



# R. Nathaniel Dett's *The Chariot Jubilee* An Instrument for Fostering Racial Harmony

JASON MAX FERDINAND

The progress of people of African heritage in classical music offers an intricate portrait that has not always been clearly visible. However, their contribution can be readily seen in Negro spirituals, jazz, gospel, and other American popular styles. Jazz rhythms and blues intervals infuse concert music of Ives, Gershwin, and Copland in America; Ravel, Milhaud, and Dvořák abroad; and many more recent composers from both sides of the Atlantic. Yet, many music history books offer an inadequate account of the

many significant contributions to classical music composition from persons of African descent such as Robert Nathaniel Dett. Over the last century and a half, however, it has been demonstrated that both classical music and Black music have become diverse and nuanced. This article seeks to position Robert Nathaniel Dett's *The Chariot Jubilee* for SATB, solo, orchestra, and organ as an instrument for fostering racial harmony during a time in American history in which it is much needed.

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# R. Nathaniel Dett's *The Chariot Jubilee*

## Biography

Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) was a composer, choral director, pianist, and music educator of the twentieth century. As with any musician, he is best understood when he is seen against his ancestral backdrop. Dett arose in the American musical scene when the Negro people of the United States experienced financial despair, thwarted desires, educational adversity, and physical brutality. The idioms of nineteenth-century Romanticism dominated his musical outpourings. Dett, like Dvořák, did not start a new school by using Negro tunes in his larger forms. Nevertheless, he did make dramatic and effective use of Negro spirituals and clothed them in classical garb.

He became, by the historical milieu of his time, an attentive social thinker, and his concerns and attitudes reverberate in his musical outpourings. Instead of conforming to more recognized musical forms, Dett chose to walk the path of preserving and further developing his unique Afro-American musical heritage. The Negro spiritual served as the toolbox from whence Dett expanded the simple tunes of the cotton fields into more extensive art forms.

Robert Nathaniel Dett was born in Drummondville, Ontario, Canada on October 11, 1882. Both of his parents were musical. Dett's first music lessons were with an English lady. At age eleven, an Austrian served as Nathaniel's music teacher. By this time, his aptitude to improvise and his natural musicality blossomed. When he was fourteen years old, he worked as a bell-boy at the Cataract Hotel in Niagara Falls where he was allowed to play the grand piano during his free time. His playing attracted the admiring attention of guests of the hotel, and he made many friends.

The singing of Negro spirituals was not foreign to Dett, but for him, they had no particular meaning. In fact, Dett himself later shared that the discussion of Negro spirituals or other Negro folk music was embarrassing to Black people, as the general public attitude toward such music was unappreciative or even mildly contemptuous. Dett spoke of this feeling in an interview published by *Musical America* in 1918.

The Negro people as a whole cannot be looked to as a very great aid in the work of conserving

their folk music. At the present time, they are inclined to regard it as a vestige of the slavery they are trying to put behind them and to be ashamed of it.<sup>1</sup>

In 1903, Dett enrolled in a five-year course of study at Oberlin College in Ohio, one of the finest conservatories of music. In a bid to foster diversity, Oberlin reached out to Black students encouraging them to enroll. Dett had a very charismatic personality and quickly became well loved by both faculty and students. Warner Concert Hall was always crowded when Dett gave recitals.<sup>2</sup> This trait of being able to bring people of different races together for a central purpose would be seen time and time again in the life and career of Dett.

Dett accomplished an admirable academic record: he gained entry into Phi Beta Kappa, was the first Negro to complete the Bachelor of Music degree, and graduated with first-class honors. Dett's studies at Oberlin included four years of composition. The most considerable influence on Dett was the instruction in composition that he received from G. W. Andrews. It was also during his time at Oberlin that the Kneisel Quartet appeared in recital. When Dett heard the slow movement from Dvořák's Quartet in F, which was based on traditional airs, the idea was born of using Negro folk melodies in art music. His knowledge of counterpoint and harmony coupled with a spark of the Negro tradition and the zest of being a recent graduate launched Dett in what was to become a career in serious music.

