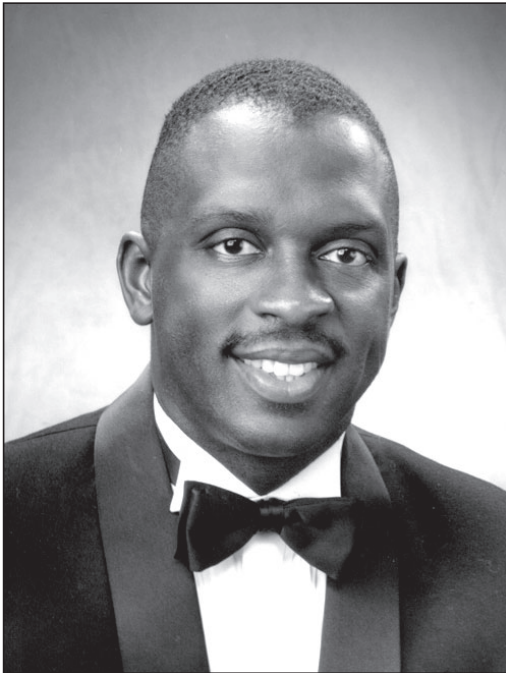


HIS LIGHT STILL SHINES

An Artistic Style for
Moses Hogan
Spirituals

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I was a pianist in the church, and it was a Baptist church, so there would be that element. I started as a classical pianist, and so there will be some classical element that you can relate to. I played the oboe for six years, and so in order to play the oboe I had to listen to the symphony orchestra, and that was my entrée to classical music... Then I lived in New Orleans, which is sort of a gumbo melting pot of all kinds of music... Therefore, my style emerges from those.

—Moses Hogan, 2002¹

The arranged spiritual is a fixed, non-improvised form of the spiritual that originated in the mid to late nineteenth century in schools created to educate formerly enslaved people of African descent.² The performance of arranged spirituals contains more elements of Western performance ideals than the folk spiritual—“the earliest form of indigenous a cappella religious music created by African Americans during slavery”³—and a precursor to the arranged spiritual. Moses George Hogan, a pianist, arranger of spirituals, and choral conductor with a passion for preserving African American spirituals, was a major figure associated with the revitalization of the performance of arranged spirituals in the mid-1990s, and whose arrangements of spirituals are still featured on the concerts of choral ensembles around the world. This article will examine Hogan’s spirituals, which embody his African American musical heritage and his training in Western art music.

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The popularity of Moses Hogan's music is likely connected to the ways in which his musical background informed the creativity found in his arrangements. Both music of the African American Baptist church and jazz, historically attributed to African Americans, embody what Olly Wilson described as specific conceptual approaches to music making that are common in West African and African American musics: the organization of rhythm based on the principle of rhythmic and implied metrical contrast, singing or playing an instrument in a percussive manner, the use of call-and-response, a high density of musical events, and the tendency to incorporate body movements in the music making process.⁴ The first four of these approaches are common in Moses Hogan spirituals.

Emily Akuno's model of creativity suggests that one's musical creativity is expressed as the sum of the interaction between culture (that which an individual absorbs directly from his or her environment) and information (knowledge and skills that are deliberately passed on to the individual).⁵ According to this model, the influence of culture on Hogan's style of arranging include his years of observing and participating in the choir at an African American Baptist church, where he recalled hearing anthems, spirituals, gospel music, and metered hymns. He credited this experience for inspiring his interest in unaccompanied arrangements of spirituals.⁶ A native of New Orleans, he also noted that jazz was a part of the soundscape of his childhood and was a minor influence on his style of arranging.

In addition to music present in his home church, Hogan's arrangements heavily reflect his six years as an oboist in school ensembles and his training at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, Oberlin Conservatory, Juilliard Conservatory, and Louisiana State University, which all align with Akuno's⁷ description of information. The various influences on Hogan's style of arranging require the conscientious choral conductor to be aware of the deep connections to both African American music aesthetics and choral performance practices of the Western art tradition. Failure to address the influence of either would leave a performance of his spirituals unbalanced and inappropriate.

