

CONDUCTING THE CODED MESSAGE SONGS OF SLAVERY: CONTEXT,
CONNOTATIONS, AND PERFORMANCE PREPARATION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

Major Department:
Music

July 2018

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

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DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

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ABSTRACT

The coded message songs of slavery are a mysterious and fascinating entity. Within the lyrics of these seemingly innocuous plantation songs are coded messages for escape, messages that provided secret information to enslaved workers on Antebellum plantations. Over the course of more than 250 years of slavery on American soil, countless enslaved Africans found freedom through the use of coded message songs and the Underground Railroad. What are these songs? Which lyrics provided this secret information? How can a study of this music provide a better musical experience for conductors, singers, and listeners? This disquisition offers answers to these important questions, as well as a presentation of this body of repertoire from the choral conductor's perspective.

First, I provide a brief historical context for the music of slavery. I analyze and interpret important historical collections of spirituals and examine them through the lens of their text. Period accounts (from newly freed slaves and by song collectors) as well as information from modern conductors and scholars provide insight into and support for my method. A discussion of textual interpretation and musical representation follows, including a valuable list of common themes used in coded message songs. In the main body of the document, I present nine spirituals that contain coded message. I focus on the lyrics of the coded songs, introducing the connotations of the messages within the music. I also offer insight to choral conductors considering this repertoire and some interpretive choices that may be made when performing this music. Finally, this study contributes appendices with concrete pedagogical resources to assist conductors in their teaching and presentation of coded message songs to their singers.

Successful choral conductors are dynamic storytellers. As a conductor preparing, rehearsing, and performing this choral music, it is critical to both communicate the context and history of coded message songs during the learning process, and also make appropriate stylistic choices in the music. Revealing the historical context and rich textual interpretation of this body of repertoire allows conductors to tell this story more effectively through their informed pedagogy, ultimately enriching and inspiring both singers and listeners.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Working on this degree over several years while teaching full time has required both patience and perseverance. Much better than I, my husband, Michael, has consistently modeled these qualities as he's supported me through the process. I have so much gratitude for his support and encouragement. I am deeply grateful to my parents, who instilled both a strong work ethic as well as a love for learning in our family. I would also like to recognize the great inspiration I have received at the feet of my teachers. Thank you all for your contributions.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work in this subject to Dr. Richard Harrison Smith, my undergraduate choral conductor. His great love for and understanding of spirituals instilled a passion in his singers that was transformative. I hope to honor his legacy through my work in choral music education.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*“I’m no ways weary, I’m no ways tired. Oh, glory, hallelujah!
Just let me in the Kingdom when the world catch on fire! Oh, glory, hallelujah!
Oh, get your ticket ready, the ship will soon be leaving! Oh, get your ticket ready to go!”¹*

These lyrics from the spiritual, *The Old Ship of Zion* (arranged by Richard Harrison Smith), are thrilling to sing.² They become even more compelling after discovering that they served as a coded message for enslaved Africans in the United States, designed to provide hope, comfort, and even secret information leading to escape and freedom.

Successful choral conductors are dynamic storytellers. As a conductor preparing, rehearsing, and performing this choral music, it is critical to both communicate the context and history of coded message songs during the learning process, and also make appropriate stylistic performance choices in the music. Revealing the historical context and rich textual interpretation of this body of repertoire allows conductors to tell this story more effectively through their informed pedagogy, ultimately enriching and inspiring both singers and listeners through the music.

The coded message songs of slavery are a mysterious and fascinating entity. Music provided a secret means of communication, whether the meaning was literal or figurative, as Arthur Jones states:

“Singing songs, the singers successfully masked their rage with the manifest image of death, safely deceiving the slave holder into believing that his docile and passive slaves were again dreaming of heaven but thankfully loyal in the present to his unrelenting demands for service. Skillfully, the singers affirmed their inner loyalty to a legitimate, heavenly master, but also announced their determination to take up arms against the earthly master.”³

¹Richard Harrison Smith, *The Old Ship of Zion* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979).

² The term, “spirituals” refers to a vast body of musical repertoire created by enslaved African Americans as they worked on plantations. This new folk music was largely “Christian,” (although not exclusively sacred) and featured intricate African rhythms as a musical style that was new to the American colonies. There are several “categories” of spirituals (serving different functions), such as: work songs, escape songs, shout and holler/ring shouts, walking songs, call and response, and religious songs.

³ Arthur Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of Spirituals* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 57.

Coded language may have announced a secret meeting or may have been a simple longing for home (Africa). Coded text was just as easily able to conceal a hope for reuniting with family members as it was to mask an insult to the slave owners. Also hidden within the lyrics of these seemingly innocuous plantation songs are coded messages for daring escape, messages that provided secret information to enslaved workers on the plantations of the Antebellum South. Over the course of more than 250 years of slavery on American soil, countless enslaved Africans found freedom through the use of coded message songs and the Underground Railroad.

What are these songs, and which lyrics provided this secret information? How can a study of these coded songs provide a better musical experience for conductors, singers, and listeners? This document offers answers to these important questions, as well as a presentation of this body of repertoire from the choral conductor's perspective. Conductors may already know some information about coded language in spirituals through their education and experience; however, do they spend enough time researching these tunes to find their origin, alternate or additional texts, and multiple connotations, elevating their scholarship of the spiritual? After having done so, do conductors extend this important information to their singers—and ultimately—to their audiences?

Recognizing a need for this information to be gathered into one place and expounded upon *as its own subject*, this study provides a useful synthesis based on historically significant resources and supported by modern scholarship.⁴ I analyze and interpret important historical collections of spirituals and examine them through the lens of their text. Period accounts (from newly freed slaves and by song collectors) as well as information from modern conductors and scholars provide insight into and support for my method. All of my sources contribute, in part,

⁴ Period sources include the major collections of spirituals collected during the Reconstruction Period as well as into the early 20th Century (full citations may be found in the bibliography): *Slave Songs of the United States* (Allen, Ware, and Garrison), *Befo' de War Spirituals: Words and Melodies* (McIllhenny), *Negro Folk-Songs: The Hampton Series Books I-IV* (Curtis-Burlin), *The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs* (Marsh), *American Negro Songs: 230 Folk Songs and Spirituals, Religious and Secular* (Work). Modern sources of scholarship include *Way Over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual* (Thomas), *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame; the Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual Was Hammered Out* (Lovell), *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals* (Jones), and the recently published, *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals* (Guenther).

to this subject, but none of them provide a substantial and comprehensive discussion. Synthesizing this disparate information into one document will provide a useful and succinct resource for conductors to use in their preparation, interpretation, and rehearsal of this repertoire.

Chapter 2 provides a brief historical context in order to enable and guide choral conductors in preparing performances of the coded message songs of slavery, including a brief recount of slavery in America and the Underground Railroad. The intent is not to provide an exhaustive historical account, but rather to offer a concise report of useful information before proceeding to the music. The sources for this chapter are purely historical, written by experts in the field.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the nature of oral tradition, historic collections of spirituals, and the use of music to communicate coded text. This musical art, born of oral tradition, is both inspiring and challenging. The primary source material consists of stories and songs, collected and written down during the final years of the Civil War, and the years immediately following. The function of coded message songs is an important part of this chapter. We know that the language of these songs had multiple meanings and purposes in the life of the enslaved. These coded message songs served as *much more* than a means of escape on the Underground Railroad. Finally, this chapter (page 19) will present the most often recognized coded words and phrases, and provide a translation for each, as well as the context in which it was used.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the music that served as “camouflage” for revolutionary ideas and escape.⁵ Songs of protest were disguised as simple work songs in the field. Clandestine meetings could be prompted only by humming a particular melody. The music—both period and modern—inspire us to appreciate the slaves’ use of music as a vehicle for revolution and hope. The musical devices employed in spiritual arrangements often illustrate (through sound)

⁵ The music for this discussion, includes music from the period between 1619 (the first arrival of the enslaved on American Soil) to the end of the Reconstruction Period (1877).

the meaning of the coded text. Awareness and interpretation of coded message songs will also be addressed.

In Chapters 6-13, I present nine spirituals that contain coded language.⁶ Each arrangement was chosen because it contained major themes of coded message songs (page 19), while attempting to offer the reader a diversity of arrangements, both chronologically and stylistically. After introducing the piece, I provide information on the arranger and comment on the general character of the piece as well as the story it suggests. Then, I identify the spiritual's collection source (if known). Any alternate or additional texts are provided from the collection(s) to which the spiritual belonged. I focus on the lyrics of the spiritual to offer translations of the text, from their coded message to their other possible connotations. Next, I present the key musical elements of each piece including the arranger's treatment of musical elements and devices to enhance the text. Finally, these chapters offer conductors suggestions for their preparation of this music with their singers.

At the end of this document are appendices intended to provide conductors with concrete information to use in their pedagogy. Appendix A (Catalog of Coded Message Songs) contains an alphabetical listing of songs containing coded messages (including their coded text, connotation and interpretation, and scriptural references). The songs were largely selected from the historical period collections referred to in Chapter 3. Appendix B is a glossary of codes and Underground Railroad terminology. The intent of these appendices is to establish a body of repertoire for choral conductors as well as a working language of coded songs and historical context for use in rehearsal preparation and instruction.

Some may ask, "couldn't everything in a spiritual be a coded message?" Indeed, it is very difficult for us to definitively say *now* what was intended *then*. The very nature of folksong is oral tradition, passed on by word of mouth and seldom written down. If the connotation of coded messages *had* been written down at the time they were being used, it surely wouldn't have

⁶ *Steal Away* (arr. Clayton White), *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?* (arr. Moses Hogan), *Keep Your Lamps* (arr. André Thomas), *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit* (William L. Dawson), *Deep River* (arr. René Clausen), *Have You Got Good Religion* (arr. Phillip McIntyre), *Elijah Rock* (arr. Moses Hogan), *Let Me Fly* (arr. Robert DeCormier), and *The Old Ship of Zion* (arr. Richard Harrison Smith).

been as effective as it was, and could have proved very dangerous. Certainly, there are things we don't know—how frequently coded language was used, which codes were used most often, and whether our modern understanding of this music is absolutely correct. However, we shouldn't let the unknown deter us, or worse, discourage us from choosing and interpreting the music with our singers. As artists, it is our job to not only engage with and examine these materials in scholarly manner, but also to have the freedom and confidence to interpret the music (based on that scholarship) in a way that best honors the genre. We must not assume that students (or our audiences) know these critical historical and musical elements any more than we would for a piece by Bach or Palestrina. This is done on behalf of our singers, and perhaps, more importantly, on behalf of those original plantation voices that provided us with such a rich and inspiring repertoire of song in the face of hostility and hopelessness.

Author, Christa Dixon writes, “Intolerable suffering becomes tolerable when the end is in sight or when something beautiful transforms ugliness.”⁷ In this way, coded message spirituals not only provided a possible “end” in sight, but also offered a sense of hope and beauty to those that sang them.

⁷ Christa K. Dixon, *Negro Spirituals, From Bible to Folk Song* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976), 81.

CHAPTER 2. SLAVERY IN AMERICA: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In order to have the necessary foundation for the understanding and pedagogy of coded message songs, a brief historical context of slavery in America and the Underground Railroad must first be addressed. My intent is not to provide an exhaustive historical record, but rather to offer a concise report to provide context before proceeding to the music. This chapter can serve as a useful source for conductors to relate to their singers. Of course, a deeper study is recommended for a full understanding of the subject.

Slavery in America

The first slave ships that came to the New World arrived in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of South and Central America in the late fifteenth century.⁸ About one hundred years later, the institution of slavery began in North America in 1619, in the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia. The first “slaves,” about twenty African Americans brought to the Jamestown Colony by the Dutch, were actually indentured servants, sent to the New World to pay off their debt owed through their time and labor. Although largely undocumented, most historians believe that after their contracted time had ended, they were allowed to live freely off the land given to them by their former masters.

However, as the New World began to grow and flourish in population and territory, so did the need for labor and materials. Out of this need grew a new, triangular trading scheme, firmly linking the distant shores of the Atlantic Ocean (Europe—Africa’s West Coast—The Americas) through goods, currency, and a brand new and richly profitable commodity: *people*. Near the end of the 17th century, indentured servitude faded in favor of slavery—more specifically—race-based slavery.

The economy of the three geographical areas of this triangle (through the workings of private companies and agents) operated as follows: America produced raw goods such as sugar,

⁸ James Walvin, *History Files: The Slave Trade* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 22-31.

cotton, and tobacco, Europe received these raw goods and manufactured textiles and luxuries from them, and Africa provided a force of enslaved labor to work and produce these raw materials in America. The Atlantic Slave Trade Triangle was extremely lucrative—so much so, that it flourished for nearly two centuries, from 1619 to 1808.⁹ The *Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves* was enacted in 1808, prohibiting the importation of any new slaves to the United States.¹⁰ Slavery in America persisted, even beyond the *Emancipation Proclamation* of January 1, 1863. On January 31 that same year, the thirteenth amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery and indentured servitude. However, the news of emancipation traveled slowly, especially in the southern states. “Juneteenth” celebrates the anniversary of the Texas emancipation on June 19, 1865, more than two years following the 1863 proclamation.

The Slave Trade Triangle led to the capturing (in Africa) and forced relocation (in the Americas) of over twelve million Africans, including more than one hundred unique African ethnicities.¹¹ Enslaved labor was purchased and subsequently relocated in all of the new American colonies. It was concentrated most heavily in the southern states, where the cash crops of cotton, tobacco, and sugar were burgeoning, but also occurred in the north until the American Revolution. It was made possible through the labor of enslaved Africans, who were purchased (or bred), and treated as a commodity by slave traders and American plantation owners. This development of chattel slavery (fueled by their racial, social, and economic beliefs) was a sinister move forward from the older Colonial (indentured servitude) model.¹²

As human “property” (rather than human beings), slaves were simultaneously valued and ignored, cared-for and punished. They were brought across the Atlantic (the great “Middle Passage”) against their will, and in deplorable and inhumane conditions. If they survived the

⁹ Ibid, 7-31.

¹⁰ Although the *Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves* was enacted in 1807, it did not go into effect until 1808. Interestingly, Congress had already enacted the *Slave Trade Act* of 1794, but did not enforce its mandates, resulting in rampant international slave smuggling.

¹¹ Walvin, *History Files*, 7.

¹² Chattel slavery indicates a system where people are sold as commodities, or personal property. Furthermore, any children born to slaves automatically assumed the same status.

journey, they were often separated from their loved ones and forced to live lives of burden, risk, and pain. Conditions on the plantations were brutal. Much has been written describing the great cruelty and savage violence of the slave masters toward their workers.¹³

Reaction from the enslaved to this brutal and inhumane treatment was to be expected. “While the determination to regain freedom was constant, the strategies employed were highly dependent on the specific realities of enslavement in a given time and place.”¹⁴ Through uprisings and revolt, enslaved workers bravely fought in outright rebellion on the plantations. These rebellions were usually met with equal or greater opposing force, often resulting in bloody violence and cruel punishment, even death. Because slave owners and masters feared revolts, they advanced management strategies that became increasingly harsh. Some went so far as to import African slave masters who were champions of physical cruelty and psychological manipulation.¹⁵

The response to slave rebellion varied. Abolitionists were pivotal in their support of and aid to enslaved people, becoming more subversive in their efforts. In light of rampant rebellion, Congress passed laws to placate the south, such as the *Fugitive Slave Act* (1793) to try to preserve the “business interests” of the South by guaranteeing an owner’s right to recover any escaped slaves.¹⁶ This was only partially effective, as the some in the northern states continued to harbor and assist those seeking freedom.¹⁷ To solve the pesky abolitionist problem (and appease southern wealthy slaveowners), Congress passed *The Fugitive Slave Law* in 1850 to ensure that any escaped slaves, upon capture in *any state*, were to be returned to their plantations under penalty of law.

¹³ Most of the scholarship I have consulted discusses the savage treatment of enslaved Africans on American soil. A particularly succinct description of the period, with images can be found in James Walvin’s *History Files: The Slave Trade*, 72-83.

¹⁴ J. Blaine Hudson, *Encyclopedia of the Underground Railroad* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 1.

¹⁵ Walvin, *History Files*, 87-94.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁷ It’s important to remember that slavery also persisted in the north.

How did the enslaved respond and resist? How did they cope with inhumane and vicious treatment? They did so through rebellion and escape, yes. *But more importantly*, they worked collectively to retain their own identity and culture. They stole away to worship as they pleased. They spoke in terms that masked true meaning. They were storytellers and poets. They used music. They sang together, in community, to soothe and repair their battered spirit. Singing provided them not only much-needed hope, but it also offered a sparkling sliver of opportunity through secret communication. They dreamed of the day when they would be set free—and until that day, they looked for opportunities to escape, to join in a subversive movement that led north to freedom: The Underground Railroad. This story of hope and resilience inspires an entire body of compelling repertoire for conductors, singers, and listeners.

The Underground Railroad

The slavery industry in the United States was a tangled web of people, profits, and politics. Because of the profit-mentality of slavery, both “sides,” North and South, were inextricably bound up in the tradition and institution of slavery, whether directly or indirectly. As historian Tom Colarco has put it, “The Underground Railroad is primarily a story of good Samaritans helping their fellow brothers and sisters along various routes to freedom. To say that it was merely the good guys (abolitionists) against the bad guys (slave owners), however, is oversimplifying a very complex situation.”¹⁸

The Underground Railroad was an intricate network of escape routes, safe houses, coded language, and secret information, stretching from Mexico north to Canada.¹⁹ Workers on the Underground Railroad could be any color or social status, Abolitionist, free, or fugitive, and they could provide a variety of services to the cause. This included sharing the location of secret

¹⁸ Tom Colarco, *Places of the Underground Railroad: A Geographical Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011), xix.

¹⁹ David Blight, *Passages to Freedom : the Underground Railroad in History and Memory* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2006), 3. “The origin of the term ‘Underground Railroad’ has several versions. One story says that in 1831 a fugitive slave named Tice Davids escaped from Kentucky to safer ground in Ohio. When his master looked in vain for him in Ripley, just across the Ohio River, he is said to have commented, “he must have gone off on an underground railroad.”

meeting points, hosting fugitives, or by offering supplies. Please see Appendix B (page 104) for a glossary listing of common codes and phrases used during this era. The Underground Railroad system began as a grass roots humanitarian effort:

“The Underground Railroad started slowly at the local level, developing networks that expanded regionally, and eventually reached out across states and into Canada. Beginning with individualized efforts to aid fugitive slaves around the time of the American Revolution, it came to involve generations of some families....”²⁰

It was a nationwide affair and a polarizing political debate. More than that, it was a problem of humanity—of being human, and recognizing that humanity in others. This issue (not only slavery, but, more importantly, the profits of slavery) was a pivotal spark in igniting the Civil War.²¹

The Underground Railroad, a subversive humanitarian movement, was born as a response to the seeming perpetuity of slavery, offering enslaved workers the opportunity to escape the plantation and find a new life, free from shackles. Inevitably, this called for illegal action, placing those who tried to escape (and those who assisted them) in great danger. “Urban slaves,” or, those that had much more freedom by working for masters (or were hired out) in cities and towns, also sought escape on the Underground Railroad.

Although there were several famous figures of the Underground Railroad—Levi Coffin (1798-1897), Thomas Garrett (1789-1871), and Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)—perhaps the most notorious was Harriet Tubman (c. 1822-1913), the Grand Conductor. Tubman was a “fugitive, and a friend of the fugitive.”²² She is credited with having assisted over 300 escapees in their

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Colarco, *Places of the Underground Railroad*, xxv. Colarco has assembled a useful timeline of the Underground Railroad including dates, pivotal figures, and locations of the operation.

²² Hudson, *Encyclopedia of the Underground Railroad*, 220.

quest for freedom.²³ She was so clever that the rewards for her capture became staggering.²⁴ In the music of the Underground Railroad, she was referred to as “Moses.” In the book of Exodus we read that Moses lead the Israelites out of bondage and out of Egypt. Moses, then, was a fitting moniker for Harriet Tubman, who risked so much to deliver her people to freedom. One of the most effective tools of communication Tubman and other Underground Railroad workers used was coded messages.

Although the “language” of the Underground Railroad was also promulgated by word of mouth, print messages, and even in specially designed quilts hanging on the wash line to dry,²⁵ the primary vehicle of communication was music. Singing was tolerated on the plantations (and even encouraged), as slave masters considered it a method to increase productivity in their plantation workers, coordinating the rhythm of their physical work. Also, the music would keep the workers’ minds occupied, resulting in less chance of subversive complaining and plotting. Little did slave masters know that coded messages for escape were being exchanged right under their close supervision. Unbeknownst to the masters, words of these simple songs contained coded messages as signals for escape. Some songs contained longer phrases or even entire bodies of lyrics devoted toward that effort. The enslaved sang together, in community, to soothe and repair their battered spirit. The signal songs became the “fight songs” of the South, spreading a message of hope to all who had ears to hear its message.

²³ The exact number of fugitives that Harriet Tubman assisted is in debate. Blaine Hudson, in *Encyclopedia of the Underground Railroad* (p. 221), reports 300, but Catherine Clinton, “Slavery is War” from *Passages to Freedom* speculates that the number is open for debate, and lists numbers between 200-400. Due to the clandestine nature of the operation, it is difficult to confirm these numbers.

²⁴ Catherine Clinton. “Slavery is War,” in *Passages to Freedom*, ed. David Blight (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2006), 208. The reward for capturing Harriet Tubman was \$40,000, a staggering amount of money at that time.

²⁵ Jacqueline L.Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 48-50. This source contains several color photos of coded quilts that survive from the era.

CHAPTER 3. COLLECTIONS, COMMUNICATION, AND CODED TEXT

The text of spirituals is a fascinating and dynamic entity. Their animated lyrics are filled with rich imagery and dramatic storytelling. They frequently recall Bible stories, featuring the epic struggles of large communities of people, as well as heroic figures who led these people to victory. The symbolism of such stories must certainly have provided a sense of association, hope, and inspiration to those bound by slavery. These “stories in song” were sung for multiple purposes: to provide religious instruction, to offer encouragement to people clearly in desolate and desperate circumstances, and finally, as a subversive call to action—a call to escape the bonds of slavery to freedom in the north. The language of the spirituals was enigmatic, to be sure, containing double, and even triple meanings to those that sang them. However, those that were listening, slave owners and slave masters, rarely heard more than what they wanted to hear...simple religious songs.

A point of clarity is required. *Not all spirituals contain coded messages. And not all coded messages (in spirituals) were used in the Underground Railroad.* Many of those enslaved escaped on their own, without any direct assistance from the Underground Railroad system. Some of the so-called “secular” spirituals were just everyday songs about work and play. Furthermore, some coded messages in the spirituals were not specific to any particular escape plan, but instead, referenced an abiding desire for freedom.

The coded messages were effective because the language that was used had more than one meaning. Clearly, there was a need for this type of communication—a need to “own” something that was far more precious than any material items they were denied through slavery. A deficiency exists in terms of how many conductors (and to what extent) are aware of these coded messages. This study hopes to provide helpful information on this subject.

Oral Tradition

The unique character of this genre of music is significant, in that, there are great variations in texts that survive for each song. Rather than the customary manner of transmitting music across ages and cultures (through written musical notation), spirituals were perpetuated and promoted through a distinct word-of-mouth tradition. This begins much earlier than slavery in America. The African culture embraced the word-of-mouth tradition; this did not change once people were enslaved and brought to American shores.