Subsequently, he acquired a succession of teaching positions:

- Lane College, Jackson, Tennessee (1908-1911)
- Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri (1911-1913)
- Hampton Institute (later University), Hampton, Virginia (1913-1931)
- Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina (1937-1942)

His teaching career was punctuated by further peri-

ods of study:

- Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1920)
- Fountainebleau School of Music, Paris, France (1929)
- Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York (1931-1932)

Additionally, he had two doctoral degrees conferred on him from Harvard and Oberlin. Dett joined the United Service Organization (USO) as musical director in February of 1943. In July of that year, he went on tour to Battle Creek, Michigan, to direct the musical arm of the USO club. On October 2, 1943, Dett died in Battle Creek from a heart attack.

## *The Chariot Jubilee*

Like Dvořák, Coleridge-Taylor, and Harry T. Burleigh, among others, Dett truly was sold on the idea that the Negro folk songs were significant enough to merit the construction of larger forms around them. Armed with his distinguished training, he proved to be a champion for that cause. Though he distinguished himself as a concert pianist and teacher, he is best known as a composer and has 100 published works, principally piano, vocal, and choral. Among them was *The Chariot Jubilee*, birthed in 1919. Despite the success and glowing praise for the initial performance, interest in the work seemed to have come to a virtual halt. There were no documented performances for another seventy-seven years. In the year leading up to the seventieth birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, interest in performing works based on Negro spirituals became increasingly popular. *The Chariot Jubilee* was often considered, but the orchestra parts could not be found. Hale Smith, a noted African American composer, recreated an orchestration that a number of performing organizations utilized.

A revised and more accessible orchestration of the piece is used as we examine the work's musical fabric. In it, we will discover seamless voice leading, an intricate weave of slow and fast-moving vocal parts, and a bevy of rhythmic variations. There is even an evoca-

tion of trains, which spirituals often compared to heavenly chariots. As the analysis of this work will show *The Chariot Jubilee* is disciplined, yet decorously expressive.

## *Text*

The text, based on both Scripture and folklore, serves as a source of inspiration for composers of many genres. Moreover, African American spirituals are revered as heartfelt expressions of faith. The two sources of Dett's inspiration—Scripture and folklore—are so cleverly combined that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate them.

The form of the text is very free and embraces a number of styles. Blank verse is often used in tandem with rhymed sections. Dett does not seem to draw his lyrical content from a single passage, but rather a collection of stories, passages, and biblical events. Table 1 on page 28 includes a hypothesized summary of those correlations that are most recognizable and indicated.

## *Score and Musical Analysis*

Frederick Martens presented a critical description of the oratorio in 1921:

It is only a short score of some thirty-one pages, yet may claim to be a masterpiece of its kind. It has that inner cohesion, that unity of inspiration, of progressive culminating movement, the free yet musically logical simultaneous development which harmonizes rich detail with breadth of outline, all of which are so much more important than any mere outward and uninspired formal development. It is built—a whole throbbing, pulsing movement, whose fermatas are less interruptions of the mounting tide of choral motion than points of emphasis and departure for a more sustained and colorful working up—on a few themes. These the composer has handled with a master's control of his material. The richest variety of dynamic and interpretative effect, sole passages with cantellations that stand forth gloriously, a splendidly contrasted handling of inner and outer voices in a counterpoint which is never arid: an ever-increasing fervor of expression, a