In my 2014 dissertation on an ideal sound for Moses

Hogan spirituals,⁸ I reviewed documents in the Moses Hogan archives at Tulane University, interviewed former members of the Moses Hogan Chorale and the Moses Hogan Singers, and interviewed expert choral conductors to determine an ideal sound for Moses Hogan spirituals and methods for achieving this sound. Participants specifically discussed topics of choral tone, diction, articulation, dynamics, intonation, tempo, rhythm, phrasing, expression, and improvisation. I compared these findings to my personal experience as a piano and theory student of Moses Hogan and as a member of both the Moses Hogan Chorale and the Moses Hogan Singers. The following findings and recommendations for rehearsal and performance are based on data collected and analyzed for that study. While this article does include a few recommendations that were suggested by study participants, the focus is on highlighting aspects of choral performance that should receive special attention when performing Hogan's spirituals. The specific manner of developing those skills should be left to the expertise of the conductor.

Choral Tone

An ideal choral tone for Moses Hogan spirituals was described by former members of his ensembles and expert choral conductors as warm, rich, round, dark, and heavy, with a slightly lighter tone used for fast pieces and darker sounds used on slow pieces. Hogan hand-picked his ensemble members to include a mixture of younger and older voices, lighter and darker voices, all of which blended together to create a particular sound that Hogan desired for his arrangements. His method for creating a choral tone specific to his arrangements through the member selection process is context-specific. Singers must refrain from artificially altering the sound to produce exaggerated approximations of a dark choral tone.

There are additional characteristics of Hogan's ensembles one might consider for each section of the ensemble. In Hogan's arrangements, not only does the soprano line usually carry the melody, there are often very high *obbligato* parts written for the soprano voices. Sopranos in his ensembles would sing up to C6 with

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relative ease while matching vowels and color with the rest of the section in that range. They also possessed a lyric quality and refrained from using a wide vibrato.

The alto line in Moses Hogan spirituals is the only one that is not featured regularly in solo lines; however, the tone of the alto section is important to effectively performing Moses Hogan spirituals. The characteristic warmth in the alto section supported the richness and warmth of the entire ensemble, a major component of Hogan's artistic style. With some parts that were as low as D3, he chose voices for this section that could sing comfortably in a wide range. They also possessed the strong musicianship necessary to maintain the inner notes of dense chords while still blending with the ensemble as a whole.

Like the sopranos, tenors had a wide range and were capable of singing easily in the upper part of their voices. The tenor line often carries a melody, and tenors were required to sing in a manner that would alternately feature the melody and blend in with the rest of the ensemble. Like the altos, tenors often held the inner notes of dense chords and had the aural skills to do so well.

The heavy tone of the bass section provided a solid foundation for the ensembles' tone. As a child, Hogan often sat in the bass section of the choir with his father, and that influence is seen in his music. The range of the bass section in his arrangements can be fairly low, and the section is often featured in small motives or as a countermelody. Because Hogan frequently used the basses to lead and support the ensemble, the voices of the bass section should have the versatility to quickly alternate between these two roles.

Breath Support

The Moses Hogan Chorale was formed in 1993 and comprised many well-respected, seasoned professional musicians from New Orleans. In 1999, Hogan phased out the Chorale and created the Moses Hogan Singers by integrating younger voices from around the country with some former members of the Chorale. According to several study participants, the Chorale's continued struggle to maintain intonation and control vibrato prompted this decision. One former member

of both the Chorale and the Singers recalled, "When Moses was talking to me when he was in the process of starting the Singers...he said he had a vision to write more music and work on music sometimes the older members weren't able... their voices weren't as agile... as they used to be, and just keeping stuff in tune [was difficult since] his music is a cappella."

The ability to perform choral music well requires a well-trained vocal mechanism, and Hogan's arrangements are no exception. A major component of strong vocal technique is the ability to maintain proper breath support. Proper breath support is related to intonation and performing with a vibrato, which should not be overly pronounced in the performance of his music. Indeed, many of Hogan's works contain dense chords, and a heavy vibrato might hinder the clarity of the chords. He routinely asked his members to eliminate the vibrato in their voices, and he likely did this for different reasons with the Chorale and the Singers. Although the Chorale had the tone he wanted at the time, some of the older members had wider vibratos and had trouble maintaining proper intonation. He addressed this by asking them to sing without vibrato. In the case of the Moses Hogan Singers, the voices were generally younger, but most had been trained for solo performing careers and were accustomed to singing to be heard alone rather than to blend with an ensemble. With a limited amount of time for rehearsals with the latter of the two of ensembles (usually a day or two before performances or recordings), he asked the Singers to sing without vibrato to create the most unified sound possible in a short period of time.⁹

Diction and Dialect

Moses Hogan began with the text when writing his arrangements, making diction of high importance when preparing an ensemble to perform his music. He stated that the rhythmic nature of his pieces was inspired by the text, therefore the relationship of the text and rhythm should always be considered. One study participant noted that Hogan was "really specific about diction when the diction influenced the rhythm of the piece."¹⁰ In several Moses Hogan pieces, word painting is used to highlight various aspects of the text.

