I won't have any of my music published without circa in front of the tempo marking because it is relative. It is relative. And there are circumstances, obviously, that may push you a little bit ahead of that marking or pull you a little bit behind it. And I try to use my best judgment based upon the text and based upon the harmonic rhythm and certainly the context. Historically, what most likely precipitated the development of this piece? So I think about those kinds of things.

J. Nelson: But it sounds like it has to be a very informed dissention or disagreement. It can't be "well, I just don't like that tempo."

Dr. R. Dilworth: Right, yes.

J. Nelson: This has to do with tempo – but the metrical organization of the spiritual – do you feel that in a spiritual there is a difference in the way the beats are weighted as opposed to most Western classical music? For example, in my discussion with Roland Carter he said that he feels the two biggest mistakes made with spirituals are there are too many beats per measure, and they are taken usually too fast. So he feels like, in the discussion we talked about, it's almost like that renaissance circle idea where the down is heavier and everything else is up.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, well I think that there is something to be said about that. I tend to arrange my spirituals in such a way that the measures are much larger, which often means that I will write more eighth and sixteenth notes in the measure and write it in common time as opposed to writing it in cut time with half as many. For example, my arrangement of "Walking to Jerusalem" some might in cut time, "I want to be ready. I want ..." that's a nice two. Well this is how I wrote it. "I want to be ready. I want to be ready." And that is because if you look at the phrase structure of many African American spirituals there is this very fascinating feature. And it has to do with the onset of the phrase. And its very deliberate climb to an apex or a peak or a climactic moment some people might say. And then its deliberate taper to what I call the resolution.

And if you don't mind I'll write in your book. I'll show you what it looks like. Here's where it starts; here's where it peaks; and here's where it tapers. It kind of tapers there. And so that kind of phrase structure is something that when one becomes aware of it it very much supports what Professor Carter said in that it doesn't go too fast. It allows you to really know where the phrase has its apex, and it will automatically take care of the line of the phrase. And it will automatically take care of the syllabic stress of the phrase, the weight within the phrase. So if you just take what I just sang, and you do that entire phrase in four as opposed to doing it in two, watch what happens. I'm going to try to graft the phrase this way, so you're looking at it, "I want to be ready. I want to be ready. I want to be ready to walk in Jerusalem just like John." It all makes sense. So if you think of those little micro-phrases, four of them, then you begin to understand not only how these phrases were very sort of carefully formed, but you also begin to understand how these phrases fit together.

A lot of people say, "Why is there so much repetition in the text of a spiritual?" Well there's a reason for that. I mean you're moving towards a resolution, and that's what the final phrase "to walk in Jerusalem just like John" is. But if you look at each one of those little micro-phrases and the shapes that they take on, when you string all four of them together they take on what I call a hyper-phrase structure, in which you have four of these little ones inside of one of these big ones. And so if you look at the mathematics of it, if you have four phrases stacked together under this hyper-phrase structure, the third phrase ends up having the climactic moment.

J. Nelson: Sorry, I just had a flash from. . . that's the "Golden Porportion" that Rodney Eichenberger speaks of.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Absolutely.

J. Nelson: Sixty-six percent.

Dr. R. Dilworth: That's what it is, yeah. That's what it is.

J. Nelson: I have to email him and say wow.

Dr. R. Dilworth: He knows what he's talking about.

J. Nelson: Now let's talk about the tone and the timbre you like to hear from a choir performing a spiritual. What is that ideal sound or balance to your hear.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Again, there are a number of considerations. It will depend on the tempo. It will depend on whose arrangement it is. But in general I tend to like a tone that is a little bit darker than ... if we take the continuum of the *chiaroscuro* I tend to be just a little bit more on the *oscuro* side, but that just depends on the piece as well because there are some spirituals, or some moments within spirituals, where I need more brilliance, and I'll ask for more *chiaro*. But in most cases I try to be just a little bit ... again, if you think of the continuum, and *chiaroscuro* being in the middle, I'm just a little bit back of that.

J. Nelson: Now is that to be confused with throatiness? Is that what you're describing, or almost throatiness?

Dr. R. Dilworth: Okay. That's a good question. I like to be just in back of *chiaroscuro* but not all the way back to the point that it's what I consider throatiness. And I'll tell you why I like that sound. Just back of *chiaroscuro*, just to the back of it, I think that there is an entire realm of resonators that we don't often think about using, especially when we're in classical music. If we go all the way back to the pharyngeal resonators, way back here, then yes, it's going to be a woofy, dark, throaty – you may even get a little bit of [fry] back there, I don't know – when you're doing it. That sound, for me, is not practical for modern singers to do on a regular basis because I think technically it is not something that's done all the time for most classical singers unless you grew up that way.

Like in the African American church you'll hear a lot of throaty gospel and spirituals and hymns being lined out. And culturally that's the norm, and so you'll hear African American choirs, many church-related choirs, who will sing with that kind of sound, and I think it's great. The problem is most modern trained singers aren't able to do that. So I have to figure out what is most practical for my singers. What's going to help them to be vocally healthy much of the time? But what's going to help us at least give the listener and the singers a glimpse of some of the coloristic things that is very much a part of most African folk and ritual singing. And it's that full-throat, no head voice, kind of sound. So I have to figure out physiologically and anatomically and technically where I can help my singers to place that sound. So that's what I go for in most places – especially when I'm working with children.

J. Nelson: Well let's assume you're working with students who are late teens up.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Okay, sure.

J. Nelson: So we're talking college choirs. How do you work – or what ideas do you use – to get that sound that you're speaking of? How do you describe that without it turning into that 16-year-old bass trying to sound Russian?

Dr. R. Dilworth: I use a variety of techniques, but the one that I use most often, especially with boys but even with female singers, is I literally have them pretend they have a grapefruit right here in the back of their throat. And we literally open up the pharynx, and we say vocally it's like this. And what I do is I turn to the side ... and I'll tell who does a good job of this, and he does a slight variation on this. But his name is Tim Seelig, and Tim is in San Francisco now, but he had the Turtle Creek Chorale down in Texas for many years. And what I do, like him, is I dial it forward. I turn sideways and then I sing. I'll sing like ... I do that with my singers.

And we experiment with that. And we do this sort of dialing back and forth. And I don't even talk about resonators. I don't use any fancy language, because I do this with little kids too. And I keep them exploring the continuum, if you will, and when we get to about here is where I tell them to stop. And I'll say, "Okay. Let's sing this phrase now, and let's keep our hands here, and let's sing it like that." And then I'll have them go all the way back and say, "Stop. Let's sing it like that." Then I'll go all the way forward, "Stop. Let's sing it like that." So I help them to explore the continuum of brilliance versus darkness. And when I get it to where I hear it I stop them, but it's usually about right here. It's usually just a little bit past 1:00, 2:00. It's like right there.

J. Nelson: Do you ever notice that pulling the placement back some ... does it affect the intonation any?

Dr. R. Dilworth: It can, and I think it's important to teach your singers how to manage that because just as you do it this way, intonation can be affected. When you go all the way here the same problems can occur. And so it's just a matter of technically building the voice so that they begin to manage that. Yeah, because the more you go back, the more ... I mean they're raising the soft palate, but that tongue starts to get in the way. Sometimes the back of the teeth are together. And I'm like, "Don't put them together." So there are some things that can get in the way of intonation.

J. Nelson: I can imagine people wanting to press the back of the tongue.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Absolutely. And of course, as you start to bring it forward, the intonation becomes more in focus because they're beginning to activate what's here. And for so many people these resonators really manage their intonation a lot as it's

coming forward here. So yeah, absolutely, those possibilities exist, but we try to mitigate that.

J. Nelson: Okay. That's a new idea. I'm interested in that. So let's talk about you as an arranger for just a bit.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Okay, sure.