# R. Nathaniel Dett's *The Chariot Jubilee*

**Table 1. The Chariot Jubilee Text and Hypothesized References**

<i>The Chariot Jubilee</i> Text – R. Nathaniel Dett	Hypothesized References
<p>Down from the heavens, a golden chariot swinging, Comes God's promise of salvation. (Amen, Amen!) Hallelujah, hallelujah!</p>	<p><b>Golden Chariot:</b> may refer to 2 Kings 2:11 where Elijah is taken up in a flaming chariot.</p> <p><b>Swinging:</b> probably appropriated from the Negro spiritual, <i>Swing Low Sweet Chariot</i>.</p> <p><b>God's promise of salvation:</b> in Scripture and in the slave-spiritual tradition, salvation (healing, freedom) was thought to come from above (John 3:31, 36)</p> <p><b>Amen! Hallelujah!</b> As one would imagine, these words are found throughout the Bible. However, Revelation 19 is a freedom context, so this may apply.</p>
<p>Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home, Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home!</p>	<p>See "<b>Golden Chariot</b>" and "<b>Swinging</b>" above.</p>
<p>God made a covenant, For the glory of His grace Through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His gospel, full and free, Like a chariot swung from heav'n, Shall bear the true believer home, Safely home.</p>	<p><b>God made a covenant:</b> This is an interesting line. Dett might be alluding to God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15: 18-21). The covenant motif runs throughout Scripture, starting in the old testament and making its way to the new testament. The basic summary is what we find in Dett's text "God made a covenant. . . through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." This is the centerpiece of the covenant motif (Jeremiah. 31:33, 34; Hebrews 8:6). Covenant = promise of salvation = salvation = safely home</p> <p><b>For the glory of His grace:</b> Ephesians 1:6, 7 (read vv. 3-6, 7-14 for context). The covenant is essentially about God giving grace in and through Jesus.</p> <p><b>His gospel, full and free, like a chariot swung from heaven:</b> Here, he connects gospel with promise of salvation, both of which come/swing down from heaven. . . full and free=grace.</p> <p><b>True believer:</b> John 3:16, 18, 36.</p>
<p>Salvation, sweet cov'nant of the Lord, I shall ride up in that chariot in that morning. (Tell it, tell it.)</p>	<p>See "<b>Salvation</b>," "<b>Cov'nant</b>" and "<b>Golden Chariot</b>" above.</p>
<p>He who doth in Christ believe, Though he were dead, Yet shall he live. King Jesus triumphed o'er the grave! His grace alone Can sinners save.</p>	<p><b>He who doth in Christ believe:</b> John 3:16, 18, 36.</p> <p><b>Though he were dead, yet shall he live:</b> John 11:25, 26.</p> <p><b>King Jesus triumphed o'er the grave:</b> 1 Corinthians 15:55; Acts 2:24.</p> <p><b>His grace alone can sinners save:</b> Ephesians 2:8, 9.</p>
<p>O Hallelujah!</p>	<p>See "<b>Amen! Hallelujah!</b>" above.</p>

## An Instrument for Fostering Racial Harmony

stretto of movement, sonorous body of choral sound, and passionate intensity culminate in the magnificent allegro finale, rightly marked con abandon. The low basses at times have the ritual quality of the Greek Catholic male-choir voices. If R. Nathaniel Dett had written no other work, *The Chariot Jubilee* would suffice to make his name. It has potentialities of effect present in very few, if any, choral works of its length.<sup>3</sup>

Dett used the spiritual, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, or fragments, for motivic, harmonic, and contrapuntal development. The harmony employed in the piece includes nineteenth and twentieth-century idioms. Several scales are used, including major, minor, chromatic, pentatonic, and modal. Contrast is achieved through new themes, varying rhythms, textural changes, and accompaniment treatment. A reduced instrumental accompaniment including flute, oboe, bassoon, french horn, piano, organ, and a string quartet, affords access



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to choirs of many levels the opportunity to delve into this luminous work. This is the edition introduced and referenced in this article.