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The most frequently cited example of this is in “Battle of Jericho” (Figure 1), where consonants used in the tenor and bass sections are pitted against consonants sung in the soprano and alto sections to create the feeling of a battle. Another example is found in “Wade in the Water” (Figure 2 on page 47), where the contour of the phrases and the dynamics imitate waves of water.

In a related vein, dialect is a topic of great interest in the performance of spirituals. Hogan chose members who had experience with some form of African American vernacular language, who were trained in

English diction, and who had performed spirituals. The combination of these three sets of experiences allowed the performers to use their classical training while judiciously incorporating elements of the African American vernacular in performance. I believe this is why there is little indication of how the words should be pronounced in his earlier arrangements. Later arrangements tend to contain more detailed information about how dialect should be approached, a deliberate move by Hogan after he realized that his lack of attention to dialect confused some conductors and ensemble members. Because there

3

mf marcato

S Josh-ua fit the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho, Jer-i-cho, Jer-i-cho, Josh-

mf marcato

A Josh-ua fit the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho, Jer-i-cho, Jer-i-cho, Josh-

mp

T Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle,

mp

B Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle,

5

S -ua fit the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho and the walls come tum-ba-lin'

A -ua fit the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho and the walls come tum-ba-lin'

T Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle,

B Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle, Josh-ua, the Bat-tle,

Figure 1. Moses Hogan, *Battle of Jericho*, mm. 3–6.

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was almost no indication on how Hogan addressed dialect in his rehearsal, following are some general recommendations from expert choral conductors interviewed for the study.

Performing dialect in spirituals include using Marshall's¹¹ rules of diction for the article "the" when using dialect. When a "d" is substituted for "th" in the word "the," it should be pronounced as [di] before a vowel sound and as [dɔ] before a consonant sound. For example, in the phrase "ride up in de chariot," one would pronounce the article "de" as [dɔ]. In the phrase "chatter wit de angels," one would pronounce the same article "de" as [di]. Words ending on an "ng" sound should use a barely articulated or nasalized "n" sound. Ending "t" sounds should stop short of being plosive and be approached closer to a "d" sound. This should only be done when the result will not hinder the clarity of the text.

Care should be taken to not over-pronounce words. Familiarity with the speech represented in dialect is important, because songs performed with dialect should follow the natural flow of speech. The same attention given to English, Italian, French, and German diction should also be given to dialect. Knowledge of English diction is not sufficient for performing dialect; certain rules that apply to English diction might not apply to dialect. In addi-

tion to the recommendations above, listen to one of the many recordings of Hogan's ensembles, as these contain the sound he aimed to represent in his scores. As with any spiritual, the use of dialect should flow within and not impede the performance of Moses Hogan spirituals.

Dynamics

In general, dynamics in Moses Hogan spirituals are indicated explicitly in the score. Often changes in dynamics can be very drastic, are used for dramatic effect, and serve to augment aspects of the score that are designed to shape the story of the piece. An ensemble will likely visit a wide range of dynamics in one arrangement of Moses Hogan spirituals. Hogan was especially particular about the way in which *pianissimos* were performed in his ensembles and would often ask his singers to deliver the softest sound possible at appropriate points. One study participant remarked, "Sometimes we'd hum it or 'oo' so low down, I'd be wondering, 'Am I still singing? Did my voice cut off?' You'd be scared to come back in!"

In Figure 3 on page 48 (Abide with Me, measures 40-44), the *mezzo piano* in all parts gradually diminishes to a *pianissimo* in the last measure (the *pianissimo* is not specifically stated in the score, but the recording of this piece as well as my recollection of multiple performanc-

The image shows a musical score for the spiritual "Wade in the Water" by Moses Hogan, measures 7 through 10. The score is written for five parts: Solo (or small ensemble), Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Wade in the wa - ter, wade in the wa - ter, chil - dren." The dynamics are marked as *mf* (mezzo-forte) for the Solo part, *f* (forte) for the Soprano and Alto parts, and *mp sim.* (mezzo-piano, *simulato*) for the Tenor and Bass parts. The Solo part has a melodic line with a fermata over the final note. The Soprano and Alto parts have a more rhythmic, chordal accompaniment. The Tenor and Bass parts have a similar rhythmic accompaniment, with the Bass part having a fermata over the final note.