Spirituals are folk songs, created by anonymous, uncelebrated poets who were enslaved on the plantations of the American south. Through their persistence and popularity, they have formed an important and inspiring repertoire of song. However, one of the challenges of spirituals is that they were born out of oral tradition. Inconsistencies—in text, in melody—occur frequently. Repetition of parts, or even entire sections of text, also arises with regularity within differently titled pieces of music. There is good reason for this, of course: the music was not written down, at least not in a comprehensive and systematic way, until 1867.²⁶ It was shared from generation to generation, and from plantation to plantation, by word-of-mouth, which allowed for great variance in what was known for each song. “Time and ‘group editing,’ according to John W. Work, are “the two greatest known purifiers of folk song. For instance, one person may create a song in which there are some unnatural intervals or some words that do not quite fit the meter. If the group is favorably impressed with the song as a whole, gradually, and without conscious effort, it replaces these unnatural intervals and misfit words with more suitable ones.”²⁷ The advantage to this oral tradition (in terms of using music to interact secretly) was that there were so many variations to the tunes and text that it was difficult for adversaries to keep track of the song, and ultimately, the meanings of those songs.

²⁶William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1867). This landmark collection, undertaken as part of the Port Royal Project, was the first organized effort of preserving this folk music.

²⁷ John Work, *American Negro Songs: 230 Folk Songs and Spirituals, Religious and Secular* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998), 11. “The inferior and incongruous material found in many spirituals has resulted from the fact that these songs became so prolific within such a short time period.”

Early Collection of Spirituals

Would we know about spirituals if they had never been written down? It's not very likely. Certainly, some descendants of the tradition would have passed it down through the generations, but so much may have gotten lost over time. Additionally, many of the formerly enslaved may have avoided passing down their knowledge of the spirituals because they may have felt that it was a painful reminder of the past—one that they did not hope to remember. Even the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who first began their concert singing tradition in 1871, programmed a traditional, European-style concert program (and performed it with great facility), but the audience's reaction was not what they had hoped for. They decided to include two spirituals, which were very "enthusiastically received" by the audience; thus, the concert spiritual made the transition from improvised field songs to *a cappella* choral arrangements.²⁸

Prior to 1867, no organized attempt was made to preserve spirituals for the future. William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, three missionaries working in within the Port Royal Experiment, met with newly freed slaves and asked them about the songs they were singing. They carefully transcribed what they heard, trying to represent, as best they could, the text and music that each singer offered. The resulting collection of text and lyrics was inspiring, but in their unique character, also presented a great challenge. When the three missionaries met to compare their collections, they noted the many variations of the text and tunes of each song. Singers may have presented related, but unique variations on the same text or tune.

It is likely that performance of these tunes also varied widely, with several differences in practice and style, depending on location, the person "leading" the singing, and the community of singers that joined in. For this reason, in all of the primary collections of spirituals, many variations occur. This variation in text may be seen as something that may rob the spiritual of

²⁸ John Lovell, *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame; the Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual Was Hammered Out* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) 403.

its strength; on the contrary, the consistency in intent (delivered by such a variety of means) offers a musical/cultural vehicle that was incredibly effective.

We must be so thankful that early spiritual collectors recognized the inestimable value and inspiration of this art and strove to preserve it before it was lost or forgotten. “In the wake of these publications, the significance of spirituals was recognized along with the risk of loss if left to oral tradition alone.”²⁹

There were obvious difficulties in the collection of these tunes. It was necessary to establish a sense of trust in order to meet and work with these newly freed singers. Understanding the differences in text, diction, rhythm, and melody that occurred from each singer to the next was daunting. Because there were often several versions of the “same” song, collectors noted which singer had provided them with the spiritual, even though they didn’t know the original composers of the tunes. Recording rhythms and melodies was also difficult because of the stylistic differences between the spirituals and the more-familiar (to the collectors), European-style music. Collectors wrote that “every effort” was made to transcribe the music exactly as it was heard, but that it was challenging to accurately represent the captivating singing style.³⁰ As Eileen Southern suggests, it was “practically impossible to identify the author of a spiritual and find its original form. The song is a stone, polished by the river of oral tradition.”³¹

²⁹ Eileen Guenther, *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals* (St. Louis: MorningStar, 2016), 336.

³⁰ Allen, Ware, and McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs*, iv. “The difficulty experienced in attaining absolute correctness is greater than might be supposed by those who have never tried the experiment, and we are far from claiming that we have made no mistakes. What may appear to some to be an incorrect rendering, is very likely to be a variation; for these variations are endless, and very entertaining and instructive.”

³¹ Bruno Chenu, *The Trouble I’ve Seen: the Big Book of Negro Spirituals* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 100. “In her fundamental study of American black music, Eileen Southern underscores that it is practically impossible to identify the author of a spiritual and to find its original form. The song is a stone, polished by the river of oral tradition. It is modified according to circumstances. Also, this music is particularly difficult to transcribe.”

André Thomas devotes a portion of his book, “Way Over in Beulah Lan’: Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual”, to the discussion of four of these primary collections.³²

Slave Songs of the United States by William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, 1867.

The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs by J.B.T. Marsh, 1880.

Negro Folk-Songs: The Hampton Series Books I-IV, Complete by Natalie Curtis-Burlin, 1918.

Befo’ de War Spirituals: Words and Melodies. E. A. McIlhenny and Henry Wehrmann, 1933.

There are other important early collections as well, notably, those by John Work, James Weldon Johnson, and Nathaniel Dett.

Using Music to Communicate

Communication within the plantation community was necessary, not only to plan escape and secret meetings, but probably more so as a means of coping and emotional survival. Music was the vehicle that carried communication from one person to another, from a community of enslaved workers to the neighboring plantation—ultimately, it carried messages throughout the south and along the routes of the Underground Railroad as well.

“Through all these musical manifestations, a communal identity was built up. The slaves did not have a wide choice of means to recognize each other in the diversity of their origins and grow into belonging to a community of destiny. But song was one of them. It allowed the group to exist, and to last, on the basis of a common identity that was forged by the creativity of vocal expression.”³³

³² André Thomas, *Way Over in Beulah Lan’: Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual* (Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2007). “The heartfelt voice of the slave resonated today thanks in large part of the efforts of several collectors who sought to preserve the spiritual. Among the most important are four anthologies from the nineteenth century. Viewed chronologically, they clearly show a development from simply capturing the melodies to the crafting of actual arrangements of these melodies. Perhaps their greatest value is in the glimpse they provide into the performance of this music in both social and religious situations on the plantation.”

³³ Chenu, *The Trouble I’ve Seen*, 94.

Simple musical notes and rhythms, text and expression, were able to provide a enough camouflage to mask the real subject of the communication. Because it was so effective, music was a primary form of communication.

Harriet Tubman's biographer, Sarah Bradford relates why music was the primary form of communication, using Tubman's own words: "Slaves must not be seen talking together, and so it came about that their communication was often made by singing, and the words of their familiar hymns, telling of the heavenly journey, and the land of Canaan, while they did not attract the attention of the masters, conveyed to their brethren and sisters in bondage something more that met the ear."³⁴ She continues, telling stories of songs that Tubman would sing to signal that she was going to leave, or that it was safe (or unsafe) to come out after her arrival.

Although undocumented—certainly, if it *had* been documented, it would not have remained secretive and would have put many lives in danger—musical communication was extremely effective, and masterfully utilized by the enslaved, as well as those that sought to help them. Arthur Jones helps us to understand the power of using music to communicate on the plantation:

“Although it is impossible to determine with any certainty the dates of composition of any specific songs, there is no question that spirituals and other songs were used frequently for secret communication among fellow captives or between captives and people in the free community working to facilitate escape or revolt. Clearly, enslaved Africans employed spirituals and other folksongs as secret coded communications, announcing plans for escape, revolt and clandestine meetings, or cheering on comrades in battle.”³⁵

Coded Text

“And so, in common with folk songs of all ages, the Afro-American spiritual employed a mask and symbol. Using them as they did, they were able to write songs that dealt with every phase of the slave's life and to do so without fear of being punished.”³⁶ Coded message was used

³⁴ Sarah Bradford, *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of her People* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 16.

³⁵ Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 45-48. The songs were "secret" largely because people outside the tradition failed to understand them.

³⁶ Lovell, *Black Song*, 193.

so much within the spirituals, it's astonishing that slave masters didn't understand that there was something subversive afoot in the fields. It was effective because the messages, although seemingly simple bible stories or religious references (at least, that was how they were interpreted by those that managed and owned the plantations), actually had multiple meanings. Frederick Douglass, in "My Bondage and My Freedom" writes,

"A keen observer might have detected in our repeated 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 the north—and *the north was our Canaan*. It had a double meaning. In the lips of some, it meant the expectation of a speedy summons to a world of spirits; but in the lips of our company, it simply meant a speedy pilgrimage toward a free state, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery."³⁷

The enslaved were able to communicate freely through song, to complain without suspicion, to plan secret meetings, to make plans for escape, or cheer on someone else that had escaped. Through their coded music, they shared the collective burden of the community and transformed their sorrow and suffering into art. Arthur Jones reminds us that the meanings of these codes were flexible, and could change depending on who was singing, and who was being sung to: "Of course, none of these songs had any 'fixed' meanings but were available 'in the air' to any African person needing them for any specific purposes. In the mainstream of the African tradition, the songs were highly functional; they could be improvised or utilized in various ways."³⁸ Through the varied repertoire of spirituals, major themes emerge as vehicles for coded message delivery. Following is a list of the most commonly-used themes for coded messages.

³⁷ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (Lexington, KY: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 94.

³⁸ Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 58. The meaning was fluid. It meant what they *wanted* it to mean, or what they *needed* it to mean. This was all done in the moment, but was easily understood by the community while slave masters stood by, oblivious to the clever communication.

Common Themes/Text in Coded Message Spirituals, Context, and Translations:

- **Heaven/Canaan/Promised Land/Gospel Feast/Mansions/Kingdom**
 - Context: the enslaved often sang of heaven and their longing to go to heaven
 - Translation: freedom, the northern free states, Canada, Africa (Liberia), or heaven
- **Hell/Egypt**
 - Context: where evil, sin, and bondage resides
 - Translation: being sold further south, slavery, death, sin
- **Deliverance/Being Redeemed/Baptized/Good Religion**
 - Context: every man whose soul is converted deserves deliverance
 - Translation: freedom, escape, religious conversion
- **Jubilee**
 - Context: the Year of Jubilee (from Leviticus 25:8-10) referred to the day, every fifty years, when the Israelites received their freedom and their property returned
 - Translation: emancipation, freedom, escape
- **Heroic Figures (Moses, Daniel, Elijah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Hebrew Children, Peter, Paul, Silas, Lazarus, Noah, Jacob, Gideon, Joshua, Nicodemus, the Israelites)**
 - Context: heroic figures of the Old Testament were ordinary men with extraordinary faith
 - Translation: these figures represented the ordinary men and women enslaved on plantations hoping to be delivered from slavery, as well as those heroes that sought to help them to freedom (agents of the Underground Railroad)
- **Evil Figures (Satan, Pharaoh, Egyptians, Rich Man Dives)**
 - Context: any persons that stood in the way of freedom
 - Translation: slave traders, slave masters, slave owners
- **Water/Jordan River/Red Sea/Rivers/Baptism/Rain/Fountains**
 - Context: a reference to water meant either a journey (on the other side was freedom), or an action of the water (aiding in escape by concealing the scent from dogs) washing the soul cleanly into a new life (baptism, finding freedom)
 - Translation: Ohio River (most-used meaning), Atlantic Ocean (to return to Africa), or any other river that posed as a barrier to freedom
- **Transportation (chariots, ships, trains, wheels, wings, shoes, walking, running, flying, Jacob's ladder)**
 - Context: any items that would facilitate traveling and escape/modes of transportation
 - Translation: methods of movement and escape on the Underground Railroad
- **Possessions (shoes, robe, crown, harp, bells, trumpet, wings)**
 - Context: since the slaves didn't "own" anything, the promise of having these things in heaven or when they were freed was exciting
 - Translation: they were symbols of traveling, devotion, praise, or freedom
- **Place (Drinking Gourd, Canaan, streets of gold, Promised Land, pearly gates, Jordan River)**
 - Context: providing a sense of "place" kept the focus forward to escape
 - Translation: North Star, Canada, freed states, escape routes

There are, of course, more of these coded texts in the spirituals, but this list encompasses a good deal of the most commonly used themes. Discussing and disseminating these coded songs through our contemporary lens is a very different prospect than in their original context so many years ago, yet because they are songs about life, they still captivate.

“They (coded spirituals) did not survive for their secretive nature, and for us to examine them. They exist because they are deeply moving and inspiring. One reason for the survival of these songs...is that the secret nature of certain songs precluded their being revealed to collectors and observers, for obvious reasons. It is impossible to determine the extent to which this phenomenon was at work in their disappearance in the oral history repertoire. I believe that one additional reason why many of the spirituals have survived is because the original inspirations behind their creation derived from deeply meaningful, archetypal human experiences, relevant not only to the specific circumstance of slavery, but also to women and men struggling with issues of justice, freedom, and spiritual wholeness in all times and all places.”³⁹

³⁹ Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 47. This music survives because it was meaningful to the community. It provided hope and support to those who needed it. It was a reflection of the human experience, sorrow and suffering converted into inspiring art.

CHAPTER 4. MUSICAL DEVICES, INTERPRETATION, AND AWARENESS

We know that music served as “camouflage” for revolutionary ideas and escape. Songs of protest were disguised as simple work songs in the fields. Clandestine meetings were prompted only by humming a particular tune, as in *Steal Away*. These arrangements prompt us to appreciate the brave use of music as a vehicle for revolution and hope.

As those enslaved from various parts of Africa were forcibly brought over to America, separated, and sold as a labor commodity, they sought to retain their African traditions. “Booker T. Washington, in examining the roots of African and African-American music, said: “There is a difference between the music of Africa and that of her transplanted children. There is a new note in the music which had its origin in the southern plantation, and in this new note the sorrow and sufferings which came from serving in strange land found expression.”⁴⁰ There are certainly many unique musical elements to address in spirituals. However, since this study is focused on a particular subset of spirituals, coded message spirituals, what elements do conductors need to know about and address within that body of repertoire?

Musical Devices & Interpretation

The musical devices employed in spiritual arrangements often illustrate (through sound) the meaning of the coded text. What musical elements are affected by the meaning—or multiple meanings—of the text? In general terms, the elements (melody, harmony, rhythm & texture) are treated as one might expect. It’s true that arrangers use melody, harmony, rhythm, and texture cleverly to advance the story of each text. However, there are more interpretive choices to be made in terms of dynamics, timbre, tempo, and diction.

Most arrangers, if they are aware of the coded text in spirituals, probably have already indicated these interpretive elements in their score markings to “paint the text.” However, if

⁴⁰ Ronald Jordan, *Praise: Amazing Stories and Insights behind the Great African American Hymns and Negro Spirituals* (Colorado Springs, CO: Honor Books, 2005), 20.

they haven't, conductors should feel free to apply their scholarship and add those elements to further enhance the meaning of the text. Furthermore, sharing the rationale behind making such decisions is not only interesting and enriching for the choir, but it will help them understand the music more completely. This is important, as Jones suggests,

“In historical accounts of the Fisk experience, it is clear that people hearing spirituals for the first time, performed by singers who understood and felt their deep meanings, invariably found themselves touched deeply by the melodies, rhythms and lyrics of these songs. The same power that formed the basis of their effectiveness as songs of resistance, personal transformation and religious conviction appeared to contribute to the ability of the spirituals to communicate effectively in widely divergent places and circumstances.”⁴¹

The flexibility and fluidity in the text of coded spirituals provides the same opportunity for these interpretive elements. Guenther instructs about tempo, “Tempi varied according to the location, the task, the weather, and the time of day—one tempo for rowing a boat, a different one for grinding grain, and a slower tempo in the evening.”⁴² For instance, in the case of *Steal Away*, if the meaning was intended to signal an escape/departure, the tempo may be slower, and more melancholy in tone. If the intended message was announcing or anticipating a secret meeting, it may be sung in hushed tones and a slightly quicker tempo. To be fair, *we don't know everything that was done at the time*, but, as artists, it is our responsibility to interpret the music in the best way we can to give an informative and inspiring performance. There is great opportunity for dramatic and exciting storytelling through the singing of these message songs. “Many of the stories and scenes in the Bible gave the Negro bards great play for their powers of graphic description. The stories are always dramatic and the pictures vivid and gorgeously colored. It might be said of them that every line is a picture.”⁴³

⁴¹ Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 125.

⁴² Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 43. Tempo is crucial. These songs, whether slow or fast, were often vehicles of movement. The conductor must not forget this. Pedagogically, it would be instructive to have the singers move as they are learning the piece rather than sitting or standing still.

⁴³ James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson. *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 39.

Choral legend, Alice Parker reminded choral directors at the 2017 National ACDA Conference that “the style of singing the spirituals varied from place to place; we should be open to reasonable interpretation, and include interpretative elements not written on the page.” She continued, “there are no less than five “filters” between the original spiritual and the ears of an audience member: spiritual—arranger—publisher—conductor—audience.”⁴⁴ I would argue for two additional steps in Parker’s model: “collector and performer.” The collector of each tune serves as the first lens through which the music was primarily interpreted. The performer serves as the final lens of interpretation, as their song is transmitted to the listening ears of the audience.

Connected somewhat marginally to coded message songs, is the use of dialect in spirituals. The enslaved quickly learned English after the great middle passage, but did so while still retaining the characteristics of their diverse African languages.⁴⁵ They spoke with a dialect that contained both English and African elements. Spirituals singers were aware that the slave masters could not always understand meanings through their thick dialect of their speech or singing. The clever singers used this to their advantage to further conceal the meaning of their music.

There is an ongoing conversation regarding use of dialect (and the extent to which it’s done) in the performance of spirituals. Because conductors want to be respectful, some do not feel comfortable incorporating dialect at all. However, most use a “hybrid” approach, incorporating some elements of authentic diction with standardized English.

“Over the years there has been much debate over the extent to which dialect should be preserved in performance of spirituals today, whether the use of dialect could be perceived as demeaning, *or whether its elimination could be perceived as demeaning.*”

⁴⁴ Alice Parker, *Got a Mind to Do Right: Approaching, Discussing, and Performing Spirituals Respectfully*, Interest Session, American Choral Director’s Association, National Conference, Minneapolis, March 10, 2017.

⁴⁵ The enslaved came from various places in Africa, each bringing their own language to American soil. In order to communicate in their new “home,” they forged their African languages with English, into a language (Gullah) that is still spoken off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. This manner of speaking—this dialect—was sometimes difficult for others to understand. It varied by region, and even by plantation. Phonetic decay, elimination of diphthongs, and altered grammar made it difficult for their masters to understand.

The Johnson brothers, Anton E. Armstrong, André J. Thomas, and numerous others have argued for the retention of dialect as integral to the historical authenticity of the songs. Dialect has its own beauty and power. It strengthens the listener's connection to the originators of spirituals by conveying the thoughts of the originators in their original language.⁴⁶

James Weldon Johnson confirms, “It is not necessary to be an expert in Negro dialect to sing the Spirituals, but most of them lose in charm when they are sung in straight English.”⁴⁷ In the performance of spirituals, this is an important quality to celebrate and respect, as it preserves the intention and artistic spirit of the original singers. However, great care must be taken to present this dialect with scholarship and respect, rather than any attempt to caricature or parody this tradition.

Arrangers don't always agree on writing dialect in their arrangements.⁴⁸ Conductors can also take time for further study and consult an expert to help them make informed choices for their choirs, whether the dialect is included in the print music or not. Most importantly, they should be prepared to engage in conversation with the ensemble, regarding the best, and most respectful approach to the diction.

Awareness

It is important that conductors realize all of the important choices they need to make when programming message songs for performance. They are not all musical. They are not all about what is written on the page. So much of the appeal and importance of coded message songs is knowing the texts, the symbols and masks, the poetry, and great creativity of these folk poets. *Knowing is not enough, however.* Conductors should advance one important step further and share the stories of the coded language with their choirs and audiences, in rehearsal preparation and program or concert notes. They should look up scriptural references that serve as the basis for the text. They should be able to present concrete facts about slavery and the

⁴⁶ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 37.

⁴⁷ Johnson, *The Books of American Spirituals*, 43.

⁴⁸ Early arrangements often include dialect, which is now largely perceived as demeaning. Modern arrangers typically do not, and leave the diction decisions to the conductor.

Underground Railroad so that their singers (and audiences) are informed, always learning, and *always* regarding this body of repertoire with respect and dignity. We cannot assume that singers and audiences know these important elements.

Toward that end, this study intends to provide resources for conductors, to help them build a vocabulary of coded message songs and their meanings.⁴⁹ The following chapters (6-13) highlight nine pieces that have been chosen because of their coded messages. Each piece is introduced (including a general description and arranger information), its coded language is presented (source information-if known, alternate texts, translations/connotations). Finally, a musical description and conductor's guide concludes each chapter.

- Chapter 5: *Steal Away*, arr. Clayton White
- Chapter 6. *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?*, arr. Moses Hogan
- Chapter 7. *Keep Your Lamps!*, arr. André Thomas
- Chapter 8. *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit*, arr. William Dawson
- Chapter 9. *Deep River*, arr. René Clausen
- Chapter 10. *Have You Got Good Religion?*, arr. Phillip McIntyre
- Chapter 11. *Elijah Rock*, arr. Moses Hogan
- Chapter 12. *Let Me Fly*, arr. Robert DeCormier
- Chapter 13. *The Old Ship of Zion*, arr. Richard Harrison Smith

⁴⁹ Please see the Appendix B at the end of this document for this helpful information.

CHAPTER 5. STEAL AWAY

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus.
Steal away, steal away home. I want to cross over into campground.
My Lord, He calls me, He calls me by the thunder.
The trumpet sounds within a my soul. I ain't got long to stay here.
Green trees are bending, poor sinner stands a trembling.
The trumpet sounds within a my soul. I ain't got long to stay here.⁵⁰

Introduction

Steal Away, is one of the most recognized and documented coded message songs of the spirituals repertoire. Not only does *Steal Away* contain coded message within its lyrics, but it is also unique, as simply humming the melody prompted action from those that recognized its meaning. This particular arrangement of *Steal Away* is scored for SATB chorus by Dr. Clayton White (b.1942).

Clayton White, retired Professor of Music and Department Chair at Community College of Philadelphia, is a recognized expert on African-American music and has published over one hundred compositions and arrangements.⁵¹ Not only is Dr. White a scholar on the subject of spirituals, but he also conducts the “Clayton White Singers,” a professional chorus that specializes in the choral performance of spirituals. His collection, “Tryin’ to Get Ready,” contains thirty arrangements of spirituals, including this one.

Steal Away is an “escape song.”⁵² At first glance, it seems as if it is a musical meditation that expresses the deep longing to die and go to Jesus in heaven. This was a common theme in spirituals. W.E.B DuBois (1869-1963) affirms this in *The Souls of Black Folk*: “The Negro, losing the joy of this world, eagerly seized upon the offered conceptions of the next; the avenging Spirit of the Lord enjoining patience in this world, under sorrow and tribulation until the Great

⁵⁰ Clayton White, “Steal Away,” in *Tryin’ to Get Ready* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2006), 79.

⁵¹ GIA Publications, “Artists: Clayton White,” GIA Publications, April 13, 2018, <https://www.giamusic.com/store/artists/clayton-white>.

⁵² An escape song, also used synonymously with “signal song” is a piece of music sung in order to communicate secretly and prompt action for escape from the plantation. Sometimes it was a plea for assistance, and other times, it was a farewell to loved ones and friends.