The oratorio's opening chords are a reflection of the homesickness, turmoil, and loneliness that an individual slave may have felt while working in the cotton field (Figure 1). The anguish of the opening B minor chord,

followed by an E minor<sup>7</sup>, followed by a more hopeful E<sub>2</sub><sup>4</sup> chord, the increasing of the dynamic leading to a D<sup>9</sup> chord and then finally the pleading sentiment of the negro spiritual is outlined in the bassoon and organ in what will be the home key of G major. A similar chord sequence starts at measure 11. However, the Negro spiritual theme is stated in Bb major, a minor third up

Figure 1. R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Chariot Jubilee*, mm. 1–10.

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from the first statement. This introductory statement pays tribute to Largo of Dvořák's *New World Symphony*.

At measure 21, Dett constructs a clarion call out of the despair portrayed in the piece's opening moments. At measure 27, we see the Negro spiritual theme in the organ and French horn. This time the Negro spiritual melody is repeated over four measures, thereby adding to the gesture of anticipatory "hope." The second part of the Negro spiritual melody "coming for to carry me home" is, for the first time, heard in measure 37 in the flute and organ.

The tenor solo enters with a simple folk-like melody, and almost immediately, Dett uses word-painting on the word "swinging." The hope on which the entire piece is based is stated in the next line, "comes God's promise of salvation," to which the chorus answers, "Amen." As the rhythmic pulse of the music intensifies, symbolizing the chariot's movement, we see Dett using the tenor solo as a counterpoint to the choir. I find the introduction from measures 1-66 to be very effective with its broadly arching and entirely unified lament moving effortlessly to its culmination. The backdrop of the oratorio is now set, and all of the musical themes have been introduced.

After the introductory phrase's emphatic conclusion, the music now returns to its melancholic and more reflective frame of mind. It is unmistakable that Dett relished setting in antiphonal style, SA voices versus TB voices. At measure 68, this is the compositional tool employed (Figure 2). The tenors and basses state the melody of the spiritual on which Dett has based the piece. The melody of the first soprano line has the characteristics of a cantus firmus. The roles of the antiphonal choirs reverse at measure 76. The tenor soloist joins the female voices as the accompaniment thickens. The harmony here is over an e minor chord as opposed to the initial G major.

Another technique that Dett uses in measure 76 is an accompaniment that serves as harmonic counterpoint to the melody. In the choral score on which this new instrumentation was based, a new melody appears in the organ. That idea appears in the flute and oboe parts in this edition. The textual imagery in the soprano and alto lines in measures 82 and 83 is crystal clear (Figure 3 on page 32). "Swing" uses two slurred notes with a rocking feeling, and then the octave drop depicts the word "low." Another trait of Dett's writing is setting the solo voice as counterpoint to the choir. It is

68 *a tempo*  
S *div. mf*  
Down from the heav - ens, a gold - en char - iot swing - ing.  
A *mf*  
Down from the heav - ens, a gold - en char - iot swing - ing.  
T *mf*  
Sing low, sweet char - - i - ot,  
B *mf*  
Sing low, sweet char - - i - ot,

Figure 2. R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Chariot Jubilee*, mm. 68–69.

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82 *più rit.*

Fl. *p*

Ob. *p*

Bsn. *mp* *p*

Hn. *mp* *p*

Pno.

Org. *p*

Ten. Solo *f* *p*

S *div.* *unis.* *div.* *unis.* *div.* *f* *p*

A *f* *p*

T *f* *p*

B *f* *p*

Vln. 1 *mp* *p*

Vln. 2 *mp* *p*

Vla. *mp* *p*

Vc. *mp* *p*

swing low, sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

swing low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

swing low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

comes God's prom - ise of sal - va - tion, swing - - - ing low.

comes God's prom - ise of sal - va - tion, swing - - - ing low.

Figure 3. R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Chariot Jubilee*, mm. 82–85.

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seen here in measures 82-85 as the tenor serves as an obbligato voice.