J. Nelson: What would you like to see a conductor do when approaching one of your arrangements that maybe they might not do in another arranger?

Dr. R. Dilworth: That's a good question.

J. Nelson: That's not a greatly worded question.

Dr. R. Dilworth: That's okay.

J. Nelson: But I think you understand what I'm after.

Dr. R. Dilworth: I do. I think that there are a couple of principles that I would like for people to apply when approaching my music, and it's the same principle I use when I approach anyone else's. Three things – one, do everything you can to learn all that you can about that music and about the genre and the performance practice, historical context, all of that. That's number one, do your best to do your homework on the piece. Second, study it like crazy. Know everything that it has to say. And once you know what it has to say, let it tell you what to do in terms of gesture and in terms of sequence of rehearsal and teaching the piece. I know it sounds crazy, but I believe if we study any piece of music well enough that it will tell us what it needs. It will. It'll tell us everything that it needs for us to do in order to deliver it, if you will.

The third thing is once it has told you everything that it needs from you do your best to be the composer or the arranger's advocate, and then get out of the way. Sorry to be so crass, but that's really what it is. And I'll tell you why I say that. Yes, the spirituals and gospel music is an African American art form, and we have concertized this music in order for it to be placed in artistic arenas all over the world. But one of the things that I'm always concerned about is that we often tend – all of us as trained conductors – we will take our Western principles and our Western ideas and our Western gestures and impose them upon something that's not Western. And we do that not only for our own level of comfort and convenience, but we also do it because we think that that's the way it needs to be done. And my feeling is that if we go the opposite route – instead of saying, "That's in four, so this is what I'm going to do to it." Rather than us doing that let us look at ... for example to go back to the, "I want to be ready," that entire phrase is in one bar of four. Does it really need to be conducted this way? Or does it need to be conducted this way?

Now the second gesture that you saw you're not going to find in anybody's conducting book. But my guess is that that gesture approximates a little bit more closely to what needs to happen than this. So that's kind of my guiding principle when it comes to not just spirituals and gospel music – my music, my arrangements – but anybody's music. And I think we owe it to the composer or the arranger to let the music tell us what to do with it, rather than us imposing a blueprint or a formula or a framework on it that we've learned that's based on another tradition. I think we have to let rhythm dominate, and unfortunately, many conductors ... maybe it's because they don't quite understand that rhythm is more important than melody in African ... and this is all documented. This isn't anything I'm making up. A guy by the name of A. A. Agordoh, who's a West African scholar, I mean he writes this in his book. In fact, I can go get the book and show it to you.

Rhythm is dominant, so we have to allow rhythm to be the driving force when we teach the music and when we perform the music, and certainly when we conduct the music. But our Western conducting gestures do not accommodate rhythm. They accommodate metrics. And so what does it mean to conduct rhythmically as opposed to metrically? Well we don't know what that means, most of us, because that's not what we learned. And that's not what was written in ... I'm not going to name the names of anybody's books. But it's not written in anybody's books. We are taught, as conductors, to conduct metrically not rhythmically. So what does that mean when you're dealing with this kind of music? Should I impose my metric framework on something that should be interpreted rhythmically? Well that's what most of us do. So I challenge conductors to rethink their entire construct of what it means to be a conductor when they're looking at my music in particular because I'm going to write it in such a way that's going to challenge to not think about baseline and boxes and whatever.

J. Nelson: Wonderful. You mentioned Agordoh. Is that how you say it?

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yes, A. A. Agordoh, and I don't think you can find the book here, but I'm going to send you a bibliography. I have a four-page handout on the African American spiritual, and the last page is like a bibliography. And it may be in there, but I don't know if the Agordoh book is there, but I'm going to email it to you right now.

J. Nelson: Well that answers that. Okay, great. Are there composers or pieces, spirituals, that you'd like to see performed more? Because we do get stuck on the things that we hear in the ACDA conferences and stuff like that, which they're great, but are there writers maybe of the past that you wish would get more stage time because of what they're doing or what they're [unintelligible 00:49:41]?

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, sure. Well I think – and I'll mention names because I know all these people – but I think when the mid-1990s hit, mid to late-1990s hit, Moses Hogan came on the scene and of course revolutionized the way we think about the spiritual in its concert version. And what he had to offer was exciting and fresh and innovative and still is to this day, of course. So there are people who probably think a lot of his music has sort of overshadowed ... his arrangements have sort of overshadowed the works of other composers. And there are people who have probably left Burleigh and Dawson and Jester Hairston and sort of looking at them as relics of the past. But if the truth be told, none of us would be doing what we do to this day if it weren't for those folks.

A lot of Harry Thacker Burleigh's choral spiritual arrangements have never been published. Go online, if you can, but a number of his manuscripts are up in New York at the Schomburg Library up in Harlem, the Schomburg collection. I think it's at the Harlem – probably the public library up in Harlem. There are a number of them that are up there, and I had a resource. I'll try to email it to you. I printed it all out, but there are a number of arrangements that never saw the printing press. And I plan to go up there, actually, this fall and dig through some of them. Robert Nathaniel Dett – he's got some great arrangements, and I think people have just sort of forgotten about them – not totally – but then there are other people who have arrangements that are really cool, like Roland Carter, but people like Evelyn Simpson-Curenton, who's down in Washington, DC.

People like ... a young kid, 31 years old, Marques Garrett, well he's on his way down to Florida State to study with André Thomas. He was director of choral activities at Cheyney University here just outside of Philadelphia. And so there are people like them. There's Damon Dandridge, who's now at Bethune-Cookman, and he's got a few arrangements. Alliance has published a few of them. But there are people like Augustus Hill who has just a handful of things, maybe only one or two things in print. And I think they're both by Alliance. Augustus lives up in Detroit. Albert McNeil – nobody's looking at his stuff anymore. I was just hanging out with him a couple of weeks ago. That man's 95 years old.

J. Nelson: I was surprised to hear he's still alive.

Dr. R. Dilworth: And he's more alive than you and I put together. He is quite the spry, feisty 95-year-old man. I mean he gets around better than people half his age. So there are people like that, and Roland Carter, his stuff gets around, but more young people need to know what he's doing. So I think there are ... Betty Jackson King, very few people know who that woman was, but she lived in Chicago, and she's got some great arrangements. And many of them are out of print now. Lena Johnson McLin – Lena lives in Chicago. Lena must be like 90 years old. Well back in the 1970s, Neil Kjos out in California was publishing

just about everything she wrote. She has tons of arrangements of spirituals. Undine Smith Moore – a few of her things are on the [unintelligible 00:53:55] label. I've got few things of hers. Ulysses Kay – I don't know if any of his stuff is still in print anymore. So these are people that I hope folk know about, but again, because of the modern era that we're in, the modern era of the spiritual, which is really precipitated by the work of Moses Hogan, pretty much single-handedly, we're just not paying attention to these folks anymore, which is too bad.

J. Nelson: Yeah, unfortunately, when I started this project I was aware of your work, André Thomas and Undine Moore just because we sang "Daniel, Daniel."

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, good.

J. Nelson: And that's about ... and Rosa [Filkins]. That's about it. So I just found all this wealth of things that I'm like –

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, Margaret Bonds is a name you should put down. A number of her things are no longer in print, but Margaret Bonds – I did my dissertation on her. So I know her stuff. Yeah, these are great souls of the past who ... every last one of those people I'm standing on their shoulders. I mean if it weren't for what they did I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing, period.

J. Nelson: It's a fascinating legacy.

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, indeed.