Day when He should lead His dark children home,—this became his comforting dream.”⁵³ Certainly, the enslaved clung to this dream of being free from earthly bondage. It offered them needed consolation and hope when everything associated with their earthly experience was full of anguish, sorrow, and suffering.

As stated in Chapter 3 (Collections, Communication, and Coded Text), spirituals’ coded messages frequently retained double and even triple meanings, offering varying levels of specificity in regards to their message. This is why coded musical communication was so effective. The meaning was determined by the context (of the singing) and the intent of the singer. While an enslaved worker was singing, “Steal Away,” he could have been singing about a longing for heaven; conversely, he could also have been providing either a signal for a secret meeting, or to escape the plantation altogether. Those listening that were not privy to these multiple meanings (slave masters, plantation owners) largely ignored the singing, thinking that the songs were about longing for heaven.

Coded Text

Steal Away appears in *The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs*,⁵⁴ one of the four primary collections of spirituals mentioned by André Thomas (b.1952) in his book, *Way Over in Beulah Lan’: Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*.⁵⁵ Additionally, it also appears in John Work’s collection, *American Negro Songs: 230 Folk Songs and Spirituals, Religious and Secular*⁵⁶ and also Edward Boatner’s *The Story of the Spirituals*,⁵⁷ both important secondary

⁵³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. First published in 1903. (New York, NY: Fine Creative Media, 2003), 141.

⁵⁴ J.B.T. Marsh, *The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 181.

⁵⁵ Thomas, *Way Over in Beulah Lan’*, 13-19.

⁵⁶ Work, *American Negro Songs*, 123.

⁵⁷ Edward Boatner, *The Story of the Spirituals: 30 Spirituals and Their Origins* (Miami, FL: Belwin Mills, 1973), 115.

collections of spirituals. “This song is exceptional: it is one spiritual connected with a composer and a specific situation. Numerous sources cite Nat Turner (1800-31) as the composer.”⁵⁸

The text of Clayton White’s arrangement has only a slight variation from the primary collections, two less verses (verses 3 & 4):

3. Tombstones are bursting, poor sinner stands a trembling.
4. My Lord, He calls me, He calls me by the lightning.

It is unknown why White’s arrangement only contains the first two verses.

Steal Away, as previously noted, is a renowned signal song. At first glance, the lyrics of *Steal Away* seem straight-forward. In this spiritual, the lyrics “steal away” have three possible meanings. First, beginning with most specific meaning, the song was intended to secretly call together the enslaved community to attend a meeting. “According to the old emancipated black folk that were living twenty or twenty-five years after the end of the Civil War, *Steal Away* was used as a signal spiritual to notify the slaves of a secret meeting somewhere in the swamps where they would assemble to pray to God for deliverance.⁵⁹ This relates to scripture, Matthew 6:6, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

The meeting could be “called” for a variety of reasons: to discuss plans for escape, worship as they wished in private, or simply to maintain the sense of community to revive hope going forward.

Second, the song could also indicate that someone amongst the enslaved community was intending to make an escape soon. The music served as an indication to be on alert and offer assistance as needed. It also provided a quiet opportunity to say goodbye to loved ones and friends, obscured from the ever-listening ears of the slave masters.

Third, (the only meaning apparent to the slave masters) the song symbolized the journey from their difficult trials on earth to receiving glory in Heaven, alongside their Savior, Jesus. This was widely accepted by the slave masters, as it not only coincided with their professed

⁵⁸ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 124.

⁵⁹ Boatner, *The Story of the Spirituals*, 115.

Christian belief, but also seemed like a harmless activity that served as a happy distraction and motivator to the workers.

Steal Away is one of the most fascinating and unique of the coded message songs because the intended meaning was communicated not only through the lyrics, but also by simply humming the melody.⁶⁰ It was so well-known amongst the enslaved community that just hearing the tune could prompt action. “Whenever the meeting was to be held, the leader would hum the first phrase of the spiritual to one of the slaves and he would, in turn, hum the same phrase to another. This signal was given all day until everyone was notified. They would hum softly the good message all during the day and the slave master would never know what was going on.”⁶¹

Steal Away also contains other coded language within its lyrics. “crossing over into campground” indicates a move toward freedom (the free states, Canada, or a return to Africa) or a passage from this earthly life to Heaven. “Green trees are bending” is an interesting phrase to consider. It seems as if this phrase contained nothing secretive or subversive within its meaning, and that’s what slave masters believed. However, this simple phrase actually had a literal meaning that the slave masters just didn’t understand:

“It was some years later, when I heard Reverend Pearlie Brown sing *Steal Away*, that I really felt this story. Brown said he had learned *Steal Away* from his grandmother, who told him that it was sung whenever there was to be a meeting among the slaves. He also said that the verse of the song that had the words, “green trees a bending” referred to bush arbors the slaves created in the woods to have their praise meetings. B bending and tying bushes, they could stimulate the bushes to grow into a kind of a cove that would be a gathering place for people to come and sing and pray and do other things that were not to be shared with the plantation owners.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Jordan, *Soul Praise*, 25. “Steal Away—one of the many “signal” or message songs sung by the slaves...the lyrics of this song were not always sung. Sometimes, a slave group leader might hum the first few words to someone else in the group, who would in turn hum them to someone else. This pattern would sometimes go on all day, even within earshot of the unsuspecting master, until everyone had been made aware of a pending meeting.”

⁶¹ Boatner, *The Story of the Spirituals*, 115.

⁶² Bernice Johnson Reagon, *If You Don’t Go, Don’t Hinder Me* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 76-77.

“Green trees a bending” had another meaning, as listed by Chenu while recounting a narrative from a newly freed slave:

“Peter Randolph, a Virginia slave emancipated in 1847, told of one of these clandestine reunions. ‘Not being allowed to hold meetings on the plantation, the slaves assemble in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols. They have an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together. This is often done by the first one arriving breaking boughs from the trees, and bending them in the direction of the selected spot.’”⁶³

“The trumpet sounds within a mah soul” refers to the long-awaited news of emancipation and freedom ringing through the land (like the sound of a trumpet). This simple song was very effective in communicating secrets, both in coded language, as well as what we know about the performance practice as a means of communication.

The Music

Clayton White’s arrangement of *Steal Away* is straight-forward in its approach. The piece is written in F major, using the pentatonic scale as its foundation. It is in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of “free and expressive,” indicating great flexibility. Clayton White has offered expressive dynamic markings that are important to note. Most of the dynamic markings are *mp* and quieter, which interestingly, may relate information about the original performance intention of this piece—to quietly announce plans for a secret meeting. Singers would easily relate these dynamics to the original performance practice of the day.

White presents the refrain simply as a homophonic statement: “Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus.” Both Boatner and Jordan stated that the singing of this song (beginning with one singer and continuing to others) was a means of communication about a secret meeting. That approach might suggest a more imitative texture, especially with the repeated text. However, White takes a different route instead, suggesting a sense of community through retaining the homophonic texture. Actually, most arrangements of this tune are homophonically set—with the notable exception of William L. Dawson, who chose to use

⁶³ Chenu, *The Trouble I’ve Seen*, 67.

pyramid entrances to open his version. Furthermore, White conveys this “adding voices effect” through clever use of dynamics, increasing the level of each phrase by one dynamic level until reaching the phrase, “steal away home.” The following phrase is hushed back as the singers sing, “I ain’t got long to stay here.”

The verse, “My Lord, he calls me, he calls me by the thunder,” is presented by the soprano section and supported by the basses, tenors, and altos all singing long notes on a vowel (“oo”). The full SATB chorus sings powerfully, “The trumpet sounds with-in-a mah soul.” The last phrase, “I ain’t got long to stay here” borrows a bit of material from the end of the refrain, and returns to the subdued dynamics presented at the beginning.

Conductor’s Preparation & Pedagogy

Although the conductor’s preparation of this piece is relatively uncomplicated, it is rich with possibilities for expression and opportunities for learning for both the chorus and the audience. The essence of community that the homophonic singing evokes is powerful, both in the loudest call of the “trumpet with-in-a mah soul” and the hushed whisper, “I ain’t got long to stay here.” The dynamics change almost every measure, which is a wonderful artistic challenge for the singers. It is easy to memorize quickly, which then inspires singers and conductor to a higher level of communication much more quickly in the learning process.

This arrangement of *Steal Away* is not technically challenging; however, the challenge (and the satisfaction) lies in performing this music with a sense of understanding its history and performance practice. How satisfying to know the possible meanings and context contained within these simple lyrics. It would be even better to communicate this to your singers and audience through creative performance. Positioning a few solo singers around the performance hall and asking them to begin the piece by exchanging the opening motive amongst themselves would be an inspiring—and effective—way to present an authentic performance practice of *Steal Away*. After this individual exchange is complete, the arrangement could be sung as written,

hopefully providing the audience with a more complete understanding of the authentic story of this spiritual.

CHAPTER 6. DIDN'T MY LORD DELIVER DANIEL?

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, then why not every man?
He deliver'd Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale,
And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace, and why not every man?
Hallelujah!
The wind blows east and the wind blows west, it blows like the judgment day.
And ev'ry poor soul that never did pray will be glad to pray that day.
I set my foot on the Gospel ship, and the ship it begin to sail.
It landed me over on Canaan's shore, and I'll never come back anymore.
He deliver'd Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale,
And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace. Tell me why not every man?⁶⁴

Introduction

For the enslaved, *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel* asks the essential question of life: “Why not every man?” Although the piece is (outwardly) another bible story, the heart of the question goes much deeper. “This piece is a classic example of the double or coded meaning that is a key to understanding the lyrics and the role songs played in daily slave life. The song's creators majestically express the hope and desire that God send a deliverer to command the slave owners to let the people go.”⁶⁵ Like other spirituals that feature epic figures of the Old Testament—*Go Down, Moses, Elijah Rock, Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit—Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel* offers the enslaved encouragement that since Daniel was delivered, why shouldn't they also be delivered? This song is the battle cry of the underdog.⁶⁶ “Why not every man?” is the repeated text of this piece. Although it appears as a simple question, Moses Hogan's arrangement presents it more as a demand than an inquiry. There is an expectation

⁶⁴ Moses Hogan, *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1999).

⁶⁵ Gwendolin Warren, *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit: 101 Best-Loved Psalms, Gospel Hymns & Spiritual Songs of the African-American Church* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1999), 42.

⁶⁶ Dixon, *Negro Spirituals*, 22. “It was not only the successful exodus of Moses and the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery but also “little David's victory over the giant, Goliath, that has inspired suffering people ever since. Through all of Judeo-Christian history, powerless individuals and groups have identified with the victorious underdog and gained vicarious satisfaction in the horrifying punishments which plagued Pharaoh and the humiliating death of the bragging Goliath.”

attached to the question...an urgency that is delivered effectively and repeatedly through the rhythm that Hogan has scored.

Moses Hogan (1957-2003) “more than any other of the modern arrangers, is heralded as the composer/arranger who revitalized the performance of spirituals, publishing over seventy arrangements in his short life.”⁶⁷ At the time of his death, he was considered an expert on the a cappella arrangement and performance of the African-American spiritual. His keen insight into the spiritual was fostered both by hearing and singing music growing up in the African Baptist Church where his uncle was the choir director, as well as his substantial classical training.⁶⁸ Hogan’s settings are always rich in word painting captivating for both singers and listeners.

Coded Text

Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel appears in “The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs” with text additional (in italics) to the Hogan arrangement:

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, d'liver Daniel, d'liver Daniel, and why not every man?
He delivered Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale.
He delivered the children from the fiery furnace, and why not every man?
*The moon run down in a purple stream, the sun forbear to shine,
And every star disappear, King Jesus shall be mine.*
The wind blows East and the wind blows West, it blows like the judgment day,
And every poor soul that never did pray, I'll be glad to pray that day.
I set my foot on the Gospel ship, and the ship it begin to sail,
It landed me over on Canaan's shore, and I'll never come back any more.⁶⁹

It also appears in Edward Boatner’s “The Story of the Spirituals” with varied text (in italics):

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, and why not every man?
He delivered Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale.
He delivered the children from the fiery furnace, and why not every man?
*If you cannot sing like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus and you can say He died for all.*⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Thomas, *Way Over in Beulah Lan'*, 72.

⁶⁸ Hogan attended the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Juilliard School, and Louisiana State University.

⁶⁹ Marsh, *The Jubilee Singers*, 169.

⁷⁰ Boatner, *The Story of the Spirituals*, 29.

Boatner says, “*Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?* is the slaves’ interpretation of the faith which Daniel showed while in the lion’s den (Daniel 6:22). Their being in slavery was also the same as being in the lions’ den, which they believed they would overcome by faith and prayer.”⁷¹

Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel communicates in a unique manner. In addition to specific word codes, the general message of the text delivers the message of hope and assurance that deliverance from slavery and oppression was possible for all. Simon Northup recounts in “12 Years a Slave,” “The goodness of God was manifest in my miraculous escape from the swamp. As Daniel came forth unharmed from the den of lions, and as Jonah had been preserved in the whale’s belly, even so had I been delivered from evil by the Almighty.”⁷² There are a few instances, however, where specific words are used with double meaning. The use of the “Gospel Ship” refers to a means of escape, the Underground Railroad. “Canaan” refer to the free states, Canada, or Africa. The story of Daniel, and other biblical figures is told dramatically through vivid imagery, which is fitting. Also, use of the word, “Lord” instead of Jesus had a more significant connotation, as John Lovell suggests.⁷³

The Music

Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel is thickly scored for SATB chorus (8 part divisi) and a small ensemble of three soloists. The small group is not designated as male or female, and could be either. However, with a trio of women singing, it is more easily heard against the dense fabric of the choral voices. The tonality is g minor, and the meter is 4/8. The suggested tempo is very

⁷¹ Ibid, 28.

⁷² Simon Northup, *12 Years a Slave*, (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2013), 96.

⁷³ Lovell, *Black Song*, 234. “The Lord in the spiritual is somewhat more comprehensive than Jesus and definitely farther away. But he is power beyond all the needs of the slave. The Lord readily cuts through laws, conventions, power structures, and all other socio-political forms to make things right for those he favors, for those who return his trust. Thus, the slave creator appeals directly to the Lord when the need is great. The rescues of Daniel, Jonah, and the trio Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not ordinary acts of deliverance. But the Lord had proved He was equal to the occasion; and the slave had proved he was deserving. Thus the miraculous deliverance was inevitable.”

fast (♩ = 150), but the performance tempo should be determined according to the speed at which the choir sings with verbal and technical clarity. Similar to Moses Hogan's *Elijah Rock*, addressed later in this study, the rhythmic character of this piece is very syncopated, though the choir sings homophonically throughout. The entire piece is effectively driven by this repetitive rhythmic feature. The "lead" resides in the vocal trio throughout the piece, but during the verses, it is doubled by the chorus.

Each verse provides a different story or example of deliverance while the chorus reiterates the story of Daniel. After the final verse, Hogan stacks all of the stories consecutively in a quickly-building rhythmic sequence (m. 67-80) that culminates in the final phrase, the question (sung in unison), "Tell me why not every man?"

Conductor's Preparation & Pedagogy

Because of the repetitive nature of this arrangement, the conductor should plan to rehearse this piece in smaller "chunks" to avoid vocal fatigue in the singers, both in the featured trio as well as the chorus. Once the melodic and rhythmic figures are learned, the refrain can be easily prepared. The verses are also manageable. The most rehearsal time will likely be spent on the last page. Because of the divisi writing (8 parts), some voices are singing in the extreme parts of their range. The rhythmic figures are very syncopated and difficult on this closing page. Before singing the pitches, it would be wise to have the singers learn the rhythm while only speaking, to both save voice as well as allow the brain to focus on rhythm instead of rhythm and melody.

In terms of diction, Moses Hogan has not indicated anything out of the ordinary in the lyrics, so nothing is prescribed other than to strive for clarity, both in the sung notes, as well as entrances and rhythmic releases (which, in the choral parts, repeat over and over). Avoidance of diphthongs or "chewing" on the vowels is also recommended.

Time should be spent finding context for the various biblical stories contained within the piece. The biblical stories of Daniel, Jonah, and the Hebrew Children are dramatic and easy to

tell, as most people are at least somewhat familiar with them. Discussion of “deliverance” would be fruitful, and could include both sacred and secular topics throughout history. The dual meanings of the text connects well with the dramatic Old Testament stories, and will become more meaningful as the singers understand them. Because of this context, their singing will be more informed, leading to a better and more authentic performance.

CHAPTER 7. KEEP YOUR LAMPS

Keep your lamps trimmed and burning, the time is drawing nigh.
Children, don't get weary 'til your work is done.
Christian journey soon be over, the time is drawing nigh.
Keep your lamps trimmed and burning, the time is drawing nigh.⁷⁴

Introduction

“The time is drawing nigh.” To those enslaved to work on the plantations of the American south, these words provided hope, a means of looking forward to a day where they could be free from the bonds of slavery. Frederick Douglass noted, “This (*Keep Your Lamps*) was a favorite air, and had a double meaning. In the lips of some, it meant the expectation of a speedy summons to the world of spirits; but in the lips of our company, it simply meant a speedy pilgrimage toward a free state, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery.”⁷⁵

André Thomas, the arranger of *Keep Your Lamps*, is much-acclaimed for his vital role in the arrangement and performance of spirituals. A Professor of Music at Florida State University, Dr. Thomas has done much in his career to provide inspiration and information about the spiritual, both in the performance hall, as well as in his landmark book, “Way Over in Beulah Lan’: Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual.”⁷⁶ He is a champion for the spiritual, and a trusted resource amongst music educators and choral conductors.

⁷⁴ André Thomas, *Keep Your Lamps!* (Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw Music Inc., 2003).

⁷⁵ Ron and Debbie Harris. *Get on Board! Underground Railroad & Civil Rights Freedom Songs*. Ron and Debbie Harris. Appleseed Records, BOO0KHYOBO, 2007, CD, Liner notes.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Way Over in Beulah Lan’*, xiii-xv. Thomas relates his new experience singing choral arrangements of spirituals in junior high school: “I must admit, I was not fond of these settings, even through high school. As a young black man, I really didn’t identify. The text utilized dialect and it made me feel as if performing this music gave white people a chance to make fun of black people. I never really heard the message in the text; I only hear the way it sounded. We certainly weren’t allowed to speak like that in my home and it denoted ignorance in my mind. While working with famed Jester Hairston in college, my “lack of enthusiasm for this music became pretty obvious. He (Mr. Hairston) began to explain to me things about dialect, particularly the “th” sound that is written as a “d” in dialect. He then began to explain to me about the strength of my ancestors, what they had endured, and how this slave songs functioned in their lives. My embarrassment was quickly replaced with pride and admiration, and I was set on a path to learn more about the music.”

The text of *Keep Your Lamps* is based on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 that waited anxiously with their lamps through the night for the coming of the bridegroom. The wise virgins had their lamps ready with plenty of provisions to see them through to the bridegroom's arrival at the designated meeting place. The foolish virgins only brought enough to get through the night. After running out of oil, they had to return home to refill their lamps. The bridegroom arrived while they were away. The message of the music? Be alert. Be ready.

Coded Text

On the surface, the parable simply offers the message to be prepared for the bridegroom, Christ. However, the deeper message is to be prepared not only for the bridegroom, but also for the opportunity to escape whenever the proper moment presented itself. This arrival could involve an agent of the Underground Railroad, or another slave seeking freedom through escape. In his composer's note in the printed score of *Keep Your Lamps*, Thomas adds, "one can only speculate that this song was sung often, when there was a possibility of deliverance."⁷⁷

Eileen Guenther offers a second interpretation of the text, quoting former slave, William W. Robinson: "They would carry with them iron lamps, with a greasy rag for a wick, and they would attach a sharp spike to the lamp to stick it in a tree. In this way they would light up the swamp, while they held their meeting."⁷⁸ The lamps may also represent those hung out to signal safe-houses on the Underground Railroad. Like *Steal Away* (discussed in Chapter 5), coded text might often refer to secret meetings (for prayer, praise, and planning) held during the night away from the plantation for fear of being caught. "Slaves could sing what they could not say, whether indicating the possibility of a conductor from the Underground Railroad coming to guide them to freedom, or simply signaling an upcoming secret meeting. Meanings were fluid, changing according to the situation at the time, as interpreted by the singer and by the

⁷⁷ Thomas, *Keep Your Lamps*, 1.

⁷⁸ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 109.

community.”⁷⁹ Of course, the text, “for this work’s almost done” could also refer to the work of the day, or the end of their earthly life.

Keep Your Lamps is found in one of the seminal collections of spirituals, “The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs by J.B.T. Marsh,” first published in 1892.⁸⁰ The text is as follows:

Keep your Lamps trimmed

Keep your lamps trimm’d and a-burning, for this work’s almost done.
Brothers, don’t grow weary, for this work’s almost done.
Preachers, don’t grow weary, for this work’s almost done.
Keep your lamps trimm’d and a-burning, for this work’s almost done.
‘Tis religion makes us happy, for this work’s almost done.
We are climbing Jacob’s ladder, for this work’s almost done.
Ev’ry round goes higher and higher, for this work’s almost done.

Although the refrain and the general message of the verses (Thomas’ arrangement) is similar to the “original,” the Marsh arrangement contains five additional verses, including a reference to “Jacob’s ladder,” a completely different spiritual. This is no surprise, as spirituals often borrow texts from one another, as a reflection of the oral tradition. If one were to arrange this spiritual with the intention of highlighting coded messages for escape, including those verses would be important, as “climbing higher and higher” on Jacob’s ladder signifies traveling north to freedom.

The Music

Keep Your Lamps is arranged for SATB voices, and is almost entirely homophonic, not surprisingly, as it clearly offers the community a message to either be ready to engage in an opportunity for freedom, or to attend a secret meeting. As is often the case in spirituals, a minor key is often used to deliver hopeful text, another clever ploy to conceal the authentic meaning of the words. This was determined by the creativity of performer, and in this case, by the arranger, Dr. Thomas. This piece is in f minor. The tempo (which almost always accompanies movement

⁷⁹ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 358.

⁸⁰ Marsh, *The Jubilee Singers*, 224.

in spirituals) is moderate (♩ = 80). Thomas recommends a feeling of 2). Interestingly, the rhythm is less syncopated than most spirituals. The syncopation consistently appears in the fourth beat of the measure, “anticipating” the next downbeat by an eighth note value.

Thomas has included a part written for conga drums. This is noteworthy. Drums were strictly forbidden on plantations, due to their unique ability to communicate across distance.

“For some time, slave masters did not realize that the drums the slaves made...were being used for communication. They thought the slaves were just making their African music. They knew these drum sounds carried far, even to the next plantation, but it didn't occur to them that the drumbeats were a sort of "Morse code" the slaves used to make plans for revolts or escapes. When it finally became clear to the slave masters that the drums were being used as a form of communication, drums were outlawed.”⁸¹

The conga part is very thinly scored, however, only providing the essential backbone of the rhythm of the piece. It provides a rather “transparent” impression to the percussion that would have made the quiet drumming at a secret meeting possible.

Conductor’s Preparation & Pedagogy

A good indicator of what to do with diction is to follow what the composer or arranger has written in the score. This particular score doesn’t indicate many changes in that regard. However, additional stylistic details (those not written on the page, as Alice Parker recommends in performance of spirituals)⁸² may be discovered by listening to Dr. Thomas conduct a recording of this piece with the 1994 South Carolina All State Choir.⁸³ He chooses to close “trimmed” to a resonant “m” sound throughout the piece. He calls for the standard English pronunciation of “burning” instead of a phonetic decay approach, “burnin.” He also adds

⁸¹ James Haskins, *Black Music in America: A History Through Its People* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1987), 5.