The choir cleverly introduces the new text in measures 86 and 87 without any instrumental accompaniment. This simple technique is very effective in making the text plain. Of note is the musical and textual differentiation between “God” and “Lord.” In measures 88 and 89, “God” is followed by a sudden instrumental hit on a G major chord. In measures 90-92, “Lord” is given a more horizontal accompaniment. Dett describes the Christian-based teaching that the “Lord” was the person sent to earth to carry out the plan of salvation as opposed to “God” who sits in heaven.

The next phrase, measures 95-122, is the longest of the piece; this is the development section where Dett expands the musical ideas that he previously introduced. In this passage, we see more frequently than in any other part of the piece tonality shifts, rhythmic changes, sweeping lyrical lines, tempo changes, and

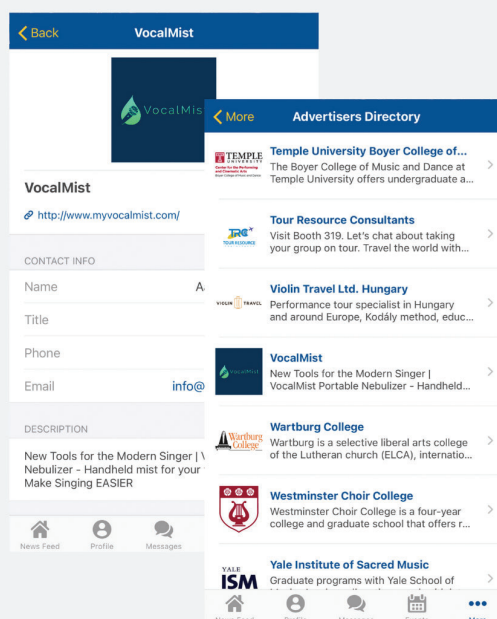
articulatory instructions. Instrumental parts are used here to contrast, to support, and to help dramatize the text. The point of structural significance is the contrapuntal texture created by the use of two antiphonal choirs between the female and male voices.

From the onset of the phrase at measure 95, we see Dett superimposing a two against three rhythmic pulsations. All the voice parts are singing different sections of the text “God made a covenant for the glory of His grace.” This technique adds to the contrapuntal effect. At measure 97 and the downbeat of measure 98, we see a brief moment of unison in the voices, which is noteworthy as it is describing the three in one concept of “Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” The music then quickly returns to a very lyrical nature reminiscent of Brahms with beautiful melodies and lush harmonies. Dett successfully makes use of word-painting on the phrase “flowing free.” Dett sets the word “home” over an F# major chord at measure 102, and with the lon-

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ger note value, it gives the listener a sense of a final destination. The sentiment is expressed again in the following two measures, however, with more emphasis as Dett indicates a slowing down of the tempo. The tonal center's unstable nature, coupled with the slower harmonic rhythm, makes for a very reflective aura.

The tonal center for this new section is D major. The new melody introduced at measure 123 is folk-like in nature and is heard distinctly in the soprano line (Figure 4). The female voices are entrusted with exalting the message of "salvation." Dett sets the female voices in simple harmonies that sometimes spread to four parts. In striking contrast, the tenor and bass voices are exhorting on the text "tell it." A conversational effect is created with the men admonishing the women to share with joy and excitement the story of "salvation." The accompaniment helps to punctuate the rhythmic vital-

ity of the passage.

Suddenly at measure 131, the tenor soloist reappears in the style of a preacher giving the sermon appeal. With the introduction of the tenor solo, the choir is now set in a homophonic response on the text "sweet chariot, swing low!" At measure 133, the text is set in a recitative style. The recitative technique, in such a sudden manner, causes the listener to ponder the meaning of the text. In measure 137, extravagant use is made of embellishments that give the effect of improvisation (Figure 5 on page 35). The conclusion of this phrase, measures 145-147, is tonally unstable (Figure 6 on page 36).