J. Nelson: I just have a couple more here. I only have one more, and this was something ... it just came up recently when I was reading. And I wish I had written down the name of the book. But for so long I had always understood that spirituals were written on two levels – the level of this is what I'm saying and the level of this is what I mean. And it was in the last two weeks because I circled it and put a notes to find out about this ... where basically the author said something to the effect of that we're giving the spirituals too much credit if we approach them that way. His take was we need to approach them at face value. This was an older book, probably written in the '60s, which could shade its thinking somewhat. But it was when I found it was somebody else who did [unintelligible 00:56:41] and we actually had it at the library at our school. I looked at it. But is it your understanding that the symbolism in spirituals was very much there on purpose?

Dr. R. Dilworth: Yeah, the spirituals ... I think that there are some you can probably just take at face value, but by and large, the ones that have gained the most popularity they speak to us on both the physical and metaphysical levels. And there is absolutely, positively, no doubt in my mind that there were multiple meanings in these spirituals because you have to remember when the slaves were

enslaved their drums were taken away from them, and the reason they were taken away from them is because the slave owners felt that they would communicate through them. And the slaves were separated on the plantation so that they were not able to talk to each other. So the way they were able to communicate was through this music. And sometimes it was just to say, "Hey, how doing?" Sometimes it was to say, "Hang in there." Sometimes it was to say, "We're going to get together in one of these [hollars] out in the woods and have a secret camp meeting." And sometimes it was to say, "We're about to get the heck out of here, and we're going to plan an escape."

And if you look very carefully at a lot of these texts you can see that very clearly, very clearly. I mean if I'm here, and the next slave is way over by those steps, and I'm walking along and I'm saying, "Meeting tonight, meeting tonight, meeting on the old camp ground," well the slave owners thought we're training them to be good Christian soldiers, so they're talking about that great camp meet up in the sky. We'll let them be. What they were really – they were talking about that – but they were also saying, "Guess what, we're going to get together tonight, and we're going to meet, and we're going to have a little celebration." I mean there's no doubt about that. Why were they singing, "Wade in the water. God's going to trouble the water?"

Well we know that's a form of spiritual cleansing and baptism, and that's what they wanted the slave owners to think. But that also meant I'm going to make my way to the water because if I can get to the water it'll throw off the scents of the dogs, and I am home free. No doubt about that – no doubt about that. I mean when a slave was walking through the field singing, "Shine on me, shine on me. I wonder if the lighthouse will shine on me," again, the slave owners thought that lighthouse is Jesus Christ, and they're singing about if the lighthouse is going to shine on them. Well what they were talking about was where on earth is the North Star? That's why "Follow the Drinking Gourd" is an important spiritual because they knew if they could find that North Star, boom, I can make it.

There's no doubt in my mind about that. And I think that the more we look at these spirituals the more we would see that. All of the biblical narrative spirituals, like "Little David, Play on Your Harp," and "Who Built the Ark? Noah Built it," "Hoist the Window Noah," "Go down Moses," I mean all of these point to this notion that, yes, these spirituals were re-enforcing the Christian teachings that they were receiving from the evangelists, and that's what the slave owners wanted. But by the same token, as the evangelists and preachers were telling these stories, the slaves were creating songs about them because they found resonance with the fact that if the Lord can take care of Moses, then surely he's going to take care of me. I mean that's just ... it was an affirmation of their faith. And it helped for them to prove to the slave owners that they were taking in all this information. But at the same time, it was giving them the hope that if freedom could not come for them while they

were living in this form on earth, they knew freedom would come when they made their way to heaven. "Elijah Rock, shout, shout." So I have no doubts about that – no doubts.

J. Nelson:

That's good. Did we hit all of those? Tone, yes, delivery and layers, rhythmic driving, intent. Yeah.

Dr. R. Dilworth:

I actually would like a transcript whenever you send it – only because sometimes I don't remember what I say. I'm going to actually send you right now this handout on the African American spiritual so that you will have it. There it is. I can send it to your APSU email?

J. Nelson:

Yes.

Dr. R. Dilworth:

And I can get that book if you want to look at it.

J. Nelson:

No, I think I'll be fine. I can get it through the library. It's there at APSU Library.

Dr. R. Dilworth:

Okay. Well I don't know if you'll be able to find the book, to be honest with you, because I bought it in Ghana I think. So while this is coming to you let me just run into my office. I'm going to have to cover my face because there's dust everywhere. That's why we didn't have the meeting in my office. It's dusty, but I'm going to run back there because I want to ...

Recorded via Telephone
August 7, 2015
4:00 p.m.

J. Nelson: I know it's [research into dialect] pending publication, but can you kind of summarize your research in a nutshell, basically?

Dr. F. Barber: I'll put it in a nutshell. Certainly, so my research specifically was on the acquisition of the language used by the slaves and then the languages that are then found in spirituals, languages and dialects. So I actually did research and did several linguistics classes as well. And part of my dissertation was just talking about how the slaves acquired the English language and then therefore the dialects that came about. So I did touch briefly on Gullah language, that there are some spirituals using Gullah language as well as Louisiana Creole. But my focus on AAVE, which is African American Vernacular English, which is a dialect of course of standard English and is the primary dialect that's found in most spirituals that you will find all the way back to the earliest collection that was published *Slave Songs of the United States* in 1867.

So then the focus of my dissertation was then trying to figure out what the performance practice should be in spirituals. I did this through two things. I wanted to research the actual scores and again even though there are some transcriptions that were dated prior to the publication in 1867, that is what we kind of think of as...I don't want to say our gold standard of where we're to begin, but looking at that early publication, which actually is transcriptions taken from slaves. I don't know if you're familiar with it. Are you familiar with that collection?

J. Nelson: The "Slave Songs of the United States," yes.

Dr. F. Barber: Okay. So you already know that the transcriptions came from several different slave plantations in several states. And so then I wanted to see if dialect was actually reflected in the music. So part of my dissertation, or focus, was I took two songs, "Nobody Knows the Trouble that I've Seen." What was the other song? Let me look here. Actually, I'll make sure I pulled my dissertation out. I pulled two songs and looked at the earliest transcription and then ... "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" and "In Bright Mansions Above," both that are familiar texts. And I actually traced them from their earliest transcription to the modern transcriptions and actually just looked at dialect. And my goal was to see how dialect was reflected in written scores, and then my other focus was doing listening. And I spent a lot of time at the Library of Congress specifically.

I also did some research in Chicago and was looking at specific studies in early recordings. The earliest recording that I have noted in my information was from 1893. But I listened to an earlier recording of not only college choirs, or what we think of collegiate performances, like Fisk Jubilee and Hampton Institute and Tuskegee, I also looked at ensembles. And then I looked at several studies that were done at the Library of Congress. Around the turn of the century there were several studies that were done that were trying to record not only the dialect in singing but also studies of the dialect, or recordings of the dialect in just speech. And so I looked at the Robert Winslow Gordon collection. I don't know if you're familiar with that.

I also looked at the University of Mississippi Delta research collection. And then there is a Hampton Institute research collection. All of these are at the Library of Congress. And I listened to everything. I had cylinders that they actually made a digital copy of, and then I had also several reels. And these studies actually had interviews with people from various states – again, across the South primarily – and then also did recordings of individuals singing, not just spirituals, but also traditional folk tunes and then also recordings of full church services. And so it was fascinating, and what I did was take a collection from that and actually transcribed myself what was being stated as the dialect that was being stated and then actually located that.

My other emphasis, and I guess the final approach to my work that I'm working on, is trying other come up with a helpful guide for teachers. And one of the ways that I'm trying to do this is through using IPA because one of the things that I noticed was a need for IPA because of inconsistencies of how – even from one specific transcriber to another – how you would define it or how a sound would be transcribed. Whereas if you use IPA that is something that is of course familiar to...are you a choral major?

J. Nelson: Yes.

Dr. F. Barber: Okay. So that would be something, of course, familiar to anyone who's a vocal major. So that's the other part and focus of my research.