⁸² Parker, *Got a Mind to Do Right*.

⁸³ YouTube, “Keep Your Lamps!” South Carolina All State Chorus, 1994. Accessed June 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HDQqM7TsLU>.

upward scoops on “don’t” in m. 25 and, more noticeably, on “journey” in m. 41. Additionally, he places marked accents on certain portions of the text, particularly, “til your work is done,” which repeats several times at the end of each verse.

A word of caution to the conductor regarding tempo: it is very easy to speed up the tempo in the performance of this piece. Perhaps because of the easy nature of the rhythm and repetitive text, singers want to push forward with the tempo. For this purpose, conducting in a 4 pattern may help the singers, as well as rehearsing the music on a subdivided neutral syllable, so that they are able to feel the underlying pulse of the music.

Taking into account the musical items Dr. Thomas has provided in the score as well as those that we can learn from researching his performances of his own arrangement, conductors are able to prepare an inspiring performance of this piece with their singers. Adding additional historical and poetic context regarding the multiple meanings of the text (coded message) will only further enhance an already meaningful learning of this music.

CHAPTER 8. EV'RY TIME I FEEL THE SPIRIT

Ev'ry time I feel the spirit, moving in my heart, I will pray;
Yes, ev'ry time I feel the spirit, moving in my heart, I will pray.
Upon the mountain my Lord spoke, out of His mouth came fire and smoke.
Looked all around me, it looked so fine, till I asked my Lord if all was mine.
Jordan river is chilly an' cold, it chills the body, but not the soul;
There ain't but one train upon this track, it runs to heaven an' right back.⁸⁴

Introduction

Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit, arranged by the venerable William L. Dawson (1899-1990), is a striking musical and poetic example of the stirring belief and steadfast faith of the enslaved. The strength of their conviction and hope for their deliverance from “hell on earth” inspired poetry that told of great spiritual powers. “Spirituals told biblical stories. My people loved the majesty of the Bible, the great wonders, miracles, and signs. Why serve a God who could do just ordinary things? They wanted one who showed His power and His command. So they proclaimed in song, ‘Upon the mountain where my God spoke, out of his mouth came fire and smoke’ and marveled at his creation.”⁸⁵ Indeed, this spiritual provides exciting imagery fused with a personal statement of hope.

In 1922, William L Dawson was teaching band and choir at Lincoln High School in Kansas City, MO, directing a 150 voice choir that specialized in Negro folk songs.⁸⁶ Little did he know at the time, that the folk songs he began to arrange and perform with this choir would lead to one of the most storied collections of spiritual arrangements in choral literature. He later became the director of the Tuskegee Institute of Music, quite an honor after having received his first formal education there. He continued arranging spirituals and toured internationally with

⁸⁴ William L. Dawson, *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit* (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1946).

⁸⁵ Velma Maia Thomas, *No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation through Song* (New York: Crown, 2001), 14.

⁸⁶ Thomas, *Way Over in Beulah Lan'*, 38-39.

his choir, winning great acclaim and respect for both his writing and performance. Now, his body of work is considered a landmark collection, and is performed by school and professional choirs around the world.

Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit presents a personal relationship with the Lord—and it's a filled with joy, energy and hope, spinning like the “wheel in a wheel” from Ezekiel 1:15-16. The Lord is described as breathing fire and smoke upon the mountain, quite a dramatic image! What else “breathes fire and smoke” and is a sign of deliverance to those enslaved on the plantations? The Underground Railroad—which may be represented through the poetry—we don't know for certain, but it would seem likely. The final two lines refer to two common poetic masks of escape: rivers and trains.

Coded Text

Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit appears in “Negro Folk-Songs: The Hampton Series Books,” by Natalie Curtis-Burlin.⁸⁷ The text is as follows:

O ev'ry time I feel de Spirit movin' in ma heart—I pray,
Upon de mountun ma Lord spoke, out of his mouth came fier an' smoke.
O ev'ry time I feel de Spirit movin' in ma heart—I pray.
Jordan Ribber chilly an' col', chill de body, but not de soul.
O ev'ry time I feel de Spirit movin' in ma heart—I pray.
All aroun' me looks so shine. Ask ma Lord if all was mine.
O ev'ry time I feel de Spirit movin' in ma heart—I pray.⁸⁸

It also appears with varied words (in italics) and additional verses in Ronald Jordan's book, *Soul Praise: Amazing Stories and Insights behind the Great African American Hymns and Negro Spirituals*.

Down in the valley on my knees, I asked the Lord have mercy please.
Jordan river chilly and cold, *took my body* but not my soul.
All around me looking so *fine*, I ask the Lord and know it is mine.

⁸⁷ Natalie Curtis-Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs: The Hampton Series Books I-IV, Complete* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), 64-65. Burlin expresses her fondness for this particular spiritual, “Of all the Spirituals, this is one of the most touching in its prayerful suggestion and quiet reverence, and in the poetic imagery of its verse, couched in a few crude words, elemental in their simplicity, yet somehow conveying the grandeur of the vision of God on the mountain-top and the dazed soul beholding heaven in wonder.”

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 64-66.

St. Peter waiting at the gate, saying come on sinner, don't be late.⁸⁹

Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit contains coded language that served to mask communication about escape and freedom. Two references, in particular, achieve this goal.

“Jordan river is chilly an’ cold, it chills the body, but not the soul.
There ain’t but one train upon this track, it runs to heaven an’ right back.”

In Chapter 4, we established that the Jordan River is widely understood to represent other bodies of water, the Ohio River, Atlantic Ocean, or any other river or body of water that needed crossing to attain freedom.⁹⁰ Again, the Jordan River, located in the Middle East, would not be nearly as “chilly an’ cold” as the Ohio River, a notorious crossing point to the free states in the north.

Also, the reference to the train is key. John Lovell, in his monumental book, “Black Song: the Forge and the Flame,” describes the use of train imagery in spirituals:

“Songs about trains are a minor miracle. The railroad train did not come into America until the late 1820s; it did not reach the slave country to any great extent until the 1830s and 1840s. Even then, the opportunities of the slave to examine trains closely were limited. Yet, before 1860, many spiritual poems exploited the train, its seductive sounds, speed and power, its recurring schedules, its ability to carry large numbers of passengers at cheap rates, its implicit democracy.”⁹¹

The image of the train, running on a track to heaven would have been very exciting. Slave masters in earshot would have easily thought that these words referred to the metaphysical realm of the afterlife, as there is no earthly train to heaven. They were not about to correct the singers, either, as it was best to let them sing happily along. The enslaved knew that the words

⁸⁹ Jordan, *Soul Praise*, 41.

⁹⁰ Velma Maia Thomas, *No Man Can Hinder Me*, 26. “When slaves sang of the Jordan River, they were speaking of the Ohio River at the Atlantic Ocean. If one crossed either, he or she would know freedom.”

⁹¹ Lovell, *Black Song*, 249.

referenced a means to get to heaven on earth via the Underground Railroad.⁹² There was only one destination on this particular train—freedom.

The Music

Guenther referred to three major styles of spirituals in her book. *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit* falls into the third category, containing “syncopated, segmented, short punchy phrases. Their tempo is quick, their rhythm invites motion, and they are driven more by rhythm than melody.”⁹³

This description fits very well within her category. It is scored for SATB voices, featuring a baritone soloist on the verses. The texture of the choir is homophonic throughout, even in the supportive background beneath the soloist. The rhythm, as Guenther’s description offers, is “syncopated and punchy” in its short, quick phrases, providing the impression of excitement, joy, and sincerity.

The tonality is set in Eb major throughout the piece. The melody, in both the refrain and verses, avoids use of the 4th and 7th scale degrees, utilizing a pentatonic scale. This is often done in spirituals, as a means of reflecting and retaining a familiar “sound” of African music.⁹⁴ The expressive markings used most pervasively are accents (as well as accents with simultaneous staccato markings), emphasizing the “punchy” and joyous nature of the text. Even the humming notes underneath the soloist receive accent markings by Dawson—unusual, sure, but further evidence of both the joy and hope this song was intended to portray as well as the physical and rhythmic quality that spirituals retain. The basses and baritones receive a *Fz*

⁹² Harris, Ron and Debbie. Liner Notes. “This song is often referred to as a typical Underground Railroad song. Several of the classic Underground Railroad coded references are present including a description of the Jordan River as being ‘chilly and cold, chilling the body but not the soul,’ and ‘there ain’t but one train upon this track, running to heaven and then right back. While scholars debate whether the lyrics of certain songs truly reference the Underground Railroad, or were simply intended as religious songs, the truth is likely a combination of both (further attesting to the genius of the songs’ creators).”

⁹³ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 32.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 35. “Certain patterns characterize the melodies of spirituals. The scales tend to avoid the fourth and seventh degrees, resulting in an effective pentatonic scale. *Steal Away* beautifully illustrates this type of scale.”

marking on their hummed notes. The general effect of the music is light-hearted and charming, successfully masking the seriousness of the intent.

Conductor's Preparation & Pedagogy

The conductor's preparation of this piece is straight-forward. Dawson's writing ensures that singers of various levels of expertise are able to successfully rehearse and perform this piece. Learning notes and rhythms won't pose a serious challenge. However, the element that is "not on the page" is the utter commitment to the syncopation and expressive markings (accents). Most singers will easily grasp the nature of the piece, but will initially fail to sing with the required rhythmic intensity to make the piece sparkle with meaning and anticipation.

Conductors ought to spend time referencing and explaining the exciting text. Asking them to consider what moves them, what excites them will help singers of all faith backgrounds understand the text. Providing context in the coded language of the verses will also be exciting to singers and listeners alike. Drawing attention to these learning opportunities, explaining them with historical context, and treating them in an academic manner will build respect and appreciation for the spiritual, and the clever poets who first sang them.

CHAPTER 9. DEEP RIVER

Oh, deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.
Oh, don't you want to go to that gospel feast,
That promised land where all is peace?
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.⁹⁵

Introduction

“I want to cross over into campground” was the constant hope held in the hearts of the enslaved. No matter what the conditions were on each plantation (some were worse than others), there was a hope for freedom, a desire to be in a place free from oppression and fear. This place could mean the free northern states, Canada, or a return to Africa.

Dr. René Clausen (b. 1953) grew up in California and received his formal music education at both St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As a member of the music faculty at Concordia College, in Moorhead, MN, Dr. Clausen has enjoyed a long career of acclaim both for his compositions and arrangements, as well as for his direction of the Concordia Choir.

When considering songs whose text had dual meanings to the slave, *Deep River* is one that provides deep significance. “This spiritual reflects a quite different philosophy of life. The stream (river) as such is of no interest except as a marker of the border. The deep river is a constant, difficult barrier between our desert pilgrimage here and the fulfillment of all desires in the “promised land.”⁹⁶ The “river” between a slave and his freedom was wide...at times it seemed to difficult to cross because of the daily struggle on the plantation. Throughout life’s struggle, the great hope of finally joining in the “gospel feast” offered enough to sustain the hopes of the enslaved another moment, another day, another year.

⁹⁵ René Clausen, *Deep River* (Delaware Water Gap, PA: Fostco Music Press, 1990).

⁹⁶ Dixon, *Negro Spirituals*, 90.

Coded Text

Deep River appears in the primary collection, “The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs,” and contains text in addition to the standard text which Dr. Clausen used in his arrangement:

Deep river, Lord, my home is over Jordan.
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.
Oh, don't you want to go to that gospel feast, that promised land where all is peace?
Lord, I want to cross over into campground.
I'll go into heaven, and take my seat, cast my crown at Jesus's feet.
Oh, when I get to heav'n, I'll walk all about, there's nobody there for to turn me out.
Lord, I want to cross over into campground.⁹⁷

The additional text advances the singer's desire to get to heaven even further, listing what would happen if allowed the opportunity to cross over into campground. After getting to heaven, the singer would first be thankful, casting all possessions⁹⁸ at the feet of his deliverer. Then, with the freedom to do so, the singer would walk around freely, without fear, without oppression.

“Once the obstacle of the deep river is overcome there will be no more hindrances. For believers who were used to being excluded from the festivities, who normally led others into beautiful homes and seated them at banquets they had themselves prepared, it is a glorious promise and prospect to be invited in and to be given a seat at the heavenly banquet where everything has been prepared....”⁹⁹

Besides expressing this general desire to escape to freedom, *Deep River* may also contain an additional meaning and message. James Haskins states in his book, “Black Music in America,” that “the songs were a way for the slaves to communicate with each other—to plan meetings, to help escaped slaves, and to remind one another that there was hope for freedom.

⁹⁷ Marsh, *The Jubilee Singers*, 230.

⁹⁸ Dixon, *Negro Spirituals*, 91. “The crown and robe are very real to the singers (of spirituals), as so many spirituals testify. Taking off the crown is an act not of defiance, but of adoration, honoring the host of the ‘gospel feast.’”

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 91.

Deep River was used to announce a meeting at the river.”¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the simple mention of a river in the spiritual might also indicate a geographical path for escape.¹⁰¹

Of course, as discussed in Chapter 4, the words of the spiritual may be accepted at face value. The singer may have been singing about death and passing on to heaven. James Lovell states, “The same pattern of interpretation will fit *Deep River*, and hundreds of other so-called death spirituals. Deliverance is often expressed in the spiritual in impersonal ways and things.”¹⁰²

The Music

Deep River is scored for SATB chorus with occasional divisi writing in each part. Interestingly, this divisi only occurs on words that have an expansive and grandiose character, such as “over” in “my home is over Jordan,” and the “promised” land of heaven. It also occurs, in the mens’ section, particularly to paint the depth of the river and suggest the breadth of the trip across the water. It is effective writing, and contains a subtlety that suggests a great depth of peace and reassurance. A soprano or tenor soloist provides the melody in m. 18-21 over the choir singing “oh.”

The meter is a gentle 4/4. The tonality is in F major, although Clausen suggests in a short note in the score that choirs may want to sing the piece 1/2 higher. The effect of the pentatonic scale used in this piece is restful, even with the wide leaps in the melody. The texture is predominantly homophonic. There are occasional animations that echo or restate the melody, providing additional harmonic interest through moving parts. This additional movement may

¹⁰⁰ James Haskins, *Black Music in America: A History Through Its People*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 6.

¹⁰¹ Gwendolin Warren. *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit: 101 Best-Loved Psalms, Gospel Hymns & Spiritual Songs of the African-American Church* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1999), 31. “Deep River, like most other spirituals, contains multiple levels of meaning. In this case, besides its sacred aspect, its text give it political significance as well.... Specifically, *Deep River* is a dual-coded song of the URR (Underground Railroad). It was often sung to help may out a route to freedom, possibly indicating that escape would involve crossing a river in order to avoid the tracking of patrols and dogs.”

¹⁰² Lovell, *Black Song*, 239.

also suggest the moving water. According to Guenther, *Deep River* is classified in the second stylistic category of spirituals: “long, slow phrases characterize the second musical style in which a longer arc of thought flows in the the texts of these more expansive songs. They express contemplative or sorrowful emotion, digging deep into the well of suffering and pain slaves experienced.”¹⁰³

Conductor’s Preparation & Pedagogy

The preparation and rehearsal of *Deep River* involves a deeper understanding of the text and the historical context of the piece. For whatever reason, *Deep River* is one of the most well-known spirituals. Singers—and audience members must be challenged to look more deeply into the meaning of the poetic symbolism. Since there are multiple meanings associated with this text, conductors should take care to present all of the interpretations and discuss which fits best with the arrangement being sung.

There are no tricky diction questions to solve in this arrangement if the conductor follows Dr. Clausen’s indicated text. It is written in standard English. If one chooses to employ some use of dialect, it would likely comprise of eliminating diphthongs. Take great care to consult an expert to guide your choices.

Singing with a full, rich tone is important in this piece because of the deep reflective quality of the text. As in any spirituals, this tone color should not be “manufactured” in any artificial or physically contrived manner, but only in a sincere attempt to connect with the deep meaning of the text. Guenther quotes famed Nathaniel Dett on this point, “(Dett) added that African-American choirs sound richer and fuller, not because of physiological differences, but because of a certain innate psychological capacity to react to the suggestion of the text.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 43.

CHAPTER 10. HAVE YOU GOT GOOD RELIGION?

Have you got good religion? My Lord! Cert'nly, cert'nly, cert'nly, Lord!
Have you been redeemed? My Lord! Cert'nly, cert'nly, cert'nly, Lord!
I've never been to heaven, but I've been told the streets up there are paved with gold.
The gospel plough is in our hands, good Lord, we're bound for the promised land.
Have you been baptized? My Lord! Cert'nly, cert'nly, cert'nly, Lord!
This is the year of jubilee, when Jesus set his people free.
We want no cowards in our band, praise God, we're bound for the promised land.
Give me that old time religion, cert'nly, cert'nly, cert'nly, Lord!¹⁰⁵

Introduction

“The plantation song in America, although an outgrowth of oppression and bondage, contains surprisingly few references to slavery. No race has ever sung so sweetly or with such perfect charity, while looking forward to the ‘year of jubilee.’ The songs abound in scriptural allusions, and in many instances are unique interpretations of standard hymns.”¹⁰⁶ *Have You Got Good Religion* anticipates and celebrates the long-awaited “year of jubilee.” To do this rightly, the singer asks various questions throughout the music to ensure that the listener is prepared to join in the celebration! *Have You Got Good Religion* is a “musical sermon” of sorts, an engaging and lively conversation between the “preacher” (the soloist) and the “congregation” (the choir).

Phillip McIntyre (1951-91), was former Associate Professor of Music at the University of the District of Columbia and a church musician who had been organist and choir director at churches in Washington, Richmond and Baltimore.¹⁰⁷ He received his formal musical training at Catholic University in Washington DC, including a masters of music degree in organ performance. He also served as choir director and organist at Hampton University; this

¹⁰⁵ Phillip McIntyre, “Have You Got Good Religion?” in *Three Spirituals* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1990), 4-7.

¹⁰⁶ Odum, Howard, and Guy Johnson. *Negro Workaday Songs*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1926.

¹⁰⁷ Washington Post, “Phillip McIntyre Dies,” Washington Post, 1991, accessed July 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1991/03/27/phillip-mcintyre-dies/91ed4eda-e21c-4e8a-9220-07767d30ca07/?utm_term=.46916bf26c85

connection is interesting, as one of the first major collections of spirituals was collected at Hampton University (see Chapter 3). In addition, Mr. McIntyre wrote much for the organ, but he also wrote a collection of vocal solos (spirituals) and several choral arrangements. Phillip McIntyre, in the foreword to his vocal solo book, states,

“The music of the Negro slave in the United States, the Negro spiritual, resulted in a human expression that is of a universal nature. These songs speak of hope, pain, suffering, joy, and other life experiences paralleled in the lives of all people. These songs do not express hatred. They do not seek revenge. They do not convey a negative attitude towards mankind. The spiritual is a simplistic musical application to a complex theological or scriptural ramification or declaration. An authenticity of the music should be sought.”¹⁰⁸

Have You Got Good Religion is the second of three pieces that appear in McIntyre’s collection, *Three Spirituals*. It is easily able to stand on its own for a performance apart from the other two pieces: *You My Bury Me in the East* and *Done Found My Lost Sheep*.

Coded Text

Have You Got Good Religion does not appear in one of the original collected sources, although it was assuredly sung in other forms. It appears under the title, *Cert’nly Lord* in several sources. Christa Dixon mentions, “It is most appropriate that it was the Jubilee singers who made this powerful ballad about the deliverance of God’s people famous, because it truly is a “jubilee” song celebrating the “year of jubilee”—the freedom from social as well as from spiritual slavery.¹⁰⁹ Eileen Guenther’s book lists additional verses and cites its use in the Civil Rights Movement. These verses were added in the modern era for the purpose of protest:

Have you been to the jail? Cert’nly, Lord.
Did they give you 30 days? Cert’nly, Lord.
Did you serve your time? Cert’nly, Lord.
Will you go back again? Cert’nly, Lord.
Will you fight for freedom? Cert’nly, Lord.
Will you tell it to the world? Cert’nly, Lord.
Do you want your freedom? Cert’nly, Lord.
Will you March for your rights? Cert’nly, Lord.

¹⁰⁸ Phillip McIntyre, *Spirituals for Church and Concert* (New York, NY: H.T. Fitzsimons Company, 1990), 2.

¹⁰⁹ Dixon, *Negro Spirituals*, 30.

Jail over bail? Cert'nly, Lord.¹¹⁰

Have You Got Good Religion contains several instances where the text has double meanings and coded messages. The call-and-response style of this spiritual, a conversation between the “preacher” and the “congregation,” provides the perfect platform to advance a good deal of text. Again, it is common (in spirituals), that talk of heaven—when not literally talking about the afterlife—refers to freedom, in the free states of the north, Canada, or Liberia, in Africa. The description of heaven as having “streets paved with gold” provides much anticipation and excitement to the listeners, urging them to make sure their souls have been converted.

The gospel plough (“the gospel plough is in our hands”) outwardly represents a simple agricultural device, but actually refers to the concept of leaving everything behind to attain freedom. In Luke 9:62, Jesus says, “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.”¹¹¹ The message was: in order to become free, the enslaved would have to sacrifice everything to reach the promised land—family, safety, all things that were familiar.

“Have you been baptized/redeemed?” Albert J. Raboteau says, in *Slave Religion*, “Baptism, the central Christian symbol of spiritual death, rebirth, and initiation, was a memorable occasion for the slaves. Accompanied by song, shouting, and ecstatic behavior, baptism—especially for the Baptists—was perhaps the most dramatic ritual in the slave’s religious life.”¹¹² Being baptized was significant in the life of the enslaved, a symbol of passage, being washed clean and starting again—symbolic of life after the bonds of slavery were loosed. Additionally, the image of baptism/water was sometimes used to offer assistance to fugitives, suggesting that they travel through the water to avoid detection. Guenther confirms, “baptism was a ritual of great importance to converted slaves. This baptismal song offers multiple levels

¹¹⁰ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 346-47.

¹¹¹ Luke 9:62, NRSVCE.

¹¹² Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 227.

of meaning. Tubman is said to have hummed this melody as a signal for escapees to move to the water, where their scent was less likely to be picked up by pursuing dogs.”¹¹³

“This is the year of jubilee, when Jesus set his people free.” The jubilee year meant freedom—through escape or emancipation. The reference to the year of jubilee draws us into the book of Leviticus, chapter 25, which provides commentary on why the year of jubilee was so celebrated and often mentioned in the spirituals.

“Seven weeks of years shall you count—seven times seven years—so that the seven cycles amount to forty-nine years. Then, on the tenth day of the seventh month let the trumpet resound; on this, the Day of Atonement, the trumpet blast shall re-echo throughout your land. This fiftieth year you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when every one of you shall return to his own property, every one to his own family estate.”¹¹⁴

Immediately following the mention of the jubilee year comes the statement, “We want no cowards in our band, praise God, we’re bound for the promised land.” This phrase speaks of courage—courage in the face of adversity, whether working on the plantation in brutal conditions, or as a required element for daring escape. Several sources report that Harriet Tubman carried a small revolver for the purpose of “encouragement” in case any fugitives wanted to return to their plantations after experiencing the danger of escape.¹¹⁵

The Music

Have You Got Good Religion is arranged for SATB voices and a soprano or tenor soloist. The texture of the choral parts is homophonic throughout, with only a few instances of decorative added notes to add interest. The meter is 2/4 at a quick tempo. The key is D major, and has a bright, joyous quality as an appropriate vehicle for the text. Again, we see that the

¹¹³ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 129.