Repetition deepens the impression, and Dett makes use of this tool between measures 148 and 157. The text, "God made a covenant for the glory of His grace," repeats over a dominant pedal between measures 148

**F** A tempo  
123 *div. mf joyously and very rhythmic*

S  
Sal - - - va - - - tion, sweet cov - 'nant of our Lord, I shall *unis.*

A  
*div. mf joyously and very rhythmic*  
Sal - - - va - - - tion, sweet cov - 'nant of our Lord, I shall *unis.*

T  
*exhorting, rhythmically*  
Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

B  
*exhorting, rhythmically*  
Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

**F** A tempo  
Sw. *staccato*  
Org. *joyous and very rhythmic*  
Melody on Gt.  
+Ped.

Figure 4. R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Chariot Jubilee*, mm. 123–124.

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131 *f* *p* *più rit. ed espr.* *mf* *f* *jubilate*

Ten. Solo He who doth on Christ be - lieve, though he were dead, yet shall he live. King

S *f* *declamato* *mf* *con espressione*  
 Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

A *f* *declamato* *mf* *con espressione*  
 Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

T *f* *declamato* *mf* *con espressione*  
 tell it! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

B *f* *declamato* *mf* *con espressione*  
 tell it! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

Pno. *f* *declamato* *mp* *mf*

---

135 *f* *p* *più rit. e marc.* *dim.* *f*

Ten. Solo Je - sus tri - umphed o'er the grave; his grace a - lone can sin - ners save!

S *f* *jubilate* *f*  
 Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet

A *f* *jubilate* *f*  
 Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet

T *f* *jubilate* *f*  
 Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet

B *f* *jubilate* *f*  
 Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet

Pno. *f* *jubilate*

Figure 5. R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Chariot Jubilee*, mm. 131–137.

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and 151, followed by the partial reiteration of the text made over a tonic pedal between measures 152 and 155. The dominant pedal followed by the tonic pedal creating a strong unifying effect. At the change of text, "O hallelujah," the harmony goes back to the V tonal area. In measure 157, Dett uses a 4-3 suspension very effectively followed by a fermata in the alto voice.

At measure 158, the suspense is alleviated, and the complete spiritual melody harmonized, the first and only time we see this occurrence. The harmony is effortless and in rapport with the mood of the spiritual. The marking that Dett indicates, "molto meno mosso quasi grandioso," suggests that the tempo is slow, but stately. Text painting is employed on the word "home," which symbolizes heaven and the ascension of all parts depicts this at the end of the phrase (Figure 7 on page

37).

The next phrase, starting at measure 164, is six measures in length and though short, is a pivotal segue to the concluding musical passage. The tenor solo is declamatory as Dett has described the salvific theme of his oratorio for the very last time. The almost even musical arc is seen in measures 164 and 165, which could be indicative of the belief that salvation is attainable by all of humanity. The harmonic rhythm, in conjunction with the tempo and decreasing dynamic, is such that it gives the listener a sense of peaceful assurance. Dett overlaps this phrase with the upcoming conclusive statement. The downbeat of measure 169 ends the reflective passage, and then the second part of the first beat bursts into the final celebratory declaration (Figure 8 on pages 38 and 39).

The musical score for measures 146-147 of R. Nathaniel Dett's *The Chariot Jubilee* is presented in a five-staff format. The top four staves represent the vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The bottom staff is for the Piano (Pno.). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: "Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home." The score includes dynamic markings such as *f molto marc.* and *rit.*, and performance instructions like *div.* and *rit.*. The vocal parts are in unison, and the piano accompaniment provides harmonic support.

Figure 6. R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Chariot Jubilee*, mm. 146–147.

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**Molto meno mosso quasi grandioso**

158 *f*

S Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home, car - ry me home, swing.

A Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home, swing.

T Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home, car - ry me home, swing.

B *div. f* Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home, car - ry me home, swing.

160 *un. più accel. molto cresc.*

S low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home, swing.

A low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home, swing.

T *un. molto cresc.* low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home, swing.

B *un. molto cresc.* low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot, com - ing for to car - ry me home, swing.

162 *div. ff*

S to car - ry me home!