Figure 2. Moses Hogan, *Wade in the Water*, mm. 7–10.

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es with his ensembles show this was the expectation). When performing Moses Hogan's arrangements, note that *pianissimos* should be taken to the extreme. Taking *pianissimos* to the extreme in Moses Hogan spirituals supports feelings of tension and resolution indicated by the notes and rhythm and enhances the total performance experience.

Rhythm

One of the more complicated aspects of Moses Hogan's arrangements is the rhythm. The voices can alternately imitate the patterns of drums, the sound of a shout, the movement of wheels, or a battle cry, each accomplished partially by using complex rhythms. Understanding how all the rhythms work together to create a complete tapestry of sound can aid choirs in performing the complex rhythms often present in Hogan's arrangements.

Rhythmic notation represents how the music is to be performed, but there is always an underlying pulse to

Hogan's arrangements that is most prominent in faster pieces. This can be as simple as a lilting feel to as complex as layered rhythmic cells. Once an ensemble has learned how to read the notes, they must develop sensitivity to the underlying pulse of the arrangement. In other words, they must *feel* the rhythm.

I recall practicing one of Hogan's earlier, simpler arrangements during a dress rehearsal for a performance with the Chorale. In response to a lackluster performance of the song, Hogan asked us to feel the song as if we were in a church service. He clapped his hands, patted his foot, and slightly bounced in a way that was reminiscent of an old, African American Baptist church. Immediately, we began to sing the piece with a renewed energy. This is just one example of moving beyond notation to capture the feel of the music.

One way Hogan illustrated the underlying pulse of the rhythm is by using accents in his music. In pieces such as "I'm Gonna Sing 'til the Spirit Moves in My Heart" (Figure 4 on page 49) and "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit," (Figure 5 on page 49) accents mark

40 Slower *mp* *rall. poco a poco*

S me. A - men, a - men, a - men.

A me. A - men, a - men, a - men.

T A - men,* a - men, a - men, a - men.

B A - men,* a - men, a - men, a - men.

*Close "N" of each *ame(n)* to hum through ending.

Figure 3. Moses Hogan, *Abide With Me*, mm. 40–44.

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an underlying rhythm for different vocal lines. When each section is familiar with the accents in their vocal line and they perform them as such, arrangements with complicated polyrhythms lose the feeling of overwhelming complexity and the underlying feeling that Hogan created with polyrhythms emerges.

Unless indicated in the score, there should be no swinging of the rhythm. Although this may be appropriate in some genres and perhaps a convention used

in other spirituals, it is not a practice he employed with his own choirs. Roland Carter, noted choral conductor, arranger of spirituals, and who served as a mentor to Hogan offered the following insight: “So many people approach spirituals with the idea, ‘Oh, we gotta swing it. Put just a little before the beat.’ I think that is deadly... For the most part we have written down what we wanted and if you want to do your arrangement, then do your own arrangement.”

Figure 4. Moses Hogan, *I'm Gonna Sing 'til the Spirit Moves in My Heart* mm. 10–12.

Figure 5. Moses Hogan, *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit*, mm. 1–4.

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Phrasing

At times Hogan would also add repeated phrases for dramatic effect, with the intention that each should be performed differently. There was a natural arc to the repeated phrases, which at times appeared in sets of three. The first of the three would serve as an introduction, usually performed at *mezzo piano* or *mezzo forte*. The next would be performed with more intensity and might be indicated by a change in dynamics or pitch. The final phrase would be performed at either the same dynamic level as the first phrase, slightly softer, or would be marked with a *diminuendo*. Occasionally there would be a phrase inserted between the second and third repeated phrase, yet the arc of the three repeated phrases should remain the same. Many repeated phrases in Hogan's early spirituals can be approached in this manner.

Moses Hogan ensemble members recalled that one of the most challenging aspects of phrasing was executing the breath. The phrases in Hogan's scores can be very long, and Hogan expected them to be performed as written (see Figure 3). One participant joked, "We never did breathe. There's your phrasing!" but Hogan's ensemble members would usually coordinate among themselves to stagger their breathing during very long phrases whether or not the directive was given from Hogan.

