PERFORMING RELIGIOUS MUSIC OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

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The fervor of sensitivity and attention to issues of justice and equity concerning the Black community may have subsided somewhat since the summer of 2020, but the importance of these conversations and the issues themselves have become no less crucial, important, or relevant. Racial injustice for the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community still exists. Inequity at the workplace, institutions of higher learning, and within the realm of professional music still occurs. Many of my colleagues in the choral field are concerned about how they might be perceived if they perform music of the African American experience, wanting to "get it right" and not be viewed as appropriating music from another culture in this age of political correctness and a sensitivity to Black culture. It is within this context that this article will address questions and concerns of the appropriation of Black music primarily by white performing ensembles.

To be clear, when I speak of African American sacred or religious music, I speak of those musical forms created by African Americans and not those of other origin that have been adopted or adapted by the Black Church. This includes Euro-American hymns, anthems, and CCM music. While Christian Rap/Hip-Hop was birthed by African Americans, this and the previously mentioned forms fall outside the scope and purpose of this article. I shall confine myself to the two primary sacred artforms that have their origins in the African American community and are the source of most of American music, sacred and secular.

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The Negro Spiritual

If we are to fully understand African American religious music, we must trace its roots and beginnings to Black people on these shores. When I refer to Black Americans or Black music in this article, I refer to those Americans of African ancestry who are the descendants of chattel slavery in America and the music they birthed. Sister Thea Bowman states, "In the crucible of separation and suffering, African American sacred song was formed."[1] Of all the slave songs this community created, it is the religious folk music of the enslaved African that would first become known as "sorrow songs" and, eventually, "spirituals." These religious folks songs—these "Negro Spirituals"—would not have emerged without the convergence of three factors: African culture or idioms, Christianity, and slavery.

The influence of African culture is seen in the ways the enslaved created music and found new ways to create community once reaching these shores. The oral tradition—a means by which history and culture is maintained though the telling of stories and the singing of songs orally—is one of the many African retentions that survived the Middle Passage. The primacy of community, antiphony (call-and-response), improvisation, and the centricity of rhythm are other retentions that remained part of the cultural expression of what Wyatt Tee Walker terms "New World Africans."[2] Evidence of these African retentions is found in the music, in the call-and-response of the verses of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and in the import of community of "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder."

Missionaries who believed that Africans were heathens and savages in need of salvation exposed them to the Christian religion and, consequently, to stories of the Bible, both Old and New Testament, as well as Protestant Christian hymns. The stories of Joshua, Daniel, Samson, and Jesus found their way into the religious folk songs of the slaves. Perhaps the most influential and impactful story of all was the Exodus of the Hebrews and the figure of Moses. The enslaved Africans heard of a God that was concerned about the plight of slaves and liberated them from their bondage. Surely, such a God that delivered the Hebrew slaves could and would deliver them. Harriet Tubman, arguably the most well-known conductor of the Underground Railroad, was given the moniker of "Moses," because, like the biblical figure, she led her people out of bondage into freedom.

Finally, the songs of the slave community gave voice to their social condition and their preeminent desire to be free. James Cone says that the spirituals are historical documents, giving testimony to the suffering the enslaved African experienced at the hand of their slave masters (oppressors).[3] What the slaves could not say explicitly was communicated implicitly through song and allowed them to comment on their social condition. The lyrics not only served as coded messages to "those in the know," but they also gave voice to the aching spirits of the oppressed. "I'm gonna tell God how you treat me" and "I'm troubled in mind" articulated the suffering of the oppressed. Coded lyrics such as "Everybody talkin' 'bout heaven ain't going" called out the hypocrisy of the so-called "Christian" slave masters.

While "Steal away to Jesus… I ain't got long to stay here" literally meant one was bound for heaven, it also could signal a secret meeting or a cue for escape. Many associated this spiritual with Nat Turner, famous for the rebellion he led in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831. When the slaves sang "I got a robe," or "a crown up in-a the kingdom," this was "good news" for several reasons. It meant that in the kingdom of heaven they would be welcome. It meant that God had prepared a place for them. Their humanity would be affirmed after being ignored on earth by their oppressors. And not only affirmed, but valued, as evinced by the trappings of royalty (a crown, a royal robe). When performing this music, one must take into account these factors and never forget their overwhelming grounding in the suffering of the enslaved community. If suffering does not factor into a performance or rendering of this music, it has missed the mark.