J. Nelson: It sounds fascinating and daunting all at the same time. So in your research did you notice an evolution of the dialect from the earliest sources you encountered to what most people understand as that dialect today?

Dr. F. Barber: One of the things that I found most fascinating, and I think this was...I don't know if I would say evolution, but maybe a...this has a lot to do with my stuff. But I think around the time of the civil rights movement in the United States, 1960s, we see a distinct shift in publications from earlier transcriptions where you would see dialect transcribed in every single spiritual, whether they were writing ... I'm going to use, for instance, the traditional deletion of an R or the R turned into "shwa" sound. So instead of "better" it would be "betta."

And so we would see that E or that change, or even just the “th” being changed to a D. You would see that reflected in scores all throughout up until about 1960. And then we see a shift where arrangers begin to put less and less dialect in the scores to the point that now where many arrangers of “traditional spirituals” do not actually even reflect any dialect in the score at all. And there is no help for those who are trying to perform in how things should be pronounced or whether it should just be Standard English.

This is another reason why I wanted to come up with a system, and one of the things that I did was kind of went through and came up with several things that were used over and over again – if that makes sense – that I clearly could see as part of the performance practice that in all of the scores that I saw this would be – like the “th” being changed or the “shwa.” Or another thing that a lot of people haven’t looked at a lot – this is one of the few that is in reference to a vowel – that is the diphthong becoming a monophthong. Instead of “wide” you would see “wahd” – just the first vowel being used. And so I guess one of the things that I noticed most strikingly was that there was almost ...in the idea of political correctness because one of the things I also address, even when I articulate this out at conferences, is that we clearly have to realize that there is a negative connotation associated with slavery attached to using dialect.

And you have African Americans who are not wanting to use it because there was so much in the literature – and this was something I found even when I was looking back at books – most of the books or transcriptions were done by Caucasians. And you would have this huge introduction that would be very, very negative before you would move to the spiritual. It was fascinating to me about how it was broken. The language was broken. And all this was again because of this type of slavery. And there was already a negative to it, which is another reason why I addressed my research through language because when you think of it, any other culture who was coming to the United States when they acquire English there may be some sounds that are not native to them. Asians or the Hispanic community – the might be some sounds that were not found in their native tongue. And this [unintelligible 00:11:23]. And so what was called broken was really not broken. It was their adaptation of the English language because there were several sounds that were not found in their native tongue. And so that “th” sound, which is one of the primary ones, which is not found in African languages, was softened, and that was the overall effect, that there was a softening of the language, and the “th” became a D.

And so one of the things that I noticed ... I think around 1960, in the era of being politically correct, or the civil rights movement, I think arrangers just began ... I don’t know this. But it appeared that they began not to use dialect or even reflect it. And I think it was in connection with the civil rights, because that was the tie. That’s the only thing I could come up with that made

sense. But I found it very fascinating. And so my hope is that my research will stimulate a conversation for modern arrangers and also that I can provide some really significant performance practice ideas for teachers so that they feel comfortable because what's happening is you're seeing a lack of performance of a lot of literature, especially of the early literature, from arrangers that are just not being performed by Dett and even Dawson now, Burleigh. So that's part of my passion, as you can tell.

J. Nelson:

It's fascinating. I always enjoy listening to someone who is passionate about what they're doing. They can make the phone book interesting, so this is wonderful. So how many ... I know you talked about the AAVE dialect and Gullah, and there was another one that I didn't write down.

Dr. F. Barber:

AAVE is the only dialect. Gullah is actually a language, and then Louisiana Creole is also considered a language as opposed to a dialect of English.

J. Nelson:

Are there other dialects that you discovered or came across?

Dr. F. Barber:

No, AAVE was called Black English early on. It's all talking about the same thing. So if you hear something about Black English or Black Vernacular English, AAVE, African American Vernacular or African American Vernacular English – they're all names for the same thing. But what I did also discover is that modern day Ebonics is actually a direct descendant of AAVE, if that makes sense, through my linguistics classes. So you'll see the same things being dropped or volicean or substitutions that we see in AAVE. It's just a ... I guess you would say Ebonics has developed out of that dialect.

J. Nelson:

Okay. Let me go through my notes here. When you listen to choirs perform or even while you were doing research, are there some common mistakes you hear ensembles making when they perform spirituals?

Dr. F. Barber:

That's a loaded question, isn't it?

J. Nelson:

Well you don't have to mention any names.

Dr. F. Barber:

No, I will not. One of the things I think specific ... because performance practice of spirituals in general is going to be [unintelligible 00:15:25]. I'm starting with dialect, but rhythm is another thing, which I won't get into right now. But specific to dialect I think what I hear the biggest no-no or whatever you want to say that I hear from choirs is that they use Standard English. And I think of it like when we talk about if we were performing something Latin or if we were performing something in French we would do the research and do the work and figure out the exact diction because we want to sound as close to authentic as possible. And I think that because there is a negative connotation on the use of dialect that we've gone completely away from it, if that makes sense. So I think one of the biggest things that I am really hoping that my

research will instigate is looking at dialect through new eyes and really seeing it as a language and that we don't have the strong guttural sounds used dialect, like really strong T's. The overall view should be a softening of the language and hopefully I'm going to give some practical suggestions of ways in which teachers can be able to do this, or performers.

But that's I think the biggest thing that I see is that because there is very little written that it's so edgy. I don't know how else to say it. It has a lot of corners as opposed to being soft and rounded off. It just sounds too crisp. And the other thing would be with rhythm I find that a lot of people have a hard time feeling the syncopation of two and four and the ease and the emphasis not being on the first part of the word like we want to say it or that word is not even. I'm trying to think of an example, but like "Wade in the Water," "Wade in the water," so we don't have everything on the same--"water [wɑ: 'tə]." And there's like a lift and a going down. So I guess it's one of the nuances of hearing it, and I don't know if it's because people are not exposed to some of the earlier recordings. But I do think one of the things that's hurting us the most is this idea of being politically correct and the idea of not wanting to offend anyone, so therefore we won't use any dialect at all. You know what I'm saying?

J. Nelson: Yes.

Dr. F. Barber: I think that's my biggest issue or pet peeve.

J. Nelson: Right, okay. So wow, you hit so many questions at once. You're really good at this. I think you must have read my mind. When you are working with a choral group, and this doesn't have to be about dialect. This can be about movement, tempos, choral tone, anywhere you want to go, basically. But when you're working with a choir, what suggestions or what ideas do you find yourself using to guide people towards what you want to hear? Are there some phrases that you use a lot that you think really help people understand what it is that you're going for in a performance of a spiritual?

Dr. F. Barber: One of the things I use a lot I will say is kinesthetic movement because I feel if you do not internalize the sound and the beat you will not get a feel for it. We did Dawson's "Ain'-a That Good News" last year, and I had my kids over exaggerate. At one point I had them marching and doing a sway to the march on step together so that they would be together, and then I turned it into a sway. Because most Western music is one and three – that is the strong beat – but in spirituals, and in most multicultural music, at least of African or Hispanic descent, that is not the beat. That is not the string. So we're on two or four or a syncopation of that within the beat. So to be able to feel that I sometimes will have them either clap, or something that they're used to, on one and then to a stronger emphasis on the two or four. But I will say that I do incorporate a lot of movement, especially early on, and then I encourage that

movement during the performance – not necessarily together swaying – but so that they're still internalizing the rhythm. And that's one of the things that I do a lot.

Another thing that I do is I do talk about the text because I am text driven in all of my performances, no matter if it was spirituals or not. And so actually discussing the text, the source of the text and then the diction of the text and the sound of – you know what I mean – the overall sound. And so sometimes I'll either speak it like in a poem, have them close their eyes, have them picture something, so that they can hear the sound or repeat the sound. And a lot of times even some of the rhythms, especially in spirituals, I might take a portion of the rhythm. I've done this I know in a Hogan piece before – and speak it in rhythm and have them just do a sway, no music, but just getting the sound of the dialect. Does that make sense?