¹¹⁴ Leviticus 25:8-10, NRSVCE.

¹¹⁵ Clinton, “Slavery is War.”, 195-209. “Stories from others as well as her own testimony confirm that Tubman did have a gun during her Underground Railroad treks. Further, the pistol Tubman kept concealed was not intended to fight off bounty seekers. She testified that she used her gun to prevent panicked fugitives from turning back. One person losing nerve could endanger an entire group.” Sarah Bradford, Tubman’s biographer, confirms this using Harriet’s own testimony in “Harriet Tubman, the Moses of Her People,” 19.

melody of this spiritual is based on a pentatonic scale, avoiding the 4th and 7th scale degrees, as is common among other pieces in this study (exceptions: *Elijah Rock*, *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel*, and *Keep Your Lamps*). The textural shifts between the soloist and the chorus add aural interest and provide a musical conversation for the listeners to witness and enjoy.

Eileen Guenther's aforementioned categorizations of spirituals list *Have You Got Good Religion (Cert'nly Lord)* as "the call-and-response style, where a leader sings a line or more of text, and a group responds with a refrain. Fiery in spirit, the call-and-response tempo is unusually quick. Call-and-response was a practical approach in an oral, non-literate society. It was also handy in a work-song, which might go on for hours and hours as the slaves labored."¹¹⁶ The soloist plays the part of the "preacher" in this spiritual; the choir plays the part of the congregation in this musical sermon. The preacher asks a question and the congregation answers in this enjoyable arrangement. There is much flexibility for improvisation in the solo part, but improvisation is not a requirement of the piece.

Conductor's Preparation & Pedagogy

The key component of this piece—and therefore, the conductor's preparation—is the selection and coaching of the soloist. The soloist requires strength and ease in a fairly narrow register. It may get fatiguing for some young voices, as melodic material repeats notes and intervals, near passagio points. The soloist may feel free to improvise some in the final verses, if the soloist is comfortable in that regard. It should not be done if the general performance is in any way stilted or contrived.

Regarding diction, there are a few items to address. Since the word, "Lord" occurs so much in this piece, the conductor will "cert'nly" need to address it as rehearsals begin. Most singers will sing the "r" in an "Americanized" way, so singers should be instructed to negate the sound. The words "I'm" and "my" also can be troublesome, as most American singers are accustomed to singing diphthongs with gusto. There are no diphthongs in the authentic diction

¹¹⁶ Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 31.

of spirituals. They should be eliminated and retain only the first vowel sound (ie “ahm” or “mah”).

The tempo of this piece is quick and exciting. There is great interplay of dynamics based on the meaning of the text and expressing the various “responses” of the congregation, some quietly excited, and some, rousing declamations. The tempo may be hastened at points where decrescendos occur, adding a hushed excitement to the song, waiting to hear the preacher’s next statement. Liberties may be taken with tempo (slowing down) in m. 55-60 to heighten the drama, only if the soloist is capable of sustaining breath, energy, and tone on the held note. The moments where the choir cuts out and the soloist continues are thrilling. However, in the final two measures, McIntyre indicates “no rit.” Conductors are free to try that suggestion to see if it fits with their artistic preference. Or, since it is the final combined joyous acclamation of the piece, conductors may wish to employ a slight ritardando...and know that it’s acceptable to do so.

CHAPTER 11. ELIJAH ROCK

Oh Elijah, oh Elijah. Elijah rock, oh.
Come on sister, help me to pray, tell me my Lord done pass dis way.
Elijah rock, shout, shout. Elijah rock, comin' up, Lawdy.
Elijah rock, comin' up, Lawd.
Satan ain't nothin' but a snake in the grass.
He's a conjur. He's a liar. Hallelujah, Lord.
If I could I surely would, stand on the rock where Moses stood.
Elijah Rock. Hallelujah, Jesus. Rock Elijah. Comin' up, Lawdy. Comin' up Lord.¹¹⁷

Introduction

Moses Hogan (already mentioned in Chapter 6) was fond of telling epic stories through his spiritual arrangements. We remember that highlighting monumental figures of the Old Testament is a common feature in spirituals. *Elijah Rock* presents Elijah, the fierce Old Testament prophet and miracle worker. There were several different options for slaves to learn Bible stories: from English-speaking missionaries while in Africa, from Christian church teaching (on the plantations), or from those within their own community that were able to read and write. Arthur Jones confirms in his book, *Wade in the Water: the Wisdom of Spirituals*,

“Symbolically, the stories of the Old Testament held particularly special meaning. In their African-derived spiritual cosmology, the captives constructed a life-consciousness that included ready connections to figures of the ancient past. In their spiritual imagination they lived and breathed the experiences of such biblical heroes as David, Daniel, Moses, and Joshua, all engaged actively in divinely inspired battles for freedom. To Africans in America, the stories of the Bible had obvious meaning, very much connected to the reality of their struggles as a community.”¹¹⁸

Elijah Rock is unique in that it is not narrative. It is a combination of several short statements. It recalls the image of Elijah, who was transformed and delivered because of his faith in God (2 Kings 2:11). It asks for help from a sister friend. It comments on Satan and his sneaking nature, and sin-inducing ways. It begs for a chance to be delivered, as Moses delivered the Israelites. It closes with a plea to ascend, like Elijah, “up” to the Lord. It does not attempt to string all of these separate ideas into the narrative of one figure or story.

¹¹⁷ Moses Hogan, *Elijah Rock* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1994).

¹¹⁸ Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 42.

Coded Text

The origin of *Elijah Rock* is not clear. It doesn't appear by title in any of the primary source collections of this study, yet it is one of the best-known spirituals in the spirituals canon. Because oral tradition has resulted in a "cannibalization" of songs throughout the years (borrowing and eliminating various lines of text), it is very likely a combination of two or more songs. Jester Hairston's benchmark arrangement contains the same text as the Moses Hogan arrangement, addressed in this study.

In 2 Kings 2:11, the prophet Elijah is described as ascending to Heaven in a whirlwind of flaming horses and chariot, a triumphant deliverance to heaven. Modes of transportation, such as the chariots in the spirituals, were used over and over again, and could refer to wagons, trains, and other such means to travel north to the heavenly freed states or Canada. "The chariot represents not only Elijah's transportation to heaven, but the heavenly ascent of all who are saved."¹¹⁹ "Throughout the lyrics of slave songs, there are references to many different modes of travel—realistic and otherwise. Included are chariots, trains, water, ships, and even wings. The image of sweet chariot comes directly from the story in Second Kings of the prophet Elijah being caught up by God swept away in a chariot to heaven. We know that "chariot" was coded language for train, which at the time was the most modern means of transportation."¹²⁰

There are other instances of double connotation in *Elijah Rock* that deserve mention. "Come on sister help me to pray, tell me my Lord done pass dis way" likely asks whether deliverance is at hand or close by (an agent of the Underground Railroad). The singer references Satan (the slave owner or slave master) as being "nothin' but a snake in the grass. He's a conjur. He's a liar." It was a delightful but dangerous way for the enslaved to speak ill of their masters. "If I could, I surely would stand on the rock where Moses stood." If given the chance, the

¹¹⁹ Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music USA* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1963), 39. Later in the chapter (page 42-3), Courlander states further, "It is readily evident that songs of this kind could be interpreted in more than one way by the slaves. It is a safe assumption that all Negro religious songs were understood by the slaves in the light of their own immediate condition. Every reference to crossing the Jordan could be interpreted to mean escape to the North...every reference to Elijah's chariot or the gospel train could be seen as allusion to the Underground Railroad."

¹²⁰ Jordan, *Soul Praise*, 27.

enslaved would certainly take the opportunity to escape to freedom, as Moses did. Moses fought in an epic battle for his own freedom and that of his people, the Israelites. After taking that chance, any fugitives would be “comin’ up Lawdy” to freedom.

The Music

Elijah Rock is written for SSAATTBB voices. Although there are some instances of only men, and only women, the main theme of the piece exists and remains in that divisi voicing. The women sing in as many as five parts (m. 25). The key is firmly planted in a minor. The basses and baritones emphasize this by singing repeated fifths through much of the piece.

Moses Hogan creates a texture of short phrases layered on top of one another to great effect. The addition or subtraction of these layers builds emotion and provides opportunities to transition to other ideas. The familiarity of the rhythmic layers is mesmerizing and compelling. Rhythmic complexity results from the layers of sound, but text clarity remains because Hogan opted to use repeated single words, “Elijah rock.” There is some syncopation in the tenor layer, but the sopranos and altos have pervasive syncopation, as the main vehicle for the melodic layer.

Elijah Rock not only contains inspiring messages of biblical deliverance, alluding to both Elijah and Moses in its text, but it also *sounds* like a means of deliverance in the capable and creative hands of arranger, Moses Hogan. Word painting is important in spirituals and the artists that sang them. Hogan knew this very well and set out to present the text in such a way that further illustrated the meaning through sound. In the case of *Elijah Rock*, Hogan’s arrangement sounds like a train, surely a reference to the Underground Railroad. The “train” begins with the basses and baritones, singing plodding, but steady quarter notes on “oh-E-li-jah.” Next, the tenors enter with an additional layer, seeming to gain speed through repeated sixteenth notes. One can almost sense being a passenger on that train, hearing (and feeling) the repetitive rhythmic patter that the voices create and the imagination readily accepts.

It’s true that the “train” does make a few “stops” in the music, as a departure from the rhythmic regularity discussed above. These stops always occur during the delivering of the verse

text by the women. After this is done, the train travels on, using the previous musical devices presented, in large manner, by the men. In the climactic arrival to the final station, each part is given its own rhythmic/text layer to sing, which culminates with divisi sopranos singing “ah,” above the staff, squealing to a stop. The effect is that of the “screeching” of the train on the rails as it attempts to slow down. It is very exciting to hear, and would be thrilling to sing. The final four measures of the piece paint the very experience of Elijah ascending up to heaven in his fiery chariot. Each part enters in pyramid fashion from bottom to top, raising the notes to the final chord.

Conductor’s Preparation & Pedagogy

Rehearsing and conducting *Elijah Rock* with a choir is a fulfilling experience. The moment when the choir realizes that the music depicts a train (and the Underground Railroad) is very gratifying. Successful performance of this piece requires a micro/macro strategy. The motivic elements need to be rehearsed using repetition to gain mastery. After this is achieved, these elements are layered together to form the larger picture.

The biggest concern that conductors should be aware of is vocal fatigue. Because of the repetition of the vocal parts (and tessitura), care must be taken to avoid asking too much of the voices. I would recommend adding capable voices (that have rests written) to strengthen parts if needed, rather than asking for more volume. An example of this would be in measure 9: any sopranos who would feel comfortable singing with the altos could do so, in hopes that the altos do not have to “push” the sound, which is marked forte, on a low A. This piece can be challenging for the conductor in terms of rehearsal process, building stamina, and preserving singers’ voices. It is especially demanding for the singers, in tessitura, volume, and stamina. For this reason, conductors should be cautioned before programming Hogan’s arrangement of *Elijah Rock*. Not every choir could *or should* sing this particular arrangement, despite its captivating depiction of the Underground Railroad.

In terms of artistically conducting what's not written on the page, it would be effective to begin the piece slowly and gradually work up to the indicated tempo. Tone color to match the various parts of the train sound must be carefully imagined and selected so as not to fatigue the voices. Great artistic liberty may be taken in the final two pages, as they are filled with expressive markings that range from pianissimo to fortissimo, as well as several accents and fermatas. Singers—and listeners—will enjoy the great variety that Moses Hogan's *Elijah Rock* provides. Furthermore, once learning the context of the text, they will be better able to imagine why this text was sung so many years ago.

CHAPTER 12. LET ME FLY

“Way down yonder in the middle of the fiel’, angel a-workin’ at the chariot wheel.
Not so partic’lar ‘bout workin’ at the wheel, I jus’ wan’ to see how the chariot feel.
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.
Meet that hypocrite on the street, first thing he do is show his teeth.
Next thing he do is tell a lie. Well, the best thing to do is pass him by.
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.
I got a mother in the Promised Land. Well, I ain’t gonna stop ‘til I shake her hand.
Not so partic’lar ‘bout shakin’ her hand, but I just wan’ to get to the Promised Land.
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.
I heard such a rumbalin’ in the sky, I thought my Lord was passin’ by.
“Twas the good ol’ chariot drawin’ nigh, shook the earth, swept the sky.
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.
I want wings, I want to fly, oh Lord, I wan’ to fly,
Oh won’t you let me fly to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.”¹²¹

Introduction

Angels, chariots, wings—what fantastic imagery the enslaved poet used to propel the spiritual *Let Me Fly!* The story is told from the perspective of the daily life of the enslaved. “In spirituals, “I” equals “we” in the African sensibility, where individuals are responsible for the whole community, not only for themselves. The bonds of community were palpable, as they sang songs of unshakable faith.”¹²² The suffering endured by each person was felt as a community, and singing about it helped to ease the burden a bit. It is a cheerful song, one that would certainly and easily mask the hidden messages contained within, intended for the community!¹²³

Robert DeCormier (1922-2017), trained at the Juilliard School of Music and quickly began a career teaching music in New York City. He and his wife, Louise, a singer, took an interest in American folksong, collecting and recording them in the Catskill Mountains of New

¹²¹ Robert DeCormier, *Let Me Fly* (Miami, FL: Warner Brothers Publications, 1984).

¹²² Guenther, *In Their Own Words*, 355.

¹²³ Dixon, *Negro Spirituals*, 82. “It is even plausible that unsuspecting overseers would be relieved to hear his slaves singing: it seemed as if his workers had religion on their minds again as they went about the fields singing and humming their spirituals. Little did he realize what secret messages were being conveyed from row to row.”

York.¹²⁴ DeCormier wrote in many different styles and genres in his career but is perhaps best known for his spiritual arrangements. He was also the leader for the Belafonte Folk Singers (1957-65) and the DeCormier Singers.¹²⁵ *Let Me Fly* is one of his most popular arrangements. Interestingly, he was asked to arrange a six-movement cantata, *They Call Her Moses*, celebrating Harriet Tubman's remarkable life helping people—in the 2013 performance by Bella Voce women's ensemble, Louise DeCormier (his wife) was the narrator for the performance.¹²⁶

Coded Text

Let Me Fly is also known by the title, *Now Let Me Fly*. Although a popular and well-known spiritual, it does not appear in any of the primary source collections addressed in this study. Portions of the text do appear in other spirituals. DeCormier's arrangement is likely the most popular and often-performed arrangement of this spiritual. This exuberant song contains a great amount of text—text that carries another meaning. It is unlikely, because its cheerful nature, that slave masters would suspect anything nefarious when hearing this tune sung on the plantation.

“My people signaled their discontent. One could hear it in their songs. They echoed throughout the fields where, with backs bent, fingers aching, and dreams fading, slaves planted rice, picked cotton, and hacked sugar cane to enrich their masters. Their spirituals told of the enslaved longing to be free. Their songs sent a message, filled with symbolism and metaphors, telling how and when and why they would flee.”¹²⁷

In the first line of text, two symbols are presented: the angel and the chariot. The enslaved—those converted, those redeemed—are represented by the angel working in the field who is working on the chariot wheel (working towards finding freedom). “Let me fly to Mount Zion,

¹²⁴ Wikipedia, “Robert DeCormier,” Wikipedia, accessed July 2, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_De_Cormier.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Live Culture, “Remembering Robert De Cormier: The Music and the Man,” Seven Days: Vermont's Independent Voice, 2017, accessed July 2, 2018, <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/LiveCulture/archives/2017/11/09/remembering-robert-de-cormier-the-music-and-the-man>.

¹²⁷ Thelma Maia Thomas, *No Man Can Hinder Me*, 26. “When the enslaved sang of David, Joshua, and Moses, they were singing of liberators---members of the Underground Railroad who would lead them out of bondage. When they sang of chariots, wheels, travel shoes, and ships, they were signing of modes of transportation and escape.”

Lord” is the repeated refrain of this piece. It has been well-established that Mount Zion, the Promised Land, Canaan, and Heaven all refer to freedom. This is the prevailing sentiment that binds the piece together.

The next “scene” in the life of the enslaved tells about the hypocrite. Who was the hypocrite? The slave owner? The slave master? We don’t know, but these are likely suspects, and the slave singers must have taken great pleasure of singing about these hypocrites while in their very presence.¹²⁸ There was a small sort of satisfaction that the slave singer gained through singing coded message such as this:

“The slave had often heard his master's minister talk about heaven, the final abode of the righteous. Naturally the master regarded himself as fitting into that category. On the other hand the slave knew that he too was going to heaven. There must be two heavens, no, God cannot be divided in this way. I am having my hell now---when I die I shall have my heaven. The master is having his heaven now; when he dies he will have his hell.”¹²⁹

There are multiple references to having family and friends in heaven, or the Promised Land. This partial list includes: *A City Called Heaven*, *Death's Going to Lay His Hands on Me*, *Listen to the Lambs*, *Poor Wayfarin' Stranger*, *Swing Low*, *The Old Ark's a-Moverin'*, *Wake up Jacob!*, and *When the Train Comes Along*.¹³⁰ The meaning may have been literal—that these loved ones and friends had passed away before them—but more likely, it symbolized those that had made their way to freedom. Furthermore, it’s altogether possible that once a friend or family member left the plantation to escape to the north, that those remaining had no idea if they had made the journey successfully or not. These references to their loved ones were a tribute, a repeated prayer that they had escaped slavery.

¹²⁸ In the spiritual, *I Got Shoes*, the line, “everybody talkin’ bout heaven, ain’t a goin’ there” is commonly understood to be a veiled insult to slave owners, who would righteously go to church on Sundays, and then continue to mistreat their slaves on a daily basis.

¹²⁹ Howard Thurman. *Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*, (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1975), 43.

¹³⁰ Lovell, *Black Song*, 307: “No one can begin to read spirituals for true meaning unless he accepts the slave's desire for freedom as his prime cause. It should be reiterated that the slave could discuss this prime cause only through symbols. Thus Death and Canaan are most often symbols of release from slavery without meaning release from life. Where Death does mean release from life, the African concepts are likely to be present or pronounced. In the dozens of songs which speak of reunion with mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and other beloved dead, these African beliefs are assuredly being perpetuated.”

Another mention of the Underground Railroad (“the good ol’ chariot rumbalin’ in the sky) leads to the final line of text in DeCormier’s arrangement: “I want wings, I want to fly, oh Lord, I wan’ to fly, Oh won’t you let me fly to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.” Chenu suggests the significance of wings in a spiritual, particularly in terms of those wishing to escape to freedom, “Travel no longer would be a problem because a pair of wings would be given.”¹³¹ The arrangement adds a flourish of activity and more importance on individual lines in this section, the closing material for the piece...a musical representation of the journey to come.

The Music

Let Me Fly is a cheerful, optimistic spiritual written for SATB divisi chorus and a baritone soloist. Two elements add to this cheerful effect, the tonality and the rhythm. G major is the tonality throughout most of the piece, until the modulation in m. 57, up a half step to Ab major. The pentatonic scale is utilized in this arrangement. The tempo is brisk (in cut time), and DeCormier indicates that the eighth notes should be sung unevenly, or “swung” through the duration of the piece. It’s impossible for us to know whether DeCormier’s interpretation accurately portrays the original performance style, but it is captivating, nonetheless. Syncopation is used pervasively in the piece.

The texture contains a bit of homophonic treatment during some verses as well as the ending of the refrain. However, most of the piece presents phrases that are in an imitative style, although they are in short, blocked phrases, echoing and exchanging motivic material between the women and men. Beginning in m. 80, the choral parts begin to receive more independent treatment, resulting in a rhythmic layering of syncopated motives on the text, “I want wings, I wan’ to fly.” The final phrase unites all choral parts with the same rhythm into the final statement of the refrain, “O let me fly to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.”

¹³¹ Chenu, *The Trouble I’ve Seen*, 213. On page 125, he writes, “The same spiritual that invites people to travel together (*Walk Together Children*) also invites the traveler to go it along to reach the Promised Land. It is an invitation to be more angel than devil,” as the opening lines of *Let Me Fly* suggest.

Conductor's Preparation & Pedagogy

The context of the lyrics is important to present to the choir as rehearsals begin. It's important that they know that this piece isn't just a happy collection of fun stories—that it presents ideas that were integral in the daily life and spiritual survival of the enslaved. Going through the text line by line, and offering the double meaning of the text and translation of those ideas will be important in the singers presenting a fully informed performance of the music.

In terms of musical preparation, most of the choir's time will be spent on the final section of the piece, as the parts become more challenging. The final two pages, in particular, will require rhythmic independence from each part, and will have to be repeated until it can be performed easily and without noticeable effort. Above all, cultivating a sincere attitude of optimism and hope through the singing is crucial for a successful performance of this piece. Even though the words held double meanings, it was this authentic and prevailing sense of hope that the enslaved clung to that sustained them through their trials: “From *Go Down Moses* to *Now Let Me Fly*, travelers on the Underground Railroad deployed the images of the Promised Land, crossing the river Jordan, and of God's activity in history to nurture a faith that helped them to circumvent the brutality and potential hopelessness of life on the plantation.”¹³²

¹³² Eddie S. Glaude Jr., “A Sacred Drama: “Exodus” and the Underground Railroad in African American Life.” In *Passages to Freedom*, ed. David W. Blight. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2006), 292.

CHAPTER 13. THE OLD SHIP OF ZION

'Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah!
I'm no ways weary! I'm no ways tired! O glory hallelujah!
Just let me in the kingdom when the world ketch a fire!
'Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah! She has landed many thousands, hallelujah!
She is rollin', jes rollin'.
She is coming in the harbor, hallelujah! She will land you safe in heaven, hallelujah!
O get your ticket ready, the ship will soon be leavin'. O get your ticket ready to go.
King Jesus is her captain, hallelujah! She will never rock nor totter, hallelujah!
Just let me in the kingdom when the world ketch a fire. O glory hallelujah!
Sing hallelujah!¹³³

Introduction

The Old Ship of Zion, arranged for SATB chorus by Dr. Richard Harrison Smith (1937-2011) contains in its lyrics a significant amount of coded language that may not be apparent at first glance. In addition, Smith's arranging style enhances the meaning of this song's lyrics through both style and musical devices, including several instances of effective word painting.

Richard Smith was well-known for his masterful treatment of African American spirituals, having several of them published over his career as a composer and choral director.¹³⁴ Although born in Pennsylvania, Dr. Smith later lived in Alabama, where he was exposed to spirituals in his formative years, both in church and school.¹³⁵ Even though he had a long career of publishing compositions in many other styles of choral and instrumental music, he possessed a unique gift for arranging spirituals. In almost forty years as a choral conductor at the University of Jamestown, Jamestown, North Dakota (1959-98), his interpretation of spirituals was equally passionate and powerful in performance. *The Old Ship of Zion* continues to be one of his most recognized and revered arrangements.

¹³³ Smith, *The Old Ship of Zion*, 1-7.

¹³⁴ Richard Harrison Smith's published arrangements include: *The Old Ship of Zion* (Augsburg Publishing House); *Heav'n's Bells a Ringin'* (Augsburg Publishing House); *Lawd, I Wanna go Home* (Lorenz); *Wear a Starry Crown* (Lorenz); *In Dat Great Day* (Lorenz); *Did Mary Know?* (Lorenz).