Gospel Music

As the Negro Spirituals are music of the antebellum south and reflect the social condition of slavery in which Blacks found themselves, so, too, does Black gospel music reflect the post-civil war social condition of African Americans in urban settings, emerging during the Great Depression. Ethnomusicologist Mellonee V. Burnim

defines Black gospel music as "the twentieth-century form of African American religious music that evolved in urban cities following the Great Migration of Blacks from the agrarian South in the period surrounding World Wars I and II."[4] The religious folk songs of slavery were sung in fields, cabins, and the hush harbors of the invisible church. This new religious music (that would later be called "gospel" music) evolved from the spiritual and the blackenized Euro-American "hymns of improvisation," developing in urban centers such as Chicago and Detroit.

Walker describes this music as "Euro-American hymns whose message of hope and inspiration spoke to Black Christians and whose original musical and poetic forms lent themselves to Black 'improvisation.'"[5] "It is these "Euro-American hymns" that were adapted by the Black religious community by injecting Black cultural idioms such as changing the original, written rhythms, use of syncopation, melodic embellishments, harmonic substitutions, tempo adjustments (either faster or slower), and even the interjection of vocal affirmations such as "yes" and "oh." In the case of the hymn "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior" with text by Fanny J. Crosby (1820-1915), the prompting line (or call by a leader) of "I'm crying/I'm calling" appears before the refrain.

One cannot ignore the influence of the blues. Thomas A. Dorsey (1899-1993), a blues musician whom many acknowledge as the "Father of Gospel Music," ushered in a new era of Black sacred song that was a melding of the blues with religious hymns that resulted in this emergent sound. Dorsey's impact on this new genre was so great that early on, all gospel songs were referred to as "Dorsey songs."

During the period of the Great Depression, Black people were economically affected disproportionately to whites. Thomas Dorsey famously said that this music should be called gospel, which means "good news." There certainly was a need for "good news" in the Black community at the time. Indeed, the subtitle of writer Anthony Helibut's book *The Gospel Sound* is "good news and bad times." Walker in his book *Somebody's Calling My Name* states, "A survey of the musical content of the Black religious experience can serve as an accurate commentary of what was happening to the Black community and its response to those conditions. Simply put, what Black people are singing religiously will provide a clue as to what is happening to them sociologically."[6] When Black gospel music emerged in the first part of the twentieth century, Blacks were faced with several challenges, both sociological and economic. It is no wonder that songs like "The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow" by Dorsey and "Trouble In My Way (Jesus Will Fix It)" by Clifton Jones resonate with the struggles of the Black community.

Musically, one must recognize the evolution of gospel music as having its roots in the spirituals tradition and hymnody, and later influenced by the blues. The music grew out of African and African American traditions of call-and-response, adaptation, improvisation, and communal engagement. As Walker points out, as early as the music of Negro Spirituals, Black sacred song comments on the social condition of the Black community. Even today, gospel music largely reflects the socioeconomic state of the Black community, as evinced by Grammy Award-winning artist Kirk Franklin's 2016 hit "Wanna Be Happy?" While the song may be targeted primarily toward a secular audience, one cannot and should not ignore the themes of frustration, disappointment, and hopelessness present in the lyrical content that the religious audience contend with as well.

Gospel music, too, serves to praise and honor God. Scriptural text is foundational to good gospel music, and entreats God to save, heal, comfort, deliver, and conquer that which oppresses and suppresses God's people. While this is certainly true, from its inception, a universal theme that Black gospel music conveys is hope: hope in the midst of despair, as the Black community wrestles with financial, social, political, and health challenges in the midst of a society that disenfranchises and oppresses us perpetually. As did the Negro Spiritual before it, Black gospel music serves to encourage a community that faces daily struggles, and from the music, the people gain strength and inspiration to face another day. To understand Black gospel music, one must never overlook its cultural origins or its sociohistoric placement as music for those in need of hope in a time of great despair.

Performance Practice for Concert Spirituals and Black Gospel Music

It is perhaps Zora Neale Hurston who first definitively made a distinction between what she terms the "real," "true," or "genuine" spiritual and the "neo-spiritual."[7] The neo-spiritual is the arranged or concert iteration of spirituals; compositions that individuals have set for glee clubs or concert artists of formal, classical training. The first of these "glee clubs" was the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who toured nationally and internationally to raise money for their school. Initially, the young students, some of whom were former slaves, were reluctant to sing the songs of their ancestors in public. In truth, never before had these songs been sung for an audience, but only for the enslaved community, and at times, in the presence of the slave masters. Later, concert artists such as Marion Anderson, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, and many others began including arrangements of spirituals on their solo recitals. Many composers such as H.T. Burleigh, Hall Johnson, William Dawson, Evelyn La Rue Pittman, Margaret Bonds, and John W. Work began arranging these religious folk tunes for choral groups in the manner of the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

These arrangements, patterned after Western European composition, were more formal in their setting, and every rendering would undoubtedly be the same, adhering to the notes in the score. However, according to Hurston, a genuine Negro Spiritual is not intended for solo, quartet, or choral presentation.