J. Nelson: Yes.

Dr. F. Barber: So that's something often I do as well.

J. Nelson: Okay. Do you have any suggestions regarding tempo? And the reason I'm asking...one of the people I interviewed...one of the first things he remarked about was he thinks most people take spirituals too fast.

Dr. F. Barber: They do. I think they think of them as [a closer] and that if it's loud and fast it's good as opposed to...you know what I'm saying? So again, the tempo I think that a lot of it most of the time is a slow groove instead of a fast ... I don't know how to say it fast, a shuffle or something. I like think of it, and I always tell it to my kids, as thinking of a slow groove, getting into a slower groove. Let me try to get a metronome out while you're talking just to see if I would have a recommended tempo. I would think usually walking tempo-ish. I don't know if this is even helping. Let me find it now. I'm going to see what 72 sounds like. Like I want to use Moses Hogan's "I can Tell the World" for example. Sometimes I hear that so fast. "I can tell the world, yes, about this. I can tell ..." It really is a slower groove. I probably would do it...this is probably about 66, 67. Well maybe not this slow. Hang on. It's about 69, 70. And the slowest they've taken it is somewhere around 80, which I think a lot of people take it – or above.

J. Nelson: Right. The spiritual that comes to mind is "Soon-ah-will be Done," the Dawson.

Dr. F. Barber: Yes, and they do it so fast that they can't get the words out.

J. Nelson: Right, but it seems like, if memory serves, the marking for that is rather fast.

Dr. F. Barber: I do not have that in front of me, and I'm at my office. I'm not at my home. I know I have that in my personal collection, but I do not have it in front of me. I'm sorry.

J. Nelson: But regardless, your suggestion would be to relax the tempo.

Dr. F. Barber: It would be in general to relax from what we are currently hearing.

J. Nelson: Sure, sure. I understand.

Dr. F. Barber: Yeah, that's what I would say in general would be to relax the tempo.

J. Nelson: Okay. Would you describe for me your ideal choral tone that you would hear in most spirituals?

Dr. F. Barber: Warm, rounded tone, but yet clear – if that makes sense. Sometimes I don't want to hear covered; I want it far back so that the sound's uncovered, which you can sometimes get where it's too covered and it feels like the vowels are all in the back of your throat. I still want clear vowels in the center, but I want rounded or warm tones.

J. Nelson: Yes. Do you think of the sections in a typical choir, SATB, as having different roles when performing spirituals than they do in most Western music? A better way to ask that would be does your idea of balance change when you're doing a spiritual?

Dr. F. Barber: No, it does not.

J. Nelson: All right. You mentioned earlier that there are a lot of arrangements and arrangers that are overlooked now because of their use of dialect in their arrangement. And that kind of is what spurred this question. Are there arrangers that you would like to see get more programming? And this doesn't have to necessarily be an arranger from the past – maybe just someone that, for whatever reason isn't getting enough attention, in your eyes, that you would like to see more of their music performed.

Dr. F. Barber: I think the one who comes to mind, and when I was actually answering that question who popped in my head, was Nathaniel Dett. You do not see...if someone is doing a spiritual you may see a Dawson, and I would like to emphasize "may." But for the most part you're seeing contemporary composers like Thomas or Moses Hogan or Rollo Dilworth being performed – or even Stacey Gibbs. And those are fantastic. I'm not taking away from any of them, but what I'm saying is we rarely see people go back and maybe look at a [Hal] Johnson, of course Dawson, but Nathaniel Dett, H.T. Burleigh as well has some choral. A lot of people perform his solo, but he does have quite a collection of choral arrangements as well. But the one I was thinking

primarily of was Nathaniel Dett in his work at Hanson Institute that he did. And a lot of his work...we're programming some this year. I'm actually in the middle...I had a family emergency, which you know of, and so I am a little behind on my programming. So I'm trying to figure out which pieces I'm going to do of Dett. But he will be on my spring program.

And so I just even going back and looking...and another great collection of work by Thomas. I could recommend a couple of different collections, which people could actually go and do some investigation in what's available. Of course André Thomas way over in "Way Over in Beulah Lan" it would be because he actually categorized by period, some of these composers. But also there are collections by Patricia Trice. I don't know if you're familiar with her work.

J. Nelson: Yes, I know the name, yeah.

Dr. F. Barber: Okay, and then Evelyn Davidson White. Those two have collections and annotations of all the ones that were published. And some things are not in publication anymore. So that was one of the things I was running into even doing my research trying to find a copy. I was going online at times trying to find a copy of things I could actually have to analyze. I know had to buy one from England – one or two – some of the earlier work. So I would just encourage people to actually investigate because there's a lot of treasures that are just not being performed as much, especially from the earlier arrangers, turn of the century and then early 1900's.

J. Nelson: I think this is the last question because you answer several in a row. And this question makes people a bit uncomfortable at times. But are there choral conductors or recordings that are readily available that you know of that a young conductor could turn to and say these are exemplars of the best performances of spirituals that I can find at this point? Are there are names or albums that you know of that would be good to look at?

Dr. F. Barber: I guess I won't say they're the best, but I will give you some that I would recommend just to give you some idea for performance practice of what the sounds could be. Some early ones...so there's Fisk Jubilee Singers, of course, Tuskegee Jubilee Singers. There are a couple of collections that they have from the early 1900s out – the one Fisk Jubilee Singers, Volume 2, 1915 to 1920. This is professional choirs ... would be "The Earliest Negro Vocal Groups," 1893 to 1922.

J. Nelson: And what were those dates again?

Dr. F. Barber: 1893 to 1922.

J. Nelson: Okay.

Barber: And otherwise I would say specifically ... Tuskegee has several quartet ensemble ones out. Even looking at recordings of Hal Johnson Singers. I have a couple of the Moses Hogan ones, but that's not what I was thinking of specifically. I have a couple again from Tuskegee Institute Singers and Quartet. Same thing, like Fisk , turn of the century 1914 to 1927, 1926 to 1928. So they have collections that are earlier, collections that you can get, that are available through iTunes and/or Amazon.

F. Barber: Thank you very much, Justin. Have a good day.

Nelson: You too, bye.

r. F. Barber: Bye.

Recorded via Telephone
July 6, 2015
10:00 a.m.

J. Nelson: Could you briefly describe your musical education and any relevant experience you have regarding African American spirituals?

Dr. A. Thomas: Oh, man. Okay. All of that information is pretty much on my website on my bio. My information about my musical training is all there.

J. Nelson: Okay, good.

Dr. A. Thomas: I have a bachelor's degree from Friends University, Music Education. I have a Master's degree in Performance from Northwestern University in Chicago. That's in Piano Performance. I have a doctorate, DMA, Choral Conducting, at University of Illinois. That's my educational experience.

J. Nelson: Okay. When you hear the phrase "authentic choral performance of a spiritual" what ideas come to your mind?

Dr. A. Thomas: Generally, I think people are kind of misinformed when they say they're going to do an authentic version of a spiritual. Obviously, trying to do an authentic version of a spiritual would permit doing the spiritual as the slaves would have sung it. I think most people, when they say they want to do an authentic performance of a spiritual, think in the terms of what they've heard on recordings from historical black colleges, all the way back to recordings from Nathaniel Dett, William Dawson. John Work didn't have that many recordings. Paul Johnson... I think that's what they think when they want to do a performance of a spiritual, not a rendition of the folk material. They're thinking of concert arrangement that they are saying they want to do an authentic performance.

J. Nelson: Okay. Would it be better, instead of worrying about authentic because they are somewhat removed from the songs of the slaves, to think about stylistically appropriate performances?