¹³⁵ Karen Smith (Smith's daughter), email message to author, March 6, 2018.

This song's dynamic narrative describes a venerable old ship that is ready to carry all weary souls safely to heaven, just as she has delivered many more thousands before. It is a compelling tale, relating the story of the ship's passengers, and readying them for the journey ahead. Most people would think that this narrative is *only* about a ship; however, slave singers knew and understood another meaning.

Coded Text

As is typical of spirituals (and the word-of-mouth tradition that bore them), the text of *The Old Ship of Zion* is an amalgamation of several other pieces. The lyrics, or parts thereof, can be found in at least five other songs: *Old Ship of Zion; Hallelu, Hallelu; I Don't Feel Weary; The Old Ship of Zion; The Gospel Train*. They appear in in the landmark collections *Slave Songs of the United States (1867)*¹³⁶ and *The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs (1892)*,¹³⁷ as well as in fragments and forms in other spirituals collections.

The text of each of these five pieces is as follows:

Old Ship of Zion

What ship is that a sailing, hallelujah,
do you think that she is able for to carry us all home.
'tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah.
She has landed many a thousand, and will land as many a more.
She is loaded down with angels,
King Jesus is the Captain, and he'll carry us all home.¹³⁸

Hallelu, Hallelu

Oh, one day as anoder, hallelu. When de ship is out a'sailin', hallelu.
Member walk and never tire. Member walk Jordan long road.¹³⁹

I Don't Feel Weary

I don't feel weary and noways tired, glory hallelujah.
Jest let me in the kingdom while the world is all on fire.
Gwine to live with God forever. And keep the ark a movin'.¹⁴⁰

The Old Ship of Zion

¹³⁶ Allen, Ware, and McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs*, 102.

¹³⁷ Marsh, *The Jubilee Singers*, 186.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Allen, Ware, and McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs*, 50.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 70.

Don't you see that ship a sailin' gwine over to the promised land!
She sails like she is heavy loaded.
King Jesus is her Captain.
The Holy Ghost is her pilot.¹⁴¹

The Gospel Train

She's nearing now the station, ah sinner, don't be vain;
but come and get your ticket, be ready for the train.
This train has never run off the track, she's passed through every land;
millions and millions are on board; oh, come and join the band.¹⁴²

The words are different for each song; they were collected from different singers. Knowing what we do about the collection of spirituals and the word-of-mouth tradition, we would (or should) expect variations to occur.

While the lyrics are not exactly the same, it is evident that Richard Smith's arrangement of *The Old Ship of Zion* contains elements of each of these five songs. It is unknown where Smith acquired this particular text, or whether he also arranged the lyrics. His published arrangement indicates "traditional spiritual."¹⁴³ Regardless, it remains an effective vehicle and a representative example of coded messages of the Underground Railroad.

Sometimes modes of transportation were used interchangeably to represent the Underground Railroad.¹⁴⁴ A sense of "movement" was the clue. This ambiguity makes sense from the perspective of singing slaves who were trying to conceal the real meaning of these words from their slave masters, who were undoubtedly aware of the Underground Railroad and its devastating effect on the slave owners' livelihood. It would be much more clever (and safe) to sing about a chariot or a ship than singing overtly about a train. Because of the secretive nature of the Underground Railroad, it is possible that the text in *The Old Ship of Zion* may also be referring to Harriet Tubman, the famous Underground Railroad conductor, who "landed many thousands" of fugitives into freedom during her life.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 102-3.

¹⁴² Marsh, *The Jubilee Singers*, 184.

¹⁴³ Smith, *The Old Ship of Zion*, 1.

¹⁴⁴ Jordan, *Soul Praise*, 27. "Throughout the lyrics of slave songs, there are references to many different modes of travel--realistic and otherwise. Included are chariots, trains, water, ships, and even wings."

“Kingdom” is a reference to Heaven, which represents freedom (either in the freed states or Canada). The “world ketch a fire” refers to “hell,” or slavery itself—something to be escaped from. “She is rollin’, jes rollin’” symbolizes the constant movement of the people of the Underground Railroad away from slavery to freedom. In fact, the phrase, “she is coming in the harbor” announces, with increasing urgency, that the time is drawing near when passengers can board (escape). This is further underscored by the command, “O get your ticket ready, the ship will soon be leavin’, o get your ticket ready to go!” This is a clear statement—a signal, a call to action—that whoever was planning to escape had better be ready when the time comes to do so!

The Music

It is satisfying to perceive the subtle sophistication of the communication in signal songs such as *The Old Ship of Zion*; however, what is equally fascinating is the manner in which Richard Smith has arranged the music to intensify the meaning of the text. Before discussing Smith’s musical treatment of the text, I offer a brief listing of the elements of the piece. The piece begins in C major and remains there until a pivotal and powerful modulation to F major for the final verse. The pentatonic scale is used again, with one exception, a brief passing note on the flatted 7th scale degree (“the world ketch a-fire”). The tempo is swift and in 2/2 meter. The texture is primarily homophonic, with small rhythmic embellishments, generally found in the mens’ lines.

The music opens with an excited declamatory musical statement which boldly announces the arrival of The Old Ship of Zion into the harbor. The refrain is proclaimed for the first time in m. 6. from the excited perspective of the passengers, who are eager to start their journey: “I’m no ways weary! I’m no ways tired!” Smith repeats this message throughout the piece, representing a tireless persistence toward the goal of freedom. Verse 1 (m. 22) portrays a strong, steady ship through the use of steady quarter notes and animated homophony.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Animated homophony refers to music in which the texture is largely homophonic throughout the voices, but also contains slight rhythmic variations due to text underlay or desired musical style.

Beginning in m. 54, Smith's musical treatment of the text, "She is rollin', jes rollin'" paints the image of a journey just beginning, slowly at first, but quickly gaining momentum. The "rollin'" motif, written for the tenors and basses, provides a sense of moving forward. The women enter the texture two measures later singing the melody. Because the tempo is much slower in this section of the music, the character of the melody increases in both richness and grandeur, representing the arrival of this ship to freedom. "She is comin' in the harbor, hallelujah. She will land you safe in Heaven, hallelujah!" I submit that by scoring the sopranos on a wordless "hum," floating above the rest of the choral texture, Smith was symbolizing heaven.

Throughout the piece, the arranger repeats the text, "I'm no ways weary, I'm no ways tired." Fugitives attempting escape needed repeated assurance and fortitude to complete the daring trip; the journey was long, and conditions were both challenging and dangerous. Many wanted to turn back. Tubman's revolver again, offered necessary "encouragement" to any fugitives who wanted to give up. When Smith instructs choristers to sing "gradually faster and louder" in m. 77 with the text, "O glory hallelujah! Just let me in the kingdom when the world ketch afire," the singers present a musical depiction of running away through the music, faster and faster, towards the "kingdom," that is, freedom.

The most captivating instance of text painting occurs in mm. 88-95, the transitional music to the last verse. The desired effect is that of an announcement whistle, one that may be heard at a train station platform, calling for passengers to board. Dr. Smith divides the choir into five parts (SSATB) for the first time here, which creates instant power, tension, and great anticipation. The womens' voices provide most of the "train whistle" effect, and the men, not to be forgotten, sing at the top of their range, in close proximity to the sopranos and altos. The choral writing is homophonic and compact, producing an exciting sound. Ending the phrase "get your ticket ready to go" on a dominant seventh chord is pivotal. The choir lingers on this major-minor chord in a quasi-fermata, teasing our ears to anticipate the next section. It is an effective moment to experience as a listener, and thrilling to sing. This chord does not resolve in a

traditional manner (through voice leading to another four part chord); instead, Smith writes a unison note to begin the final verse, which pivots directly into the new key of F major—quite a dramatic shift from C major to symbolize the journey to freedom.

Conductor’s Preparation & Pedagogy

As a conductor, confident interpretation is key to the choir’s successful singing of the music. Alice Parker reminds us that “so much of successful performance of the spiritual is singing what’s *not* on the page.”¹⁴⁶ Richard Smith, a great admirer of Alice Parker (particularly her folk song and spiritual arrangements), knew this well. The musical devices he employs in this arrangement of *The Old Ship of Zion* paint a deep understanding of the text-music relationship in this spiritual. The music *sounds* as though it is advancing the story and character of the text. Smith’s conducting certainly demonstrated this, even though not all stylistic elements were written on the page. He was confident in his interpretation, and the both audience and choir gained a better understanding of the piece as a result.

In his musical markings, Smith briefly also addresses diction. As mentioned in chapter 4, diction is an important—and sometimes controversial—element of the spirituals genre that every conductor needs to address with clarity and respect. In *The Old Ship of Zion*, Smith directs the singers to use a hybrid diction approach, as described by Anton Armstrong in his essay, “Practical Performance Practice in the African American Slave Song.”¹⁴⁷ Traditional English is melded with two important elements of authentic dialect: phonetic decay and management of diphthongs.

According to Armstrong, phonetic decay (dropping the strength of consonants in the middle or ends of words) is used to accurately and respectfully represent the authenticity of the pronunciation of text. In *The Old Ship of Zion*, examples include: tired/tah-uhd and coming/

¹⁴⁶ Parker, *Got a Mind to Do Right*.

¹⁴⁷ Anton Armstrong, “Practical Performance Practice in the African American Slave Song,” in *Teaching Music through Performance in Choir*, ed. by Heather Buchanan and Matthew Mehaffey, (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2005), 24-39.

comin'. These methods of phonetic decay are applied throughout Smith's arrangement in similar context. Vowels, specifically diphthongs, must also be managed carefully. The most troublesome is the first word of the piece, "I'm." Instead of pronouncing both vowel sounds [aɪ], the singer should only sing [a] and add the "m" following the vowel.¹⁴⁸ These are important decisions concerning diction must be determined well ahead of the first rehearsal of the music with the choir, to provide both clarity, respect, and attention to an authentic performance of this genre of music.

¹⁴⁸ International Phonetic Alphabet transcription used here.

CHAPTER 14. CONCLUSION

Because of their hopeful, heroic, and inspiring character, spirituals that contain coded messages are very attractive to choral conductors and singers. They sing of secrets—secrets hidden in the text—that led to freedom for countless enslaved people. When there was no opportunity for escape, these coded message songs provided something just as important for their survival: hope.

Successful choral conductors are dynamic storytellers. It is vital that conductors communicate the history of coded message songs during the preparation, rehearsal, and performance of this body of repertoire. Context would have been hugely important in properly interpreting song meanings. The time period, place, or specific circumstances that the singers encountered when these magnificent songs were created and performed would have determined the actual intended meanings.

While the clandestine nature of the Underground Railroad makes it difficult to confirm all of the claims made about the coded language imbedded in the music, as artists, it is our job to engage with and examine contextual materials in scholarly manner, and to then to expressively interpret the music, based upon that scholarship. As conductors, we must spend time researching the context and connotation of this body of repertoire. We must move beyond what we assume they know, and actively engage our singers and audiences through our own scholarship and passion. This is done on the behalf of our singers, and, more importantly, on behalf of those original plantation voices that provided us with such a rich and inspiring repertoire of song. Sharing this repertoire with singers and audiences allows choral conductors to tell a more complete story of the music of slavery, a compelling story of strength, perseverance, and hope.

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APPENDIX A. CATALOG OF CODED MESSAGE SONGS¹⁴⁹

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Ain't I Glad I've Got Out the Wilderness	Work, 185.	Numbers 14 Exodus 14	O, ain't I glad I've got out the wilderness. O, come along, mourner, Run out the wilderness.	The wilderness is the bondage of slavery.
Ain't a That Good News	Work, 195	Mark 8:24 Mathew 24:14	I've got a crown up in the Kingdom, Ain't a that good news? I've got a harp. I've got a robe. Gonna shoulder up-a my cross. Gonna take it home-a to my Jesus.	Talk of possessions offered hope for a better life.
Almost Over	Allen, 74.	Matthew 28:19-20	I done been down, and I done been tried. I been through the water and been baptized. And when you get to heaven, you'll be able for to tell, How you shunned the gates of hell.	Go through the water to reach freedom. Heaven is freedom, Hell is slavery/south.
Angels Waiting at the Door	Marsh, 223.	Psalms 91:11	My sister's took her flight and gone home, And the angels waiting at the door. She has laid down her cross and gone home. She has taken up her crown and gone home. Tell all my father's children, Don't you grieve for me.	My loved one has made it to freedom. Don't grieve for her, I'm happy she's free.
Archangel, Open the Door	Allen, 32.	Psalms 91:11	I'm gwine to my heaven, I'm gwine home. Archangel open de door!	Archangels are agents of the URR
Bell da Ring	Allen, 34.		Want to go to meeting, bell da ring. Road so stormy. You can't get to heaven when de bell da ring. The gates are all shut when de bell da ring.	We want to have a secret meeting but we can't because the bell is ringing, a signal that it's not safe.
Bound for Canaan Land	McIlhenney, 42. Newman, 73.		Where're you bound? Bound for Canaan land. Raise up your head with courage bold, For your race is almost run. I have hard trials here below, I'm bound for Canaan land.	Bound for Canada. You're almost there. I've had trials before, but I'm bound for Canada
Brudder Moses Gone	Allen, 66.	Matthew 24:14	Brudder Moses gone to de promised land, Hallelujah.	Tubman/other URR agent had gone.
Bye an' Bye	Work, 228	Matthew 11:30	Bye an' bye, we all shall meet again, An' I wouldn't mind dying' if dying' was all. After death got to fill an empty grave.	It's a farewell song. Dying is escaping.
Bye an' Bye	Boatner, 17.	Matthew 11:30	Bye and bye, I'm going to lay down this heavy load. I know my robe's gonna fit me well, I tried it on at the gates of hell. Some of these mornings, bright and fair, Going to take my wings and cleave the air.	Expresses a longing to escape to a new home.