> The jagged harmony is what makes it, and it ceases to be what it was when this is absent. Neither can any group be trained to reproduce it. Its truth dies under training like flowers under hot water. The harmony of the true spiritual is not regular. The dissonances are important and not to be ironed out by the trained musician. The various parts break in at any old time. Falsetto often takes the place of regular voices for short periods. Keys change. Moreover, each singing of the piece is a new creation. The congregation is bound by no rules. No two singings are alike, so that we must consider the rendition of a song not as a final thing, but as a mood. It won't be the same thing next Sunday.[8]

What Hurston describes is the freedom experienced in community. It lends itself to the authentic African practice of improvisation as integral to the oral tradition. Though Hurston states that she finds value in the arranged spiritual as "good and beautiful," she is clear that these compositions that she deems "neo-spirituals" are not *the* spirituals.[9] Therefore, when performing the concert or arranged spiritual, the music should be approached as one would a formal composition, in the same manner as other music written in the western classical style. In most cases, the composers who set these Negro folk melodies were trained in the style of western, classical music. Their arrangements reflect that training and should be regarded as such.

Gospel music encourages improvisation by both singer and pianist (or other accompanying instruments). In fact, it is expected. The concert spiritual, however, is a different matter. The arranger of the concert spiritual expects that his/her music will be performed as written, in the same way other composers of the Western tradition would expect. André Thomas in his book *Way Over in Beulah Lan'* states, "Some conductors will impose rhythm and blues, gospel, and jazz techniques on all performances of spirituals in an effort to create a 'black' sound… All of this may be full of good intention; the result, however, is often an experience fraught with stylistic abuse and, ultimately, a mockery of the intentions of the arranger."[10]

The performing of Negro Spirituals may be met with all manner of trepidation that includes fear of appropriation and blackface caricature. I encourage my colleagues in the field of choral conducting to approach this music with the same care you do music of the Western tradition; research the history, culture, and style of the music and seek to render a musically authentic performance that honors the intent of the composer (arranger). But please, do not "gospelize" concert/arranged spirituals unless the arranger has so indicated in the score. Two examples of gospel arrangements of the spirituals are "Guide My Feet" arranged by Avis D. Graves, and "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder" arranged by Horace Clarence Boyer. Both are published by GIA Publications, Inc. Boyer's arrangement explicitly states in the score, "Gospel arrangement." While Graves's arrangement does not explicitly state it is a

gospel arrangement, if one is familiar with the gospel idiom, this becomes apparent within the first few measures, especially if one listens to the recording GIA also makes available.

There is a universality to the spirituals that makes their message and appeal relatable to those outside of the African American community. Some of the themes that are present in the spirituals that are not unique or particular to the Black community are hope, joy, sorrow, mistreatment, disappointment, and affirmation of the humanity of a person. One of the first times a non-Black audience heard the music of enslaved Africans was when the Fisk Jubilee Singers of Nashville, Tennessee, sang the music of their ancestors in the presence of a gathering in Oberlin, Ohio. While at a religious conference in Oberlin, during a pause in the program, the young people from Fisk University began to sing the slave songs. Perhaps they wanted to forget the painful history of slavery, or maybe because this music had previously only been sung in community and never for an audience, there was reluctance on the part of the singers to sing this music aloud for others. Well, the response was undeniable. In his book *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals,* Arthur C. Jones describes the incident this way:

> History had now been made. The singers, encouraged by the positive audience response, sang on and on, one spiritual after another. Contrary to their apprehensions, there was no sign of ridicule. The extraordinary power of music, much of which had not been heard before in a public arena, appeared to counteract the prevailing negative racial atmosphere. Momentarily forgetting that these were African American singers, many of the listeners cried, obviously touched by the music. Although created by African Americans in slavery for exclusive use within the African community, these songs nonetheless touched something deep in the psyches of this predominantly non-African audience, providing one of the first affirmations of the archetypal and transforming power of the spirituals outside of the context of slavery.[11]

Not only does this music have a universal appeal, but the archetypal and transforming power of the spirituals is not restricted to performance by African Americans. Jones asserts that it is possible for this transformative power to be conveyed by those outside of the Black community. He recounts an instance where a non-Black choir accompanies opera singer Jessye Norman in a recording of this music.