A to car - ry me home!

T *div. ff* to car - ry me home!

B *ff* to car - ry me home!

Figure 7. R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Chariot Jubilee*, mm. 158–163.  
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169 **Allegro** ♩ = 96  
*mf con abandon*

S home. O hal - le - lu - jah, O hal - le - lu - jah, O hal - le - lu -

A home. O hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu - jah, O hal - le -

T home. O hal - le - lu - jah. hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le -

B home. O hal - le - lu - jah, O hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le -

**Allegro** ♩ = 96  
 Sw.  
*mf*

Org. Man.

175 *cresc.*

S jah, hal - le - lu - jah! O hal - le - lu - jah, O hal - le - lu -

A lu - jah, O hal - le - lu - jah! O hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu -

T lu - jah, O hal - le - lu - jah! O hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le -

B lu - jah, hal - le - lu - jah! O hal - le - lu -

Org. Ped. 3

Figure 8a. R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Chariot Jubilee*, mm. 169–180.

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The final statement of the oratorio makes use of the text "O Hallelujah." The various entrances of the voice parts are like the members of a church responding to the preacher with resounding agreement. The joyous cacophony that would follow a great sermon in the African-American church is recreated here by Dett and his use of the term "con abandon," to alert the musicians to sing and play without restraint, reinforces this. In measure 184, a tonal pedal is used until the end of the piece. Of interest are the appoggiaturas in the alto and tenor lines. The appoggiaturas here are of rhythmic importance to the overall exuberance of this phrase.

The re-entry of the tenor soloist at the last three measures is an editorial decision. Throughout the oratorio, the tenor soloist serves the role as a leader, and that clarion voice seemed an appropriate addition to the end.


## Conclusion

May 25, 2020, will forever be a murky day in American history. Every creed and race could identify with the stinging wound of social injustice. The very fabric of humanity was questioned, and people around the world took to the streets in response. Empathy has been on full display as we witness the myriad of races at the protests. The senseless killing of George Floyd has aroused our sensibilities in the choral world as well.

Comparably, Dett arose in the American musical scene at a time that scarily resembles our present circumstances. Our economy is in shambles, job opportunities are fleeting, and social injustices and cries of police brutality are commonplace. African Americans saw in Dett the epitome of excellence, both in his music and literary contributions. Through his work, they recognized a man from a similar background who was successful in a dominantly Caucasian society. Yet, Dett did not climb the ladder of recognition that he deserved.

History ought not to repeat itself. Dett was a polymath and, as a result, proved knowledgeable of society. He was always trying to bridge societal gaps. To be clear, he paid the price dearly even at the hands of his very own racial community, which was the case in his

termination from Hampton Institute (now University). The fostering of racial harmony has to be practiced by all. As "second-line" workers, part of our responsibility is to have an insatiable curiosity about humankind. Seeking out worldviews of others with open hearts will allow us as artists to be more in tune with the needs of those around us. As "second-line" workers, we possess a unique tool in music. Our intentional efforts at sharpening our tools could lead to impacting societal reformation.

An examination of Dett's life reveals that many of his mentors did not share his racial identity. His charismatic personality and his pristine music making attracted by all accounts, varied audiences. *The Chariot Jubilee* has been performed, recorded, and appreciated by a broad cross-section of society. The story of the text is timeless in its content, for all can relate to a message of hope and desire for a better tomorrow. I offer all of you, my valued colleagues, an instrument for fostering racial harmony: *The Chariot Jubilee*. 

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> May Stanley, "R.N. Dett, of Hampton Institute, Helping to Lay Foundation for Negro Music of the Future," *Musical America* (July 2018): 17.
- <sup>2</sup> Vivian Flagg McBrier, *R. Nathaniel Dett: His Life and Works, 1882-1943* (Washington D.C.: Association Publishers, 1977), 9.
- <sup>3</sup> Frederick Marten, *Southern Workman* (Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1921), 664.