¹⁴⁹ The Underground Railroad is abbreviated as URR.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Calvary	Work, 104	Genesis 28:10-12	We are climbing Jacob's ladder, Every round goes higher and higher.	Moving higher, or further north
Captain, O Captain	Work, 237.		One o' these mornings it won't be long, You goin' holler fo' me but I'll be gone. If I feel tomorrow like I feel today, Goin' pack my suitcase an' make my getaway.	Planning for escape. Saying goodbye.
Children, Do Linger	Allen, 51.		O member, will you linger? I go to glory wid you. Member join. O, Jesus is our Captain, he lead us on to glory. We'll meet at Zion's gateway. We'll enter into glory when We done with dis world's trials.	Are you coming with us? Someone will guide us. Meet at the designated spot.
Chilly Water	Marsh, 298		I know that water is chilly and cold, I have Jesus in-a my soul. Old Satan's just like a snake in the grass, Watching for to bite you as a-you pass. Oh, brothers and sisters, one and all, You had better be ready when the roll is called.	There will be struggle, and danger, but you better be ready when the time comes to escape.
City Called Heaven	Boatner, 20.	Revelation 21:2 Psalm 39:12	I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow, I'm left in this wide world alone. I ain't got no hope for tomorrow, I'm trying to make it, make heaven my home. Sometimes I'm tossed and I'm driven, Lord, sometimes I don't know which way to turn. I've heard of a city, a city called heaven, My mother has reached that pure glory, my father's still walking in sin. My brothers and sisters won't own me, because I am trying to get in.	I am a pilgrim, trying to make my way to heaven (freedom), even though there are struggles along the way. My family is separated, somewhere between freedom and bondage.
Come Along, Moses	Allen, 104.	Exodus 14	Come along, Moses, don't get lost, We are the people of God. We have a just God to plead our cause. He sits in Heaven and he answers prayers. Stretch out your rod and come across.	A longing for Moses (URR) to come and lead them to freedom.
Come and Go with Me	Newman, 71.	Revelation 21:2	This old world is not my home, O Christian, come and go with me. Yes, I seek my home in Heaven, O moaner, My home is in the new Jerusalem, O sinner, Yes, my home is over Jordan, O sister.	An invitation to try and move towards freedom
Come Down	Work, 88.	Matthew 14:28	Come down, my Lord! Way down in Egypt land. I'm purchased by the dying Lamb Way down in Egypt land. Peter walked upon the sea, And Jesus told him, Come to me.	A plea for rescue.
Comin' Ag'in By an' By	McIlhenney, 64		Ain't no mo' dodgin' in de Bushes iner Gawd's army. I bow out here an' dare; Comin' ag'in by an' by. Somet'ing dare was in ma way. It's nutin but de devil, but he can not stay.	No more hiding for me. I'm going to escape.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray	Curtis- Burlin, 23.	Numbers 14	An' I count hear nobody pray O Lord! O, way down yonder, by myself. In the valley, on my knees, With my burden, an my savior. Chilly waters, in the Jordan, Crossing over, into Canaan.	Contemplating escape, and the patience it requires to wait for the right moment.
Crossin' Ovah	Jackson, 3-11.	Deuteronomy 32:47	Oh sistuh, put on yo crown, shout and sing, Great day in duh kingdom, Lordy. Sing and shout while de bell does ring, Hallelujah to duh Lamb! Oh brothuh, is dat yo robe? Oh glory. You walk around and tell de story, Singin' hallelujah to duh Lamb! For we will a meet, meet aid duh Lamb of glory, Shout and tell of duh wondrous story, Crossing' ovah duh Jerdons stream, We'll a soon be nearing' home. I hear de angels play on dere harps and sing. We gonna sing and shout hallelujah. Now, chillun, do you wanna see Jesus? Yes, Lord! Can you hear dat shouting'?' Will you cross on ovah?	Dreaming of reuniting with family members in the land of the free and enjoying the comforts of that kind of life.
Dat Same Train	McIlhenney, 79.		Dat same train goin' t' be back tomorrow. Dat same train too away Ma father and ma mother.	
Deep River	Marsh, 230.	Deuteronomy 3:24-25 Joshua 3	Deep river, my home is over Jordan, I want to cross over into campground. Oh, don't you want to go to that Gospel feast, That promised land, where all is peace? I'll go into heaven and take my seat, And cast my crown at the Master's feet. Oh, when I get to heav'n, I'll walk all about, There's nobody there for to turn me out.	I will cross whatever great barrier there is between me and freedom. I will join in the feast, rather than be a servant to it.
Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?	Marsh, 168.	Daniel 6:22 Matthew 24:29	Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, why not every man? He delivered Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale. He delivered the children From the fiery furnace, And why not every man? The moon run down in a purple stream, The sun forbear to shine, And every star disappear, King Jesus shall be mine. The wind blows East And the wind blows West, It blows like the judgment day, And every poor soul that never did pray, I'll be glad to pray that day. I set my foot on the Gospel ship, And it begin to sail, It landed me over on Canaan's shore, And I'll never come back any more.	Since the Lord delivered Daniel from all of his challenges, why not me? Freedom is possible for all. I will be delivered.
Don't be Weary, Traveller	Allen, 75.	Numbers 14	Don't be weary traveller, Come along home to Jesus. My head got wet with the midnight dew, Angels bear me witness too.	Keep going, do not be discouraged. URR agents will help you.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Don't You Let Nobody Turn You Roun'	Work, 89	Mark 1:5	Don't you let nobody turn you 'roun; Keep the straight an' the narrow way. T'was at the river of Jordan, baptism was begun, John baptized the multitude, But he sprinkled nary one; The baptis' they go by water, the methods' go by lan' When they get to heaven, They'll shake each other's han'	Keep moving forward, via routes, water or land.
Elijah Rock	Hogan, 1-11.	1 Kings 19:11 2 Kings 2:11	Oh, Elijah rock. Come on sister, help me to pray, Tell me my Lord done pass dis way. Satan ain't nothin' but a snake in the grass. He's a conjur. He's a liar. If I could I surely would Stand on the rock where Moses stood. I'm comin' up Lawdy.	Satan (the enemy) is cunning If you have faith, as Moses and Elijah did, you can be delivered "up" to heaven by a chariot.
Ezek'el Saw the Wheel	Work, 148.	Ezekiel 1:15-21.	Ezek'el saw the wheel Way up in the middle o' the air. The big wheel moved by Faith, The little wheel moved by the Grace o' God. Jes' let me tell you what a hypocrite'll do, He'll talk about me an' he'll talk about you. Watch out my sister how you walk on the cross, Yo' foot might slip an' yo' soul get lost.	The motion of the wheels symbolize the movement of the URR, and those moving toward freedom.
Farewell, My Brother	Marsh, 219.		Farewell, my brother, farewell forever. Fare you well, my brother, Now, for I am going home. Oh! Good-bye, for I am bound to leave you, Oh! Good-bye, for I am going home.	Farewell song.
Follow the Drinking Gourd	Guenther, 361-2.		Follow the drinking gourd, For the old man is waiting For to carry you to freedom. When the sun goes down And the first quail calls. The river bank would make a mighty good road, Dead trees will show you the way. Left foot, peg foot traveling on. The river ends between two hills, There's another river on the other side.	Although not appearing until later, this is one of the most famous of coded songs, providing geographical markers and suggested times for escape.
Gabriel's Trumpet's Going to blow	Marsh, 229.	I Thessalonians 4:16	Gabriel's trumpet's going to blow, By and by, at the end of time. The first sounding of the trumpet For the righteous. Go, wake the sleeping nations. Then poor sinner what will you do? You'll run for the mountains to hide you.	The signal from Gabriel, an archangel (URR agent) will wake those waiting and bring them to action.
Git on de Boat Little Chillun	McIlhenney, 69		Jes you git on de boat little chillun An' we'll sail away. Angel come f'om hebben, I t'ought I heard him say, Jes you raise dem diamon' curtain' An' er hear dem Christians pray.	Join the angels (URR) and escape from slavery.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Go Down Moses	Work, 165. Curtis-Burlin, 16.	Exodus 6:10-11 Exodus 10:3 Exodus 14	When Israel was in Egypt's land, Oppressed so hard they could not stand. Tell old Pharaoh, Let my people go! Thus saith the Lord bold Moses said, If not I'll smite your first-born dead. No more in bondage shall they toil, Let then come out with Egypt's spoil. The Lord told Moses what to do, To lead the children of Israel thro' When they had reached the other shore, They sang a song of triumph o'er.	The Israelites in bondage represented those bound by slavery. Pharaoh represented the plantation owner. Moses was Harriet Tubman, or some other agent of the URR.
Go Down, Moses	Marsh, 178.	Exodus 6:10-11 Exodus 10:3 Exodus 14	<i>New verses, as sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers:</i> O 'twas a dark and dismal night, when Moses led the Israelites. The Lord told Moses what to do, To lead the children of Israel through. O Moses, the cloud shall cleave the way, A fire by night, a shade by day. You'll not get lost in the wilderness, With a lighted candle in your breast. Your foes shall not before you stand, And you'll possess fair Canaan's land. We need not always weep and moan, And wear these slavery chains forlorn. O brethren, brethren you'd better be engaged, For the devil he's out on a big rampage. O take yer shoes from off yer feet, And walk into the golden street.	See above.
Go Tell it on the Mountain	Work, 215.	Luke 2:11-15	Go tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and everywhere, That Jesus Christ is born. While shepherd kept their watching O'er silent flocks By night, Behold throughout the heavens, There shone a holy light. The shepherd feared and trembled When lo above the Earth, Rang out the angel chorus, That hailed our Saviour's birth. Down in a lonely manger the humble Christ was Born, and God sent out salvation, That blessed Christmas morn.	Shepherds and angels were agents of the URR, ushering their "sheep" to salvation/ freedom.
Goin' Away to See-er Ma Lord	McIlhenney, 65		Goin' away to see ma Savior, I'm goin' away to see-er ma Lord. Ma sister mighty happy fer to see ma Jesus, Mighty happy on Josua's wall. Ef I get on de udder side ob Judgment, I ain't comin' here fer to sin no mo'	I'm going to freedom and if I reach it, I'm never coming back.
Goin' Home	Work, 139.	II Kings 2:11	Hallelujah! I'm a goin' home in the chariot in the mornin'. Lord I'm comin' to your glory! Sinner man, you better pray! For judgment is comin' in every day. You must believe, I'm going home in the chariot in the mornin' O mourner, And the grace of God you will receive. Now I lay my burden down, so glad I'm done. My Lord, I'm comin' to your kingdom, I'm on my journey now.	Chariots commonly referred to methods of transportation for escape to freedom up north.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Going to Set Down and Rest Awhile	Newman, 83.		Going to set down and rest awhile, When my good Lord calls me. Sister Mary went to Heaven, And she went there to stay, And she didn't go to come back no more; She sang a song that the angels couldn't sing: Hosanna, carry on! Little children, don't you moan, When my good Lord calls me. O, Zion!	References family members or friends that have have found freedom. Many times, when people escaped, they were never heard from again.
Going to Shout all over God's Heaven	Work, 180.		I've got a robe, you've got a robe, All of God's children got a robe; I've got a crown... I've got a shoes... I've got a harp... I've got a song... When I get to heaven goin' to sing a new song, Going' to sing all over God's Heav'n.	This song of hope referenced the possessions that were available as a freed person.
Good-bye, Brothers	Marsh 249		Good-bye, brothers, good-bye, sisters, If I don't see you anymore, I'll meet you in heaven, In the blessed kingdom.	Farewell song.
Good News! The Chariot's Comin!	Curtis- Burlin, 32-33. Marsh, 282-3.	2 Kings 2:11	Good news! So glad the chariot's comin' I don't want it to leave a me behind. There's a long white robe in heaven I know. There's a starry crown in heaven I know.	A happy proclamation of hope...the chariot was a vehicle to freedom.
Good Old Chariot	Marsh, 244.	2 Kings 2:11	Swing low, sweet chariot, Don't you leave me behind. Good old chariot, take us all home. Don't you leave me behind.	Hope for freedom.
Great Day	Work, 182.	Psalm 51:18 Leviticus 25:10	Great day! The righteous marching, God's going to build up Zion's walls! Chariot rode on the mountain top, My God spoke and the chariot did stop. This is the day of jubilee, The Lord has set His people free. We want no cowards in our band, We call for valiant hearted men. Going to take my breastplate, Sword and shield, And march out boldly in the field.	The chariot would bring the enslaved to freedom on jubilee day. You had to have courage to attain freedom.
Hallelu, Hallelu	Allen, 67.		Oh, one day as a'noder, hallelu. When de ship is out a'sailin', hallelu. Member walk and never tire. Member walk Jordan long road.	Vehicles for freedom and a message of encouragement.
Have You Got Good Religion	McIntyre, 1-11.	Revelation 21:21 Luke 9: 62 Leviticus 25:10	Have you got good religion? Certainly Lord! Have you been redeemed? Certainly Lord! I've never been to heaven, but I've been told, The streets up there are paved with gold. The gospel plough is in our hands, Good Lord, we're bound for the promised land. Have you been baptized? Certainly Lord! This is the year of jubilee, When Jesus set his people free. We want no cowards in our band, Praise God, we're bound for the promised land.	Those bound for heaven (freedom) had to have courage, so that at the time of jubilee, they could be freed from bondage.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Heaven Bell a Ring	Allen, 20.	Revelation 6:12-16	My Lord, what shall I do? And a heaven bell a ring and praise God. What shall I do for a hiding place? I run to the sea, but the sea run dry. I run to the gate, but the gate shut fast. No hiding place for sinner here. When you get to heaven, Say you remember me.	This text refers to the business of escaping, and the various things to be encountered.
Here's No Hidin' Place Down Here	Newman, 41.	Revelation 6:12-16	Here's no hidin' place down here. I went to de rocks to hide my face, De rocks cried out, "no hidin' place." De rock cried, "I'm burnin' too, Wanna go to heaven the same as you." Oh, de sinner man, he gambled an' fell, He wanted to go go to heaven, But had to go to hell.	The south doesn't offer a place to hide or stay for anyone. Eventually, freedom will reign.
Hold On	Chenu, 250.	Luke 9:62 Genesis 28:12	Noah let me come in, Doors all fastened and de winders pinned. Keep your hand on-a dat plow. Sister Mary had a goldchain, Every link was my Jesus' name. Keep on plowin' and don't you tire, Every row goes high'r and high'r. Ef you wannar git to Heben I'll tell you how, Keep your hand right on-a dat plow. Ef that plow stays in-a your hand, Land you straight in de Promise' Land.	Great figures of the Bible often represented agents of the URR, assisting escapees. Once you've left the plantation, don't look back...keep going higher and higher until you reach freedom.
Hold Your Light	Allen, 12.		What make ol' Satan to follow me so? Satan ain't nothin' at all to for to do wid me. Run, seeker! Hold your light on Canaan's shore.	The slave master was Satan...cruel and cunning.
Home in d'Rock	Gibbs, 1-12.	Luke 16:19-25	I got a home in-a dat rock, don-a you see? Between de earth an' sky, Thought I heard my Savior cry. Rich man Divies lived so well When he died he foun' a home in hmm, (hell) Po' man Lazrus, po' as I, When he died, he foun' a home on high.	Lazrus was the slave, and would get to Heaven. Rich man Dives was the plantation owner, who would stay in hell.
I Am Bound for the Promised Land	Newman, 85.		I am bound for the Promised Land, O, won't you rise and go with me. When I get to Heaven I'll set and tell, I am bound for the Promised Land Just how I shun the gates of Hell. O, Christians, be enraged, Old Satan in an awful rage.	An invitation to be a partner for escape, turning away from the plantation and the slave master.
I Can't Stay Behind	Allen, 6.	John 14:1-7	I can't stay behind, my Lord. Dere's room enough in heaven my Lord. I been on the road into heaven, my Lord. I can't stay behind.	A deep desire to attain freedom.
I Don't Feel Weary	Allen, 70.		I don't feel weary and noways tired, Glory hallelujah! Jes let me in the kingdom while the world is on fire. Gwine to live with God forever. And keep the ark a movin'!	You must be tireless and persistent to escape the hell of slavery.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
I Got Wings	Jordan, 48.		I got wings, you got wings, All o' God's children got wings. When I get to Heaven, gonna put on my wings And gonna fly all over God's Heaven. Everybody talk' bout Heaven, ain't a goin' there. I got shoes, you got shoes...gonna put on my shoes And gonna walk all over God's Heaven. I got a harp, you got a harp...gonna put on my harp And gonna play all over God's Heaven. I got a robe, you got a robe...gonna put on my robe And gonna shout all over God's Heaven.	When I get to heaven, I will have the opportunity to have my own possessions.
I Have Another Building	Work, 186.	Revelation 21:2	I know I have another building, I know it's not made with hands, O brethren. I want to go to Heaven, and I want to go right, I want to go to heaven all robed in white. I haven't been to Heaven, but I've a been told, The gates are pearl and the streets are gold. Look over yonder and what do I see, A holy band of angels coming after me.	Heaven (freedom) will be wonderful, full of untold riches. Holy angels (URR agents) will help me get there.
I Want to Be Ready	Work, 50 Marsh, 293.	Revelation 21:2, 16 John 14:1-7	I want to be ready to walk in Jerusalem Just like John. John said the city was just four square And he declared he'd meet me there.	Dreaming of freedom.
I'll Hear the Trumpet Soun	Marsh, 170		You may bury me in the East, You may bury me in the West, But I'll hear the trumpet sound in that morning. Father Gabriel in that day, He'll take wings and fly away.	When I get the signal I'll fly away to freedom, just like the angel, Gabriel.
I'm A-going to Join the Band	Work, 196.		I'm a going to join the band, hallelujah! The more come in with a free good will, Makes the band seem sweeter still. Jordan's stream is so chilly and cold, If you don't mind it'll chill your soul. Watch that Sun, how steady she runs, Don't let her catch you with your work undone Going to hang my harp on the willow tree, It'll sound way over in Galilee.	I'm going to try and escape to freedom. I will have to cross a stream, or pass a difficulty to get there. Travel at night, and watch for signals along the way.
I'm Just a Goin' Over There	Work, 221.		I'm just a goin' way over Jordan, I'm just a goin' over there. I'm goin' home to see my brother. I'm goin' home to see my mother. I'm goin' home to see my Jesus.	I hope to see my family when I reach freedom.
I'm a Rolling	Marsh, 167.		I'm a rolling, rolling thro' an unfriendly world. O brothers, won't you help me, Help me to pray? O sisters, won't you help me, help me to pray? O preachers, won't you help me, Help me to fight? Won't you help me in the service of the Lord?	I'm running for freedom. Please help me by praying, or by fighting if need be.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
I'm so Glad	Marsh, 269.	Exodus 14	I'm so glad the angels brought the tidings down, I'm hunting for a home. You'll not get lost in the wilderness, With the love of Jesus in your breast. Oh Christians you had better pray For Satan's around you every day. A little longer here below, And then to glory we will go. Hunting for a home.	I hope to find a home in freedom someday. Bounty hunters are searching for fugitives.
In the Mansions Above	Allen, 59.	John 14:1-7	Lord, in the mansions above I hope to meet my Jesus. If you get to heaven before I do, tell my Jesus I'm comin' too. Lord, I've had many crosses And trials here below.	Send a message that I'm going to try escape for the north.
I've Done What You Told me to Do	Work, 198.		O Lord, I've done what you told me to do. In a that morning, O my Lord, When the Lord says "hurry!" O Gabriel come on down the line. O gambler, you can't get on a this train. O sister, have you got your ticket signed?	An URR agent is there to help you escape.
Jesus on the Waterside	Allen, 29.		Heaven bell a ring, I know de road, Jesus sittin' on the waterside. Do come along, do let us go.	A story of escape, including a signal and route.
John Henry	Work, 233.		This ol' hammer killed John Henry!, But this ol' hammer won't kill me! This ol' hammer shines like silver! But rings like gol'. Take my hammer to the walkin' boss, Tell 'im I'm gone. If he ask you any questions, Tell 'im you don't know.	The hammer sound was a signal that it was safe or unsafe to come up/out.
Join de Angel Band	Allen, 29.	Numbers 14	If you look up da road, you see fader Mosey, Join de angel band. Do, fader Mosey, gader (gather) your army. Join 'em all, join 'em for Jesus, Jerusalem band. Sixteen souls set out for Heaven.	Watch for Moses (Tubman, or another URR agent) for your chance to escape.
Judgment Day Is Rolling Round	Marsh, 183		Judgment day is rolling around, O, how I long to go. I've a good old mother in the heaven, My Lord. There's no back-sliding in the heaven, My Lord. King Jesus sitting in the heaven, My Lord. There's a big camp meeting in the heaven, My Lord.	The day is approaching when we will all be free. O, how I long to go to that meeting.
Keep Your Lamps	Marsh, 224.	Matthew 25:1-13	Keep your lamps trimm'd and a-burning, For this work's almost done. Brothers, don't grow weary, Preachers, don't grow weary, For this work is almost done.	Be ready for the chance to escape, and don't succumb to weakness.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
King Jesus Built Me a House Above	Work, 227.	John 14:1-7	King Jesus built me a house above, An' he built it without a hammer or a nail. King Jesus built me a house above, An' he built it on Jerusalem lane. I want my Elder to go with me, To walk down Jerusalem lane.	There is freedom in the north for me and my loved ones.
Let God's Saints Come in	Allen, 76.	Exodus 10	Come down angel, and trouble the water, And let God's saints come in. Canaan land is the land for me, And let God's saints come in. There was a wicked man, he kept them children in Egypt land. God did say to Moses one day, Say Moses, go to Egypt land. And tell them to let my people go, And Pharaoh would not let them go.	Please, come and help me escape and find freedom. My slave owner won't let me go.
Let Me Fly	DeCormier, 1-15.	II Kings 2:11	Way down yonder in the middle of the field, Angel workin' at the chariot wheel. Not so particular bout workin' at the wheel, Just wan' to see how the chariot feel Oh, let me fly, oh let me fly to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord. Meet that hypocrite on the street, First thing he do is show his teeth. Next think he do is tell a lie, Well the best thing to do is pass him by. I got a mother in the Promised Land. I ain't gonna stop 'til I shake her hand. I heard such a rumbling' in the sky, I thought my Lord was passing' by. "Twas the good ol' chariot drawn' nigh, Shook the earth, swept the sky.	I am working towards freedom until that day when I fly away. The hypocrite is the slave owner, who would attend church, but then treat others inhumanely. I hope to reach freedom.
Let us Cheer the Weary Traveller	Work, 190.		Let us cheer the weary traveller Along the heavenly way. I'll take my gospel trumpet and I'll begin to blow, And if my Savior helps me, I'll blow wherever I go. And if you meet with crosses And trials on the way, Just keep your trust in Jesus, Don't forget to pray.	Let us assist those trying to find freedom and encourage them on their way.
Listen to the Angels Shoutin'	Work, 210. Marsh, 259.		Where do you think I found' my soul, Listen to the angels shoutin'. I found' my soul at hell's dark door, Before I'd lay in hell one day, I'd sing an' pray myself away. Run all the way, listen to the angels shoutin! Way over yonder by Jordan's stream, I hear them shoutin' I've been redeemed. If you get there before I do, Tell all my friends I'm coming' too.	Run away, over obstacles towards freedom. Tell them I'm coming!

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Little Innocent Lamb	Bartholomew, 1-15	Matthew 18:12-14	Little Lamb, little innocent Lamb, I'm a gonna serve God till I die. Hypocrite, tell you what he do, He'll talk about me and he'll talk about you. Debbil, he's got a slippery shoe, Now if you don't mind, He gonna slip it on you. 'Cause dere ain' no dyin' ober in a dat lan'. Dere'll be joy! Yes take one brick from Satan's wall, Satan's wall gonna tumble an' fall	The slaveowner is a hypocrite. Beware. There will be joy and happiness in the north. Slavery will end one day.
March On	Work, 205. Marsh, 200.	Exodus 10	Way over in Egypt's land, You shall gain the victory, You shall gain the day! This is the year of Jubilee, The Lord has set his people free. We want to cowards in our band, We call for valiant hearted men.	This is the time when we will be set free. You must have courage.
Marching up the Heavenly Road	Work, 181.	Exodus 14	Marching up the heavenly road, I'm bound to fight until I die; My sister, have you got your sword and shield, I got 'em fo' I left the field. O come along Moses, don't get lost, I stretch your rod and come across. O fare you well friends, fore you well foes, Leave you all my eyes to close.	This is a narrative of escape...route, determination, and assistance.
Mary Had a Baby, Yes, Lord	Newman, 202.	Matthew 2:11	Mary had a baby, yes, Lord! The people keep a coming And the train done gone. What did she name him? She named King Jesus, Mighty Counselor. Where was he born? Born in a manger, Yes, Lord! The people keep a coming And the train done gone.	The URR is passing by.
Mary, Don't You Weep	Work, 176. Harris, 3.	Exodus 14	Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn, Pharaoh's army got drowned in the Red Sea. If I could I surely would Stand on the rock where Moses stood. Mary wore three links of chain Every link was Jesus' name. One of these nights about 12 o' clock This old worlds going to reel and rock. God told Moses what to do To lead the Hebrew children through. Moses stood on the red sea shore Smotin' the water with a two by four. God gave Moses the rainbow sign No more water, but fire next time. Mary wore three links of chain Every link was freedoms name. The very moment I thought I was lost The dungeon shook and the chains fell off. May be right and I may be wrong I know you're gonna miss me when I am gone...	This narrative tells the tales of the Israelites freed from Pharaoh's rule, including the escape through the water and climbing higher towards freedom.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Michael Row the Boat Ashore	Allen, 24.		Michael rose the boat ashore, hallelujah! I wonder where my mudder deh (mother there) See my mudder on de rock g'wine home. Gabriel blow de trumpet horn. Brudder, lend a helping hand. Jordan stream is wide and deep. Jesus stand on t'oder side. Sinner, row to save your soul. Then you'll hear the horn they blow. Trumpet sound for jubilee.	Possibly a signal to escape via the water. Listen for signals along the way.
Move Along	Marsh, 260.	Revelation 21:2	Let us move along to the heavenly home, I am bound to meet you there. We are on the ocean sailing, And a while must face the stormy blast, But if Jesus is our captain, We will make the port at last. Yonder see the golden city, and the lighthouse Gleaming on the shore, With a shout of joy they'll greet us, When we meet to part no more. There we'll meet our friends in Jesus, Who are waiting on the golden shore, With a shout of joy they'll greet us, When we meet to part no more.	Use the water to escape for freedom. Our friends and family are waiting.
My Father, How Long	Allen, 93.	Revelation 21:2	My father, how long poor sinner suffer here? We'll soon be free, de Lord will call us home. We'll walk the miry road, Where pleasure never dies. We'll walk the golden streets Of the new Jerusalem. We'll fight for liberty when the Lord Will call us home.	How long before we can escape for freedom?
My Lord, What a Mourning	Work, 92 Marsh, 233.	Matthew 24:29-31 Revelation 6:12-16	My Lord what a mourning When the stars begin to fall. You'll hear the trumpet sound to wake the nations Underground, Looking to my God's right hand.	Travel at night. Listen for signals to guide you.
My Lord's Goin' Move This Wicked Race	Work, 217.	Numbers 14	My Lord's goin' move this wicked race, He's goin' to raise up a nation that shall obey! Nicodemus he desired to know, How a man be born when he is old! Marvel not man if you want to be wise, Just believe on Jesus and be baptized! God called old Moses on the mountain top And He stamped His law on Moses' heart.	Moses (Tubman, or another important URR agent) will help you reach freedom.
My Ship is on the Ocean	Marsh, 199.		My ship is on the ocean, poor sinner, Fare you well. I'm going away to see the good old Daniel, I'm going away to see my Lord. I'm going to see the weeping Mary. Oh! Don't you want to live in that bright glory.	I intend to escape.
My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord	Work, 131.	Hebrews 6:19 Matthew 18:12-14	My Soul's been anchored in the Lord. Where've you been, poor sinner? Been working out of the sight of man. See my father in the gospel come Wagging up the hill. So slow, he's crying now. Left my burden at the river, in the valley.	I am determined to escape and leave slavery behind.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
My Lord's Goin' Move This Wicked Race	Work, 217.	Numbers 14	My Lord's goin' move this wicked race, He's goin' to raise up a nation that shall obey! Nicodemus he desired to know, How a man be born when he is old! Marvel not man if you want to be wise, Just believe on Jesus and be baptized! God called old Moses on the mountain top And He stamped His law on Moses' heart.	Moses (Tubman, or another important URR agent) will help you reach freedom.
My Ship is on the Ocean	Marsh, 199.		My ship is on the ocean, poor sinner, Fare you well. I'm going away to see the good old Daniel, I'm going away to see my Lord. I'm going to see the weeping Mary. Oh! Don't you want to live in that bright glory.	I intend to escape.
My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord	Work, 131.	Hebrews 6:19 Matthew 18:12-14	My Soul's been anchored in the Lord. Where've you been, poor sinner? Been working out of the sight of man. See my father in the gospel come wagging up the hill So slow, he's crying now Left my burden at the river, in the valley.	I am determined to escape and leave slavery behind.
My Way's Cloudy	Marsh, 201.	Leviticus 25:10	Oh! Brethren, my way's cloudy, Go send them angels down. There's a fire in the east and fire in the west, And fire among the Methodist, Old Satan's mad and I am glad, He missed the soul he thought he had. I'll tell you now as I told you before, The promise land I'm bound to go, This is the year of Jubilee, The Lord has come and set me free.	I am in trouble. Please send help, I have almost been caught. I am trying to escape.
No Hiding Place	Work, 149.	Psalm 32:7 Psalm 27:5 Revelation 6:12-16	There's no hiding place down here. Went to the rocks for the hide my face, Rocks cried out, no hiding place. Boatman boatman row one side, Can't get to heaven' 'against wind and tide.	A signal that it might not be safe. Be careful how you travel.
Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen	Boatner, 97. Marsh, 159.	Job 13 Matthew 26:38	Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, Nobody knows my sorrow. Oh, glory Hallelujah. I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down, But still my soul feels heavenly bound. I want to goto heaven when I die, To shout salvation as I fly. Oh hell is deep and a dark despair, Stop poor sinner and don't go there.	I don't want to be sold further south in slavery. I wish to be free.
Nobody Knows Who I Am	Work, 189.	Revelation 6:12-16	Nobody know's a who I am, Till the judgment morning! Heav'n bell a rising, the saith all a singing, Heaven bells a ringing in my soul. Want to go to Heaven, to go right, All dressed white. Don't want to stumble, don't want to fall, Want to be in Heaven when the roll is called. If you don't believe that I've been redeemed, Follow me down to Jordan's stream.	I'll listen for the signal to escape. I want to go north. Come with me.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
O Brothers, Don't Get Weary	Allen, 94.	Numbers 14	O brothers, don't get weary, We're waiting for the Lord. We'll land on Canaan's shore, We'll meet forevermore.	Don't be weary or impatient, as the Israelites were with Moses.
O it's Goin' to be a Mighty Day	Work, 232.	Exodus 14	O, it's goin' to be mighty day! As I went down into Egypt, I camped upon the ground' At the soundin' of the trumpet The Holy Ghost came down. The good ol' chariot passing by, She jarred the earth an' shook the sky. I ain't got time for to stop an' talk, The road is rough an' it's hard to walk.	Egypt represented slavery. At the signal call, the "chariot" passed by to deliver people to freedom.
O Mary Don't You Weep, Don't You Mourn	Work, 176.	Exodus 14 Isaiah 65:19 Revelation 21:4	O Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn; Pharoah's army got drowned. Some of these mornings bright and fair, Take my wings and cleave the air. When I get to Heaven going to sing and shout, Nobody there for turn me out. When I get to Heaven goin' to put on my shoes, Run about glory and tell all the news.	Don't worry, slavery will be destroyed. I will find freedom.
O Rocks Don't Fall on Me	Work, 126.	John 14:1-7	Look over yonder on Jericho's wall, And see those sinners tremble and fall. Rocks and mountains don't fall on me. In a that great judgment day, The sinners will run to the rocks and say... When every star refuses to shine, I know King Jesus will a be mine... The trump shall sound, and the dead shall rise, And go to mansions in a the skies.	Slavery will fall, and all will be raised to freedom.
O, Sinner Man!	Newman, 48. Marsh, 210.	Matthew 18:12-14	O sinner man, O, which way are you going? O, come back sinner, and don't go there, Which way are you going? For Hell is deep and a dark despair, Though the days be dark and the nights be long, We'll shout and sing till we get home; T'was just about the break of day, My sins forgiven and soul set free.	Slavery is a deep despair. Travel through the night towards freedom.
Oh, Brothers, Are You Getting Ready?	Marsh, 288-9.	Leviticus 25:10	Oh, brothers, are you getting ready For the year of Jubilee. Oh, rise, shine, and give God the glory. Oh, sisters, are you getting ready? Oh, fathers, are you getting ready? Oh preachers, are you getting ready?	Are you preparing to run to freedom?
Oh, Wasn't that a Wide River?	Marsh, 235.		Oh, wasn't that a wide river of Jordan, Lord? There's one more river to cross. Oh, the river of Jordan is so wide, I don't know how to get on the other side. I have some friends before me gone, By the grace of God I'll follow on. Shout, shout, Satan's about, Shut your door and keep him out. Old Satan is a snake in the grass, If you don't mind he'll get you at last.	This could be a signal about a river to cross, or could symbolize any obstacle between the slave and freedom. Beware of sneaky slave hunters.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Old Ship of Zion	Marsh, 186.		What ship is that a sailing, hallelujah, Do you think that she is able For to carry us all home. Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah. She has landed many a thousand, And will land as many a more. She is loaded down with angels, And King Jesus is the Captain.	The gospel ship is the journey to freedom or the URR.
On to Glory	Allen, 66.		O, come my brethren and sisters too, We're gwine to join the heavenly crew.	An invitation, and encouragement.
Plenty Good Room	Allen, 66.	John 14:1-7 John 14:2	There's plenty good room, way in the kingdom; My Lord's done just what he said, Healed the sick and raised the sea. One of these mornings bright and fair, Going to hitch my wings and cleave the air. When I was a mourner just like you, I prayed and prayed till I came through. Come on, mourner, make a bound. The Lord will meet you on halfway ground.	This is a song of hope and encouragement. There is help for all those that wish to run towards freedom.
Poor Man Lazrus	Hairston, 1-8.	Luke 16:19-25	Poor man Lazrus sick and disabled, He had to eat crumbs from the rich man's table. Dip your finger in the water come & cool my tongue Cause I'm tormented in the flame. Rich man Divies he lived so well, And when he dies he went straight to hell.	The poor man was the slave, who would be saved. The rich man, the slave owner, would burn in hell.
Poor Me	Work, 67.	Job 13	I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down, But still my soul feels heaven'y bound. Sometimes I think I'm ready to drop, But thank my Lord I do not stop.	Through any trials, you must not give up.
Poor Sinner	Work, 193.	Matthew 25:1-13	O poor sinner, o now is your time. What you goin' to do when your lamp burns down? Fire in the east, fire in the west, Fire goin' to burn up the wilderness. Head got wet with midnight dew, Morning star was witness too. Wind blows hard, wind blows cold, Lord, have mercy on my soul. I done died, don't die no more, I'm goin' to cross on the other shore.	The path to freedom will be full of trials and struggles.
Poor Wayfaring Stranger	Newman, 170.		I'm a poor, wayfaring stranger, While journeying through this world of woe. Yet there's no sickness, toil, and danger, In that bright world to which I go. I'm going there to see my father, I'm going there no more to roam, I'm just going over Jordan, I'm just going over home. I know dark clouds will gather 'round me, I know my way is rough and steep, Yet bright fields lie just before me, Where God's redeemed their vigils keep; I'm going there to see my mother... I'll too be free from every trial, My body will sleep in the old churchyard, And enter on my great reward.	Life will be so much better when the bonds of slavery are broken. I will see my family and find freedom on the other side. But for now, I am journeying on my own.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Praise, Member	Allen, 4		Praise, member, praise God. I praise my Lord until I Die and reach my heavenly home. Oh, Jordan's bank is a good old bank, and I h'aint got One more river to cross. I want some soldier to help me bear the cross... I look to the East and I look to the West... I wheel to the right and I wheel to the left...	I need assistance from someone in my search for freedom.
Pray all de Member	Allen, 35.		Pray all de member, yes my Lord! Pray a little longer, yes my Lord! Jericho da worry me. Patrol aroun' me, tank God he no ketch me.	A simple prayer for safety and success.
Religion is a Fortune	Work, 172.		O religion is a fortune, I really do believe. Going to see my sister Mary. Going to chatter with the angels. Going to walk and talk with Jesus. Where've you been poor sinner, so long? Been low down in the valley for to pray And I ain't got weary yet.	Looking forward to freedom—and sharing hope with others.
Ride on, King Jesus	Work, 49 Marsh, 202.	Revelation 19:11 Job 9:12 1 Cor. 9:24	Ride on King Jesus! No man can hinder him. King Jesus rides on a milk-white horse, The river of Jordan he did cross. If you want to find your way to God, The gospel highway must be trod. I was young when I begun, But now my race is almost run.	No man will hinder me from my quest for freedom.
Rise, Shine, for Thy Light is A-comin'	Work, 47. Marsh, 296	Isaiah 60:1 Leviticus 25:10	Rise, shine, for thy light is a-comin! My Lord says he's comin' bye and bye. This is the year of Jubilee. My Lord has set his people free. Intend to shout and never stop Until I reach the mountaintop. Wet or dry I intend to try To serve the lord until I die.	Leviticus tells us that in the Jubilee year (every 50 years), that those enslaved will regain their freedom and property and return to their families.
Roll On	Work, 80.	John 14:1-7	Roll on, roll on, sweet moments roll on, And let these poor pilgrims go home. The heavenly land so bright and fair, There are very few seem going there.	A song dreaming of freedom.
Roll, Jordan, Roll	Work, 199. Marsh, 165.	Joshua 3:14-17	Roll Jordan, roll! I want to go to heaven when I die. O brother you ought to been there, A sitting in the kingdom To hear old Jordan roll O sister you ought to been there. O seeker you ought to been there.	A song of encouragement and hope.
Run to Jesus	Marsh, 222. Newman, 99.	John 14:1-7	Run to Jesus, shun the danger, I don't expect to stay much longer here. He will be our dearest friend, And will help us to the end. O, I thought I heard them say, There were lions in the way. Many mansions there will be, One for you and one for me	Given to the Fisk Jubilee Singers by Frederick Douglass, with the statement that it was this song that first made him think of trying to escape from slavery.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Run, Mary, Run	Newman, 105.	II Kings 2:11	Run, Mary run, I know the other world is not like this; Fire in the east, and fire in the west, Bound to burn the wilderness. Jordan river is a river to cross, Stretch your rod and come across. Swing low, chariot, into the east Let God's children have some peace; Swing low, chariot, into the west, Let God's children have some rest. Swing low, chariot into the north, Give me the gold without the cross; Swing low, chariot into the south, Let God's children sing and shout. If this day was judgment day, Every sinner would want to pray;	A variety of signals and messages are offered here. Danger is all around, there is a river to cross, and the URR can help fugitives.
Sail, O Believer	Allen, 24.		Sail, O Believer, sail; sail over yonder; Sail over yonder and view the Promised Land.	Escape—travel through the water.
See the Signs of Judgment	Work, 225.	Luke 21	See the signs of judgment, The time is drawn' nigh. Read the book o' Saint Luke, Bout the twenty first chapter.	Be on guard and watch for signs.
Somebody's Buried in the Graveyard	Work, 127.		Somebody's buried in the graveyard, Somebody's buried in the sea, Going to get up in the morning a shouting, Going to join Jubilee. Although you see me coming along so, To the promised land I'm bound to go. I have some friends before me gone, By the grace of God I'll follow on. Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, But still my soul is heavenly bound.	This is a farewell song, and a promise to seek freedom.
Somebody's Knocking at Your Door	Work, 192.	Matthew 7:7 Luke 11:9 Luke 13:25	Somebody's knocking at your door, O sinner, why don't you answer? Knocks like Jesus... Can't you hear Him? Answer Jesus, Jesus calls you, Can't you trust Him?	An conversation through song.
Soon a Will Be Done	Work, 109.	I Thessalonians: 4:17 John 14: 1-7	Soon a will be done with the trouble of this world, Going to live with God. Come my bother, and go with me, Let King Jesus make you free. When I get to heaven I will sing and tell, How I did shun both death and hell.	Soon I will be free.
Stand the Storm	Work, 161.		O stand the storm, it won't be long, We'll anchor bye and bye. My ship is on the ocean, She's making for the kingdom.	An invitation to seek freedom. Help is at hand.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Steal Away	Marsh, 181 Work, 123. Boatner, 115	Ezekiel 37:13 Matthew 6:6	Steal away to Jesus, I ain't got long to stay here. My Lord, he calls me, he calls me by the thunder; The trumpet sounds within my soul, I ain't got long to stay here. Green trees are bending, Poor sinner stands a trembling... Tombstones are bursting, Poor sinner stands a trembling... My Lord calls me, he calls me by the lightning...	There is a meeting at the regular meeting place (usually in the swamps/coves). It could also serve as a farewell song.
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot	Work, 152. Marsh, 160.	II Kings 2:11-12 I Thessalonians 4:16-17	Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home. I looked over Jordan, and what did I see, A band of angels coming after me. If you get there before I do, Tell my friends I'm coming too. I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down, But still my soul feels heavenly bound.	The URR will assist in the quest for freedom
The Angels Changed My Name	Marsh, 261.		I went to the hillside, I went to pray, I know the angels done changed my name For the coming day. Thank God the angels done changed my name. I looked at my hands and my hands were new. I looked at my feet and my feet were too.	Angels (URR agents) would change names as part of an escape plan. A whole new life and identity was necessary.
The Good Ole Way	Allen, 84.		As I went down in the valley to pray, Studying about that good ole way, Where you shall wear the starry crown, Good Lord, show me the way. Oh mourner, let's go down, Down in the valley to pray.	Let's escape.
The Gospel Train	Marsh, 184.	John 13:33 Romans 10:12	The gospel train is coming, I hear it just at hand, I hear the cartwheels moving, And rumbling through the land. Get on board, children get on board, For there's room for many a more. She's nearing now the station, O sinner, don't be vain, But come and get your ticket, And be ready for the train. The fare is cheap and all can go, The rich and poor are there No second class on board this train, No difference in the fare. There's Moses, Noah, and Abraham, And all the prophets too Our friends in Christ are all on board, O, what a heavenly crew We soon shall reach the station, O how we then shall sing, With all the heavenly army, We'll make the welkin ring. We'll shout o'er all our sorrows, And sing forever more, With Christ and all his army, On that celestial shore.	The URR is at hand. Anyone can try to escape to freedom. How happy it will be in heaven (the north).