Expression

Hogan used the combination of the elements of choral performance addressed in this article in expression. It was not a separate element but interwoven into all aspects of performance. Few would dispute that the history of spirituals is deep and rich and is simultaneously a remnant of a horrific chapter in American history. Choral conductors who choose to perform Hogan's spirituals must find a way to connect singers with the history of the pieces if they truly wish to attain Hogan's artistic style. The texts of spirituals can contain hidden meanings and an understanding of those meanings is important in performing Hogan's spirituals. For instance, it is often noted that some spirituals were not simply religious texts but were codes for enslaved people to communicate secretly with each other. Understanding the underlying meanings in spirituals, as well as the historical, cultural, and social context of their development and dissemination,

will aid conductors and students alike in interpreting spirituals.

Singers can also be encouraged to develop a personal story to assist them in connecting to the message of the piece. Although the original context of the folk spiritual is context specific, there are some aspects of the songs to which singers can connect their personal stories. This is not to equate any modern American experience to that of being enslaved; in singing music that is based on spirituals, however, one might relate to feelings of loneliness and longing, moments of joy, connection with a higher power, and other sentiments expressed in spirituals. By doing so, performers will be better able to express the essence of the spiritual.

Former ensemble members shared that although expression was important to Hogan, he did not spend much time addressing it. This element of performance came naturally for them, as he used aforementioned aspects of choral performance (e.g., choral tone, diction, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, and phrasing) as a medium to express the sentiment of a piece. Under his direction, expression was not just an element of choral performance, it was a goal.

Other Considerations

Improvisation. Moses Hogan was very specific about how his arrangements should be performed. Although some conductors may incorporate improvisation in their performances of spirituals, improvisation on Hogan's arrangements are not in line with his artistic style, and improvisation should be avoided in the performance of his arrangements of spirituals.

Recordings. Hogan was deliberate about making recordings of as many of his arrangements as possible, and the process would take several hours over the course of two or more days. In the recording sessions, Hogan was very particular about all the aforementioned aspects of choral performance. He often recorded the same piece several times over several years, working more and more toward the perfect performance. It is highly recommended that one listens to Moses Hogan's own recordings to understand his artistic style.

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A Visual Model of the

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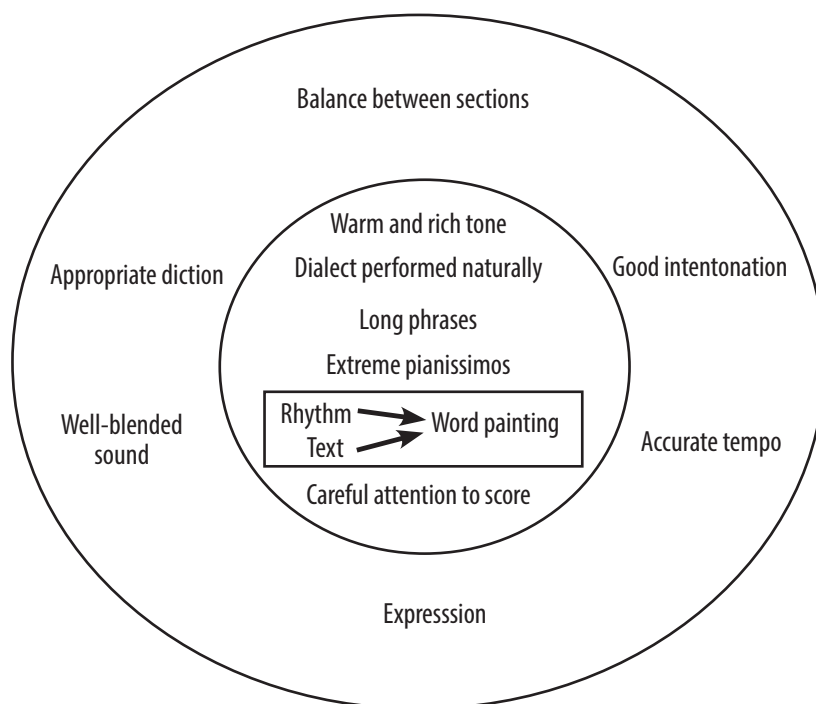
Some elements of choral performance are more important than others in the performance of Hogan's spirituals. This principle is represented in Table 1. Most choirs of the American choral tradition would strive to produce appropriate diction and a well-blended sound; to achieve balance between sections, good intonation, and expression; and to follow an accurate and appropriate tempo. These are not unique to Hogan's artistic style and are found in the outermost circle.

The inner circle of the diagram contains elements that were important to Hogan, but may not have been of similar significance in other arrangements or for other ensembles. Those values, in increasing order of importance, include the production of a warm and rich tone, dialect performed naturally, special consideration for long phrases, extreme pianissimos, rhythm and text used in word painting, and careful attention to the score.