Dr. A. Thomas: Well, yes. I think there are many things in consideration of a stylistic performance. I would say that would be a better phrase to say than the authentic version. I think what you're going to do is to try to recreate as much as humanly possible what the arranger has intended in the arrangement of the spiritual. For instance, if you look at an arrangement by William Dawson,

obviously, the slaves were not in the field singing with a lifted soft palate. But you would know from hearing the Dawson recording that this was a historically black school and that for many of these composers this was the outlet for composition and probably, in many cases, the only ones that they could get published was through the outlet of the spiritual songs. You had teachers that were teaching students how to sing in the Western art manner, and so we have these choirs with lifted soft palate, vibrato, etc, so I just think about what did Dawson have in his head in doing these things? And then I would immediately go to, my performance of Dawson; I would use that as the impetus for my performance consideration.

It's like this. Often people don't want to take the time to study enough about the music. It's like for instance if I was going to do art song or German lieder, and I was a baritone, and I'm looking at one of the Schubert, lieder songs, I certainly would look at Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and his interpretation of those performances of it. I would have other choices that I would be able to go back and have a reference for, as long as what we know of [unintelligible]. So I think it would be the same thing when I look at Dawson or I look at Nathaniel Dett, so that would be my major consideration.

J. Nelson:

Okay. You have written a lot on the subject of dialect in spirituals. In your book you advise that dialect shouldn't be forced or overdone and unwritten accents certainly shouldn't be added on words that does not warrant them. Would you expand on that thought and perhaps offer an example of what forced dialect would sound like to you?

Dr. A. Thomas:

Well, what I really mean by that is making it a part of, part of this will also depend on how well the arranger has arranged the piece of music. We'll take, for instance the article "the", and it will be notated often as "de" sometimes, so everything is de, de, de, de, de. Well, there's variation there. Its de and duh. So they'll just take advantage that all "the's" are going to be de. Plus, the next thing is that "t-h-e" is not a noun. So don't put all the energy on an article or preposition and that way what happens is that you bring so much attention to the article that the noun is overshadowed, and so then the piece sounds affected.

An example of that is when we play in popular music, for instance, we get these arrangements of composers doing popular music. And then what we have to do if we want to have a good performance of that is to go through that and begin to soften some of what would be Western art tradition. In other words, if I'm doing an arrangement of Michael Jackson's "Beat It," I wouldn't go "beat it [bit It]." I just wouldn't do that, although that's decent diction, but it's not the diction appropriate to bring attention to itself. And people would forget it was the song. What was that? Why are they singing that? That's a good deal of what I mean by diction.

Also, there is this wonderful dissertation by Felicia Barber. [Unintelligible] and in her dissertation, the entire dissertation focuses on dialect. And she looks at dialect from a linguistics standpoint. She takes all those early transcriptions of slaves singing these songs as people are trying to write them out and all the slaves are singing these songs. She's taking a look at all of that. She's taking a look at all of the 200 recordings from the Library of Congress, and she's categorized them according to linguistic ideas. This is a really very specific idea of how to approach the diction. Lots of it is not all that different than what's actually in the book that James Weldon Johnson gave us many, many years ago. And as I said, if diction becomes the focus of the listener's experience they're missing the heart of the music; the diction should be a color, not [unintelligible 00:09:55] of itself. That was a whole lot, but it's recorded.

J. Nelson:

Yes, I'm recording so that's good. Do you feel comfortable performing a spiritual with dialect if the arranger chose not to use dialect when setting the text or vice versa? Do you feel comfortable not using dialect if the arranger chose to set an arrangement with dialect?

Dr. A. Thomas:

Well, often what I will do is I will often implement dialect because I'm there to control it. I will often implement even if it's not clearly indicated. For instance, in my own arrangement of "Keep Your Lamps" I did not write any dialect into that arrangement simply because I didn't want people trying to improvise dialect and not being able to explain it to the singers what they were doing, so that people that don't talk about heritage, are embarrassed about it - especially if they're African American - they're embarrassed about their heritage because some conductors aren't informed enough to explain why there were no "th's", why they're saying "the" and "thuh" because th didn't exist in that African Dialect, so I left it out there.

But I perform it most often with some dialect. I was not going, "That's fine, I've got to go, [singing] 'The time is drawin' nigh', "drawing nigh," but I was testing this problem anyway. That is a personal choice, okay? Even if I'm doing somebody else's arrangement and I decide not to use the dialect, the piece still remains a spiritual, whether or not it's keeping the dialect or not. That becomes a performance choice, and I think in most cases it [use of dialect] enhances the music and really it's easily done to do that, so that would be my own personal decision, but I wouldn't criticize who decided not to use dialect as long as we have informed choices.

J. Nelson:

Okay; informed. I'm going to switch gears here. In regards to choral timbre do you have a timbre that you like to hear used when choirs are singing spirituals? Do you like to hear darker sounds, brighter sounds; less vibrato, more vibrato? Things like that?

Dr. A. Thomas: Well, I would say that while that my preference would be that's the sound is warmer and richer, according to the ability of the singers that I'm working with. In other words, if I'm working with children I'm sure going to want a warmer and richer sound than I would if I was doing the same piece by Carrero, which is a Spanish composer, with those same children. I would probably lighten the sound more and maybe make it a little bit more nasal because that's what the Spanish preferred in their tonal concept.

And the opposite with the spiritual, I would warm up the sound, which means I must give more space in the mouth, more pharyngeal presence, you know, but I would not have it so openly dark that the pitch would suffer and I could [unintelligible]. In other words, when I say richer and warmer, I don't mean that they have to swallow the sound.

J. Nelson: Sure.

Dr. A. Thomas: Now, the matter of vibrato - more than likely, if I'm doing Dawson, if I'm doing the composers - what I call the traditionalists in my book, I'm doing their music - I'm not going to have the choirs sing with a straight tone. That was one of the practices in their sound and their singers didn't really quite know how to do it anyway so I probably would not have them sing with a straight tone. But on the other hand, I wouldn't have a vibrato so out of control there's no center in pitch. I think there has to be clarity of pitch, you know, and I think I would do more with timbre than trying to broaden the vibrato.

J. Nelson: Do you feel like the basic sections in a choral ensemble take on a different role when signing spirituals? I guess what I'm asking here is should a typical choral balance be adjusted when performing spirituals? For example, do you like to hear a heavier bass section than you would in more traditional Western art music or do you like a richer alto section?

Dr. A. Thomas: No. I don't look at each section and decide that I want a richer - a more abundant bass in my balance. There's a huge a possibility of arrangement, of what the arranger has done. For instance, "My Lord, What a Morning", I'm going to have to have more bass; I'm just going to have to have that sound; it has to be present to make that piece work. It's the arrangement that will constitute what I do with balance and what I do with the actual choir itself.

My overall concept is going to be warmer because that's what I think of when I think of music of the African American institution. I don't think I was picking individual sections, my basses because they're a little dark, but my tenors just have to be bright. I don't think in those terms. I think everybody will have a general overall concept of the piece [unintelligible], and then there are certain parts of the piece maybe the balance will change.

I'm trying to think of another setting of mine. Oh, like "Keep Your Lamps," I have a descending baseline, da, da, da, da, da - I want to bring that out. I going to make it a little bit more colorful because I've done it with the arrangement itself, but I'm not going to say to the bassist, I want you always to be this, one color comes out, but you have the overall tonal concept, and then I teach the palette as the arrangement itself dictates.

J. Nelson:

Okay; that did that and that actually answered this next question too, so that's good. Most people think of body movement by a choir like swaying or stepping side to side as associated with more gospel styles of music, do you think that type of music or any choreographed music is stylistically appropriate in a performance of a spiritual?