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
The Hammers Keep Ringing	Work, 116.		The hammers keep ringing on somebody's coffin Makes me know my time ain't long. The hearse wheels rolling Somebody to the graveyard Makes me know my time ain't long.	Listen for a signal to move and travel to freedom.
The Old Ark's a Movering	Work, 175.	Genesis 8:13	O, the old ark's a-movering, And I'm going home. See that sister dressed so fine? She ain't got Jesus in a her mind. See that brother dressed so gay? Death's goin' a come for to carry him away. See that sister coming so slow? She wants to go to Heaven Fore the Heaven doors close. Th'aint but the one thing grieves my mind, sister's gone to Heav'n and left me behind. Th'old ark she reeled, the old ark she rocked, Old ark she landed on the mountain top.	My family and friends have moved towards freedom. I will too.
The Old Ship of Zion	Allen, 103.	Matthew 25:21	Don't you see that ship a sailing' G'wine over to the promised land! I asked my Lord should I ever be the one to go Sailing' over to the promised land She sails like she is heavy loaded. King Jesus is her Captain. The Holy Ghost is her pilot.	Dreaming of freedom and escape to the north.
The Old Ship of Zion	Smith, 1-7.	Matthew 25:21	Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah! I'm no ways weary! I'm no ways tired! O glory hallelujah! Just let me in the kingdom When the world ketch a fire! Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah! She has landed many thousands, hallelujah! She is rollin, jes rollin. She is coming in the harbor, hallelujah! She will land you safe in heaven, hallelujah! O get your ticket ready, the ship will soon be leavin,' O get your ticket ready to go. King Jesus is her captain, hallelujah! She will never rock nor totter, hallelujah!	This is a song of persistence. Freedom is worth any trial or struggle. The "ship" (URR) will carry you to freedom, like thousands before.
The Sun Mow's Down	Work, 229		Hurry mourner! The sun mows down, Goin' to pray until I die. Now what do you think about dying' children? I think it's mighty tryin' children. My Jesus will meet me in a that mornin'	Hurry and get ready to go, for it's almost night.
There's a Great Camp Meeting	Work, 145. Marsh, 280.	Numbers 14 Isaiah 5:27	Walk together children, don't you get weary. There's a great camp meeting In the Promise Land. Talk together, children. Sing together, children.	Don't get weary. Don't be impatient. Freedom is coming soon.
This is a Sin-tryin' World	Work, 137.	II Kings 2:11	O this is a sin-tryin' world. O Heav'n is so high and I am so low, I don't know whether I'll ever get to Heaven or no. Jordan's stream is chilly and wide, None can cross by the sanctified. Way over yonder in the harvest fields, The angels shoving at the chariot's wheels.	It feels like I am so far away from freedom. There are obstacles in my way, and angels are working to free others.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
This Train	White, 82.		This train is bound for glory, this train. Everybody on it must be holy. This train don't take no liars. This train don't take no gamblers.	A description of the URR.
There's a Meeting Here Tonight	Work, 219. Marsh, 218		Get you ready, there's a meeting here tonight, Come along, I know you by your daily walk. Camp meeting in the wilderness. Those angel wings are tipped with gold, That brought glad tidings to my soul.	Arranging a meeting time. The news of an angel (URR agent) makes me glad.
Trampin'	Harris, Steal Away	Revelation 21:2	I'm tramping', trying to make heaven my home. Well I've never been to heaven, But I've been told, The streets up there are paved with gold. Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, Sometimes my soul feels heavenly bound.	Contemplating being free and what it would take to escape.
Tryin' to Cross the Red Sea	Work, 208.	Exodus 14	Didn't ol' Pharoah get lost tryin' To cross the Red Sea. Creep along Moses, I thank God. I went down in the valley and I didn't go to stay, Tryin' to cross the Red Sea, My should got happy and I stayed all day. I went down in the valley to offer up prayer, When I got there old Satan was there Ol' Satan's mad and I am glad, He missed that should he thought he had I wonder what old Satan's grumblin' a bout, He's down in hell and can't get out.	I tried to escape and was almost caught by the slave hunter. The slave master is angry.
Tryin' to Get Home	Work, 55.	Job 13	Lord I'm bearin' heavy burdens, Tryin' to get home. Lord I'm climbin' high mountains, Tryin' to get home. Lord, I'm standin' hard trials tryin' to get home.	I'm trying to get home, despite the struggles before me.
Wade in the Water	Soul Praise, 53.	John 5:4 Matthew 28:19-20	Wade in the water, children. God's a going to trouble the water. See that host all dressed in white, The leader looks like the Israelite. See that band all dressed in red, I Looks like the band that Moses led. Look over yonder, what do you see? The Holy Ghost a coming on me. If you don't believe I've been redeemed, Just follow me down to Jordan's stream.	If you try escape, take to the water to disguise your scent. Moses (URR) led people through the water to freedom. Also represented baptism into a new life.
Wait a Little While	Marsh, 240.		Wait a little while, then we'll sing the new song. My heavenly home is bright and fair, No pain or sorrow enter there.	We need to wait before escaping.
Wake Me	Work, 247.	Mark 14:38	Wake me, shake me, don't let me sleep too late, Got to get up early in de morning' Going to swing on de golden gate. Get to de lot befo' I do, Catch my mule I'll be there too. Dis ol' gettin' up jes' fo' day, Never did like that thing no way.	To escape, make your way and travel through the night.

Title	Collection/ Citation	Scriptural Reference	Lyrics (relevant lyrics listed only)	Connotation/ Interpretation
Wake up, Jacob!	Allen, 65.	Genesis 28:10-12	Wake up, Jacob, day is a breaking. I'm on my way. I want to go to heaven when I die, Do love the Lord. Got some friends on de oder shore, I want to see 'em more and more.	An invitation to join an attempt at freedom.
W'en I'm Gone	McIlhenney, 40.		W'en I'm gone Lord, w'en I'm gone. Somebody's goin' t' miss me w'en I'm gone. Goin' t' miss me fer ma moan, Miss me fer ma groan.	Farewell song.
We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder	Work, 220.	Genesis 28:10-12	We are climbing Jacob's ladder, Soldier of the cross. Every round goes higher and higher.	Move higher toward freedom.
We Shall Walk Through the Valley	Marsh, 228	Matthew 18:12-14	We shall walk through the valley And the shadow of death, We shall walk through the valley in peace, If Jesus Himself shall be our leader We shall walk through the valley in peace. We shall meet our brother there. There will be no weeping there.	We shall go through struggle, but if we follow our leader, it will lead to joy.
When Moses Smote the Water	Marsh, 209.	Exodus 14	When Moses smote the water, The children all passed over, The sea gave away. O children ain't you glad You've left that sinful army?	There is a deliverer that will help you free yourself from slavery.
When the Train Comes Along	Work, 94 Newman, 65.		When the train comes along, I'll meet you at The Station when the train comes along. I may be blind an' cannot see, but I'll meet you At the Station when the train comes along. I may be lame an' cannot walk, but I'll meet You at The station when the train comes along. If my mother asks for me, Tell her death summons me; If my brother asks for me, Tell him death summons me.	A signal to a meeting place when the URR passes by. Tell my family I have gone.
You Must Have That True Religion	Carter, 1-8.		You must have that true religion, You must have your soul converted Or you can't cross there. Where have you been poor sinner? Where have you been, I say? I've been way down to the river of Jordan, No you can't cross there. Where have you been, good Christian? Where have you been so long? I've been way down in the valley for to pray, And I ain't done praying yet. Give me that true religion.	You must be ready to go through struggles and trials, or you won't be able to get to freedom.
You'd Better Min'	Work, 212.	Matthew 12:36 I Peter 4:5	You'd better min' how you talk, You'd better min' how you sing, You'd better min' how you shout, For you got to give account in Judgment, You'd better min'.	A warning message to be wary of who to trust and how much you should talk.
You'd Better Run	Work, 93	John 14: 1-7	You'd better run, run, to the city of refuge!	A signal to escape.

APPENDIX B. GLOSSARY¹⁵⁰

Word/Phrase	Coded Message Meaning
A friend of a friend sent me	Phrase used by solo fugitives indicating that they were part of the URR
A friend with friends	Password used to announce the arrival of an URR Conductor and fugitives
Abolitionist	Person who worked towards an end to slavery
Agent	Coordinator of the URR who provided contacts and directions to fugitives
Angels	Conductors, or agents on the URR
Ark	The "body" of escapees on the URR
Baggage	Fugitives on the URR
Band of Angels	URR conductors/agents
Baptized	To journey through a river to safety
Bells	An announcement, a call to action
Brakeman	Person who makes contacts for fugitive slaves
Bundles of Wood	Fugitives on the URR
Canaan	Canada
Captain	Master
Chariot	URR, or some other mode of transportation to freedom (boat, wagon, horse, etc)
The Jordan River	The Ohio River
Christians	Abolitionists
Church	The "body" or community of escapees on the URR
Climbing Jacob's Ladder	A connection between earth and heaven; moving northward, or "up" to freedom
Conductor	Person who brought fugitive slaves from slavery to freedom
Darkness	Closer or deeper into slavery
Depot	Houses, barns, haystacks, and secret passages inside farmhouses
Die/Go to Heaven	Freedom
Drinking Gourd	Big Dipper and the North Star
Dry goods	Female fugitive slaves
Egypt	Hell/the South/Bondage/Slavery

¹⁵⁰ The Underground Railroad is abbreviated as URR.

Word/Phrase	Coded Message Meaning
Elijah	An Old testament deliverer. Also, Elijah Anderson, an agent of the URR, would use his blacksmith's tools to sound out codes at river crossing points.
Fireman (keep the boilers hot)	Agents! Keep the train moving.
Fisherman	Agents that assisted fugitives at river crossings
Flying Bondsmen	Escaping slaves
Forwarding	Moving fugitives from station to station
Freedom Trails	Escape routes
Freedom Train	URR
French Leave	Covert departure
Gabriel	To alert to safety or danger (or Gabriel's trumpet)
Get on Board Little Children	Encouragement for those that wanted to flee slavery
Glory	Closer to freedom
Go Down Moses	Song that proclaimed it was not safe to come out, and there is danger afoot
God's gonna trouble the water	Travel through the water and move it around to wash away any scent from hunting dogs
Gospel Train	URR
Hammers	Signal that it was safe to cross the Ohio River. Using his blacksmith's tools, Elijah Anderson would hammer out code, sending the message of escape across the river to agents and fugitives on Boone County's crossing points.
Heaven	Canada/the northern states/freedom
Jerusalem	Canada/freedom
Jesus	Freedom (in the here and now, and the here-after)
John Henry/Hammer	Folk hero: worked as a hammer/driller on a railroad tunnel
Jubilee	Freedom (in the here and now, and the here-after)
Judgment	The day or process period of escape or the end of slavery
Jumping off Place	A place for escapees to find refuge or respite
Left foot, peg foot	Clue left by an URR worker with a wooden leg to warn fugitives
Let us Break Bread Together	Let us have a secret meeting
Letter	Ticket, a sign to escape, an agreement
Line	Travel route
Load of Potatoes	Slaves would hide underneath cloths and produce in traveling wagons

Word/Phrase	Coded Message Meaning
Manager	Someone in charge of a hiding place
Marching	Journeying---escape
Moses	Harriet Tubman, she helped her people escape slavery like Moses in the Old Testament...also John Brown, or other major figures.
Mourner	Escapees---fugitives---those looking to escape
Operator	Person who helped enslaved fugitives as a conductor or agent
Overflow Station	large places to hide for big groups of fugitives
Parcel	Expected fugitives
Patter Roller	Bounty hunters
Pharaoh/Charioteers	Plantation owner/slave masters
Pilot	Guide for fugitives
Praying	Plotting an escape
Preachers	URR leaders and agents
Preaching	Making plans to escape
Promised Land	Canada/the free states/freedom
Red Sea	Ohio River (or other body of water)
Redeemed	Freedom
River Jordan	The Ohio River
Roman Kingdom	Slavery/plantations
Sanctuary	A place to hide and rest
Satan	Slave master
Seeker /Watchman	Fugitive/slave master
Shepherds	Escorts for fugitives, or assistants
Shout	To escape, resist, or run
Singing	Running, escaping
Sinner	One bound by slavery
Soldier	Fugitive, a rebel
Stars refuse to shine	In the dark of night, no light
Station	A safe house, sanctuary
Station Master	Keeper of a safe house, often hid slaves in their homes at great personal danger

Word/Phrase	Coded Message Meaning
Steal away to Jesus	Used to alert fellow slaves that an escape attempt was anticipated, as a farewell song; also signified that there would be a meeting
Stockholder	A supporter of the URR, through money or supplies
Storm	The trials of slavery
Sunday	A day of rest, freedom from bondage, resurrection on Sunday, born again to a new life
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot	The URR is coming to pick up fugitives and take them to freedom. Be ready to escape. One of Tubman's favorite songs
Sword and Shield	Symbolized bravery and courage
Terminal	Canada/northern states/freedom
The dead trees will show you the way	Moss grows on the north side of dead trees, so if the North Star were not visible, they would know which direction to go
The river bank makes a mighty good road	Traveling through water was smart, as it washed off the scent from the tracking dogs
The river ends between two hills	The Tombigbee River in Mississippi
The wind blows from the South today	A signal that fugitives were to be wary of slave hunters
Tracks	Escape routes
Wade in the Water	Walk through the water so that the tracking dogs lose the scent, used by Tubman
Wheels	The URR...or other modes of transportation
When the great big river meets the little river	The Ohio River, and smaller, connected rivers
When the Roll is Called	To be gathered in freedom up north
When the sun come back and the first quail calls	A good time of the year for escape was early spring, when the first quail calls
Wilderness	Slavery, the unknown and dangerous nature of escape
Zion	Canada/northern states/freedom