Conducting Style

Certain aspects of Hogan's artistic style were produced in an organic manner by his members. His first groups, the New World Ensemble and the Moses Hogan Chorale, comprised mainly Western-trained African American musicians from the Deep South. All of his subsequent groups grew from that core, and new members, most of whom came from similar backgrounds, adjusted to the style of the group. Study participants indicated that much of this adaptation to his style occurred through recommendations from fellow section members, a point to which I can also attest. I propose that intensive work on certain aspects of choral performance specific to his arrangements was not necessary because of shared cultural and musical understandings among his members and guidance from veteran members that took place within the ensemble. There were, however, some remarks on Hogan's style of directing his ensembles I will share.

Table 1. A Visual Model of Moses Hogan's Artistic Style



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The primary manner in which Hogan communicated his artistic style was through verbal communication. He would describe the sound, play examples on the piano, tell singers what he wanted them to do, and give swift and direct critique when anything was not to his liking. In addition, he used lots of repetition, sometimes focusing on just a few measures for very long periods of time.

His conducting gestures were minimal, but his body movements were instrumental in conveying desired aspects of performance. They were so integral to his conducting that seven of the ten former ensemble members in my study commented on it unprompted. I recall a dress rehearsal for an upcoming performance, where the Chorale kept rushing an up-tempo piece. He stopped the rehearsal and was obviously frustrated. A veteran member of the Chorale broke the tension by loudly proclaiming, “Follow the hips!” After the laughter died down, we resumed our rehearsal and “followed the hips” with no more tempo issues. His body movements were sufficient to keep the Chorale moving as a unit.

His facial expressions gave clear indications about his assessment of the performance. In one concert, one might read delight, intense concentration, and displeasure among a myriad of other sentiments. One participant remembered, “His eyes would kill on stage if something was to happen with us on stage.” Another recalled that, “If we were going too fast, he made us keenly aware because his eyes would bulge.” Through minimal hand gestures, body movements, and facial expressions, Hogan developed his own way of communicating with his ensembles.

Conclusion—His Light Still Shines

On February 11, 2003, the world of choral music lost a great presence when Moses Hogan passed away, however Hogan left a strong legacy of excellence in arranging and performing African American spirituals. The fact that choirs around the world continue to honor his work is a testament to the depth of his impact, but his legacy extends beyond the performance of African American spirituals. His work inspired later arrangers and composers to compose and arrange music rooted in their own cultural heritage and demonstrated how that music could be performed and appreciated internation-

ally. The popularity of his arrangements has continued to grow since his death and shows little signs of slowing. Although there are many who interpret Hogan’s spirituals, there is often debate about the validity of various interpretations. It is doubtful that those discussions will cease; however, these considerations are presented as a research-based contribution to the various arguments and to provide choral conductors and ensemble members alike with information regarding the history and artistic style of Moses Hogan. Forty years after he first began arranging spirituals, Moses Hogan’s light still shines—wherever his works are performed, whenever audiences are moved to tears or roaring applause by one of his arrangements, and whenever the contribution and value of African American spirituals is recognized. ◻

NOTES

- ¹ Moses G. Hogan, interview with Kathy Romey, 2002.
- ² Mellonee V. Burnim, “Spirituals,” in *African American Music: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., (New York: Routledge, 2015), 62.
- ³ Emily A. Akuno, “A Conceptual Framework for Research in Music and Music Education within a Cultural Context,” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* no. 147 (Winter 2000/2001): 3-8.
- ⁴ Olly Wilson, “The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African-American Music” in *New Perspectives on Music Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern* (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1992).
- ⁵ Emily A. Akuno, “A Conceptual Framework for Research,” 54.
- ⁶ Moses Hogan, interview by Kathy Romey, 2002.
- ⁷ Emily A. Akuno, “A Conceptual Framework.”
- ⁸ Loneka Wilkinson Battiste, “Music Down in My Soul: Achieving a Sound Ideal for Moses Hogan Spirituals” (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 2014).
- ⁹ I share this with the understanding that this is a highly debated technique in choral music. It is not meant as a recommendation, but rather has a description of what occurred in Hogan’s ensembles.
- ¹⁰ Loneka Wilkinson Battiste, “Music Down in My Soul.”
- ¹¹ Madeleine Marshall, *The Singer’s Manual of English Diction* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1953).