Dr. A. Thomas:

Well, let's talk about African music in general. African music has always been associated with movement and dance; it just always has been. This was not necessarily a thing that we do with a choir whenever there was a performance. Everybody does a little [unintelligible 00:19:08], you do what you've got to do; when you go to Ghana, and I was with Ghana people when they're singing. That's all up the West coast of Africa, people move. They move as they sing, and especially descended from this kind of song it is. But what what I become offended by is if the same people do versions of "Oh When the Saints" and all of a sudden people have broken into, what do you call it, a jazz square where they're going up and down and open jazz hands, and all of that.

That bothers me because I think that becomes distracting in gospel music our end and in a presentation, so I possibly would tend not to want to have that happen. Also, I'd want to be careful that I'm not trying to bring in secular movements to a piece that basically has a sacred function. The piece is basically a sacred piece so I'm not going to bring in secularness to that.

It's the same way when you see the dances through various kinds of period dancing, are functions of that. When you look at sacred dancing, when you look at dance for secular dance, right? I'm not going to have the choir all of a sudden start doing a samba on a spiritual because that dance has a specific kind of tension and it's not sacred so I'm not going to ask people to do that, if that makes any sense.

J. Nelson:

No, it does; it really does. Do you have any suggestions for determining a performance tempo of a spiritual in which the arranger has not given an indication?

Dr. A. Thomas:

Well, that's difficult; that is difficult because if an arranger doesn't give an indication then he can leave himself open for interpretation. I tell my students don't listen to a recording and copy it, but there are certain things that come in a tradition. For instance, if I had a student who is conducting the Beethoven Ninth okay, I'm going to say "What does Solti do there?" "What does Robert

Shaw do on this line?" "What does Toscanini do on this line?" If you see my scores you'll see various conductors' markings on those scores. I will still come up with my own but what that gives me, is that gives me the latitude of what was tradition as it relates to the tune, okay, but when it's tradition of what the tune has said, okay?

Now, I'm going to be so wrong [unintelligible] the tradition of how that tune would sound. If the arranger or composer has a recording that he or she has supervised, that also gives me an idea of what the arranger's intent was for tempo. But if the conductor or the arranger has no recording and I'm free now to make that decision, I go back to the source tune that he uses. If that tune is "Deep River" then I'm going to listen to it a number of recordings, historically back - recordings of just the spiritual tune, "Deep River", and then getting a consensus of what's been done in the past I will probably continue with that onto the arrangement. Now, sometimes the arranger will tell me how fast or slow I can go based on how quickly the harmonic rhythm changes. Do you understand what I mean by that?

J. Nelson: Yes.

Dr. A. Thomas: That means that every eighth note is a change of harmonic color; I probably can't go real fast because even in the arranger did not put anything down there, there are really quick shifts of harmony, will be pretty problematic which means I have to go at a slower tempo.

J. Nelson: Do you feel like you always must follow tempo indications or do you feel comfortable with taking your preferred tempos if they differ?

Dr. A. Thomas: I think that's what varies from conductor to conductor. My very closest friends, Anton Armstrong, did the recording for Dawson's spiritual arrangements and you'll see - I think it was a question of what he talks about and what he does or what he has decided to do with the tempo - so I think that's the choice of the conductor. For me, because I have a personal relationship with Mr. Dawson, I know specifically what he would want, so more than likely I would try to implement what he would want if at all humanly possible.

Now, often with simple markings you've got to be a little bit careful because you need a lot of evidence of people coming in, composers coming in who then immediately go, "Ah, that's just what I want," and it's five clicks slower than what they've indicated, so I would have to deal with the acoustic of the room, the [unintelligible 00:25:24] a lot of things come into mind when you're thinking about the tempo. So there might be some deviation but what I suppose [unintelligible], so when he came he said, "Aah, that's it, so even though it's different than what I marked, that's it for this moment," but you

have to be careful there, [unintelligible] the composer's intention, if it is indeed his marking.

J. Nelson: You say in your book that spirituals have a roundness of rhythm that should kind of move away from an angular feel of over emphasizing accents. Could you give me an example of what you meant by this?

Dr. A. Thomas: [Singing] - that's how they do it.

J. Nelson: Okay.

Dr. A. Thomas: That's angular; this is [singing] - do you hear the difference?

J. Nelson: Uh-ha, but how do you -

Dr. A. Thomas: There's a roundness of the sound rather than making it all angular and short.

J. Nelson: Uh-ha.

Dr. A. Thomas: What often happens, especially if they're European Americans doing this music, is that they work so hard to get the rhythm correct so it can become kind of a caricature, but that happens not only with spirituals; it also happens when people get challenging rhythms, and when they see the syncopation in the rhythm they try so hard to get the syncopation, then it becomes almost comical.

J. Nelson: Does the trying to achieve a roundness of rhythm create a problem with choirs' swinging rhythms?

Dr. A. Thomas: No. Roundness of rhythm and swing are two different things. Swing is where you have something that is indicated even, you know, and then it sort of comes [unintelligible 00:27:55] fashion for us, the jazz here. In classical music you see that [unintelligible] in the French music of Lully, Couperin, Charpentier; you'll see even eighth notes but they're performed slower, in a triplet manner.

I don't implement swinging any spiritual unless it is actually a tradition of that. There are really few examples here that might come so I probably wouldn't necessarily swing it, because it's not jazz. Now, if the arranger has kept the spiritual in a jazz style then I'm probably going to lean towards swinging it a bit because he's already recited it in a jazz style.

J. Nelson: In spirituals how do you treat the metrical organization of notes? In other words are stresses heavier on beats - one and three as opposed to two or four, or is it the opposite way, or do you feel like the beats are evenly weighted?

Dr. A. Thomas:

No, I think it's metric music, it's kind of based on dance so there's going to be a weight to it, you know? [Singing], so the down beat is going to be a down beat, yeah? And there are going to be times where you're going work [singing], and the second beat becomes a little bit stronger because it becomes anacrusis function to one, so it depends upon each individual piece what I do metrically, but I don't believe in making every exactly even. [Singing], that would be really boring.

J. Nelson:

Sure. You speak in your book, and you've already said quite a bit about this already, about trying to find the intent of the arranger when studying and rehearsing a spiritual. What guidance would you give a choral conductor in order to ensure themselves that they are travelling down the right path of finding out that arranger's intent?

Dr. A. Thomas:

First of all I think - well, we live in a digital age now and so we now have choices of what we can hear, for example, on You Tube, or more importantly the arrangers themselves have recorded all the music themselves. That will give you some idea of what might be expected. You have to be careful with You Tube because everybody might do it, and just because something is on You Tube it could be a day that that composer or that arranger [unintelligible] with a group of singers that are really struggling.

But little Jonny's mother loves little Johnny so they've recorded it and of course it's now on You Tube, and you'd want to [unintelligible] on that piece of music rather than go because you can't just [unintelligible 00:31:37], so you have to go a little bit longer, a little bit more. You have to look at a number of different recordings until you get to You Tube. But if the composer, arranger has a CD of some sort that would give you some idea.

For instance, I find it really helpful when I go back to do the early Shaw-Parker arrangement, Alice is still alive so its easy to get to Alice. Shaw is of course dead, so how are their recordings? I can listen to how Shaw did it. And then I can decide, okay, well, I love this arrangement but I think I'm going to deviate a little bit. That would be a conscious decision that I would make to deviate, but why would I deviate? Well, if one thing brings it closer to what I know of the style it's in I probably wouldn't deviate.

J. Nelson:

Okay. Does improvisation have a place in the performance of spirituals?

Dr. A. Thomas:

Well, it all depends on how the spiritual is sung. If it's a concert version of the spiritual I would say no, unless the arranger has specifically given license that it has a soloist to feel free to do some things with this. Color shifts are different, lots of license for color shifts and changes, more so than improvisation.

Now, if I'm doing a doing a gospel piece. I've now given way because I think if - and if the spiritual is used and set in a gospel manner I am now giving way for that to happen. For instance, something like Raymond Wise's setting of "I've Got A Robe" - [singing] - is very different. He just uses it as an emphasis for this piece; this is a gospel piece so then the soloist is going to have to let loose by adding the soloist there, and then for that spirituals is most appropriate.

J. Nelson:

Okay. What books, other than yours, would you point someone to who wished to learn more about spirituals? Which books do you find the most valuable?

Dr. A. Thomas:

Well, I really wish that I had handy Felicia Barber's - that's F E L I C I A B A R B E R - her dissertation on dialect. I think that would be highly useful. If you go in my book and look at the bibliography, pages 265-267, all of those books I would say are helpful; those books and those articles.

J. Nelson:

Okay. And to my last question here - who are some composers or pieces that you feel like deserve more attention or performance time? Are there some pieces out there that you wish people would perform more that seem to get over looked?

Dr. A. Thomas:

Well, I think one of the purposes of the book, well, for me, was to make people aware of many of the wonderful arrangements that existed and to [pique] their interest about it. And in a way the book has been successful about doing that because many of the arrangements that were out of print are now in print. So I would say I think there is no way that I would ignore works of Jester Harriston, of Rosamond Johnson, [unintelligible 00:36:52], Mitchel Southall - I think those would be quite [unintelligible] which we don't hear that much about. Many of his settings would be wonderful settings to take a look at. Undine Moore does get some attention but always with class she has; I would love to see more performances of her work.

I think I've mentioned Paul Johnson before. I'm not concerned about Moses Hogan; he's current and even though he's deceased gets plenty of performance, so that's not a fact. We don't know much of Dett's writing besides "Listen to the Lambs" and a couple of things, but certainly more of his. Then there is a whole array of youngsters that would be nice to get hold of a bit more of their work. My major thing right now is the older composers whose music is out of print.

J. Nelson:

Okay. Well, I think that's all I have for you. I certainly appreciate your time. I know you're a very busy person.

Dr. A. Thomas:

You are so welcome, Justin. Good luck with your project. I'll try to scan that and send it back to you; that consent form.



**AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Date: 4/10/2015

RE: 15-025: Performance practices in the choral performance of spirituals

Dear Justin Nelson,

We appreciate your cooperation with the human research review process. This letter is to inform you that revisions to study 15-025 have been reviewed. It is my pleasure to inform you that your study has been approved. You are free to conduct the study at this time.

This approval is subject to APSU Policies and Procedures governing human subject research. The IRB reserves the right to withdraw approval if unresolved issues are raised during the review period. Any changes or deviations from the approved protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB for further review and approval before continuing.

This approval is for one calendar year and a closed study report or request for continuing review is required on or before the expiration date, 4/10/2016. If you have any questions or require further information, you can contact me by phone (931-221-6106) or email (shepherdo@apsu.edu).

Sincerely,

Omie Shepherd, Ph. D. Chair, APIRB

Cc: Dr. Ann Silverberg

Justin R. Nelson

EDUCATION

Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN

Master of Music in Choral Conducting, expected May 2016.

Thesis: "The Spiritual: Its History, Meanings, and Performance Practices as Demonstrated in Two Settings for SATB Choir."

Carson-Newman University, Jefferson City, TN

Bachelor of Music in Education (Choral/Vocal and Instrumental), *magna cum laude*, Dec. 11, 2000.

LICENSURE

Tennessee Professional Teaching License, Endorsed for Vocal/General Music K-12 and Instrumental Music K-12, Expires 2024.

EXPERIENCE

Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN

Graduate Assistant in Choral Music, Aug. 2014—Present

- Lead full and sectional rehearsals of university choral ensembles.
- Manage university choral library.
- Conduct university choral ensembles in performance.
- Assist in all administrative functions for choral ensembles.

First Presbyterian Church, Clarksville, TN

Choral Scholar, Aug. 2014—Present

- Bass section leader.
- Substitute service pianist.
- Assistant conductor of Clarksville Community Teen Choir hosted by First Presbyterian Church.

Cherokee High School, Rogersville, TN

Director of Choral Arts, Jan. 2001—May 2014

- Directed a graded choral program.
- Instructed music theory and music appreciation courses.
- Produced, directed, and conducted spring musical productions.
- Conducted the CHS Chorale and Concert Choir in annual concerts, community events, choral festivals, and school functions.
- Member of and chairman of many faculty committees.
- Facilitator for the Portfolio for Student Growth training for Hawkins County Schools.

First Baptist Church, Rogersville, TN

Director of Music Ministries, March 2001—August 2014

- Conducted the First Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir and Joyful Sounds Handbell Ensembles.
- Planned worship services and special events throughout the liturgical year.
- Supervised a graded choir and missions programs for children ages 4 to grade 7.
- Conducted seasonal concerts with guest musicians from all over East Tennessee.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Cherokee High School Teacher of the Year

2014, 2011, 2007

Hawkins County High School Teacher of the Year

2014

Who's Who Among American Teachers

2007, 2004

Bi-vocational Staff Minister of the Year for the Tennessee Baptist Convention

2006

Who's Who Among American College Students

2000

PRESENTATIONS

"The Use of Dialect in African American Spirituals," Tennessee Music Educators Conference Research Poster Session, Dr. William Lee, moderator, Memphis, TN, April 8-11, 2015.

"Portfolio for Student Growth in the Arts," Austin Peay State University, Dr. Eric Branscome, facilitator, Clarksville, TN, April 15, 2015, Nov. 4, 2015, and March 30, 2016.

WORKSHOP EXPERIENCES

Choral Conductors Workshop with Rod Eichenberger, Master Class Participant, Alexandria, VA, July 13-17, 2015.

Jo-Michael Scheibe, Roy Acuff Chair of Excellence Residency, Private Conducting Lesson, Austin Peay State University, April 16, 2015.

SIGNIFICANT PERFORMANCES

Culminating Student Performance, "Magical Moments Are Not Magic," Willie Anthony Waters, Roy Acuff Chair of Excellence Residency, Austin Peay State University, Baritone soloist, Nov. 4, 2014.

Magnificat by Durante/Pergolesi, Baritone Soloist, Gateway Chamber Orchestra and Chorus, Clarksville, TN, Douglas Rose, Conductor, Dec. 6, 2014.

The Sound of Music, Director, Producer, Music Director, Cherokee High School, April 2013.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast, Director, Producer, Music Director, Cherokee High School, April 2007.

Many Moods of Christmas by Robert Shaw and Russell Bennett, Conductor, First Baptist Sanctuary Choir and Cherokee High School Concert Choir, Members of the Knoxville and Kingsport Symphony Orchestras, Dec. 2007 and Dec. 2013.

Gloria by Antonio Vivaldi, Conductor, First Baptist Sanctuary Choir and Cherokee High School Concert Choir, Members of the Knoxville and Kingsport Symphony Orchestras, Dec. 12, 2004.

Christmas Oratorio by Camille Saint-Saëns, Conductor, First Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir, Soloists, Members of the Knoxville and Kingsport Symphony Orchestras, Dec. 8, 2002.

Messiah by G. F. Handel, Conductor, First Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir, Soloists, Members of the Knoxville and Kingsport Symphony Orchestras, Dec. 16, 2001.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

National Association for Music Education, Jan. 2001—Present

American Choral Directors Association, Jan. 2001—Present

COLLEGIATE MEMBERSHIPS

Alpha Chi, National Honor Society, 1999—2000

Pi Kappa Lambda, National Honor Society for Music, 1999—2000

Omicron Delta Kappa, National Leadership Honor Society, 1998—2000

American Guild of Organists, Carson-Newman University Chapter, 1998—2000

National Association for Music Education, Carson-Newman University Chapter, 1997—2000