> In an interesting kind of irony, African American conductor Willis Patterson is directing the Ambrosian Singers [of London] to sing background choral accompaniments for Norman. In the process Patterson has shown that indeed this music can be performed effectively by singers outside of the African diaspora. In his unique demonstration Patterson has also affirmed the accessible, archetypal core of the spirituals, which have the ability to speak to broad human issues far afield from the specific context of African American slavery.[12]

What I will add to this statement is that one must study this music and convey to the performer the many attributes necessary to sing the spirituals authentically, even when singing concert/arranged spirituals. No matter the subject matter of the music, whatever the apparent mood of the piece, spirituals are grounded in the pain and suffering of an enslaved people. Spirituals are rhythmic, rooted in the functionality of the drum, central to African culture. Wendell Whalum states, "The rhythm is most important, and that according to research of John W. Work, 'may be slow and pounding' or 'hard and driving.'"[13] James Cone asserts "The spiritual is the community in rhythm, swinging to the movement of life."[14] There are other considerations such as tone and whether or not to use dialect. I recommend omitting the use of Negro dialect unless one does the necessary research to understand dialect and can perform it effectively without it coming across as minstrelsy. Lastly, the spiritual inevitably conveys the enslaved community's desire for freedom, and in the midst of suffering, an abiding hope and belief that "trouble don't last always."

Black gospel music is a delicate balance of sacred and secular elements. There is a theological grounding in sacred scripture and the acknowledgement of God's sover-

eignty, saving power, and omnipresence. Though held in tension with the profane, from its inception, Black gospel music reflects and is influenced by secular music. The reverse is also true. From its beginnings gospel reflected the qualities of the blues. Later, the music of rock, rhythm and blues, country, jazz, new jack swing, and hip-hop found their way into gospel music. Gospel artist Richard Smallwood has successfully merged classical music with Black gospel, resulting in a hybrid that has become his signature sound, earning him awards and deserved acclaim.

African retentions, those qualities that harken back to African culture, may be found in every aspect of African American music. One such retention that is essential to the performance of Black gospel music is improvisation. Mellonee V. Burnim states, "At the heart of the Black esthetic is the acceptance of and the expectation of individual or personalization of the performance (most commonly referred to as 'improvisation')."[15] She identifies three technical aspects that factor into the execution of improvisation: time, text and pitch. Burnim goes on to say, "These factors form the basis of a unified structural network, subject to constant interpretation and reinterpretation by individual performers."[16] Performers must constantly be in the moment, engaging with these qualitative factors, manipulating them in their performance (in a tasteful way), so as to engage the audience, resulting in a new performance each time of any particular song.

Especially those who are new to the Black gospel aesthetic, I strongly recommend referring to what I call the "aural score" to learn how to interpret this music. Rather than the written, ocular source of information and guide to interpreting music of the western classical tradition, music rooted in the oral tradition requires a different authoritative source from which to glean information. This may be found in the recordings of the music, often made by the composers themselves, or a live performance at a church or concert venue. Herein lies the authoritative source for answers to tempo, phrasing, articulation, chord substitutions, vocal inflections, feeling, and style.

Gospel composers have historically been what some would deem musically illiterate in the ocular tradition of written scores. Some reasons for the inability to read music may be lack of economic resources and the privilege of opportunity for some type of formal study. This should not be taken as a deficiency in musical ability, as many gospel musicians are extremely skilled artists and have spent an incredible amount of time perfecting their craft. Over time, written scores for gospel music have become available, and more and more composers trained in western classical music have begun publishing their compositions. However, for many reasons, even when a written, ocular score is available, I recommend consulting the aural score in tandem with the ocular score to check for inconsistencies between the two. Where the two sources do not agree, you are usually safe to give preference to the aural score, especially when the aural source is rendered by the composer.

Appropriation

Appropriation has been defined as "the action of taking something for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission" and "the artistic practice of reworking images from well-known paintings, photographs, etc. in one's own work."[17] If we substitute "sounds" and "musical aesthetics" for "images" and "songs or other musical works" for "paintings, photographs, etc." we begin to have a clearer picture of what can be called cultural appropriation. James O. Young addresses this difficult topic of cultural appropriation by dissecting the topic into several types of appropriation, framing the discussion as an interrelationship between insiders and outsiders, resulting in what he calls subject appropriation.

> Subject appropriation is controversial precisely because outsiders draw upon their own experiences of other cultures. Since outsiders do not have access to the experiences of insiders, one might argue, outsiders are bound to misrepresent the culture of insiders. Since the works of outsiders distort the insider's culture, they may be thought to have aesthetic flaws. Since artists could misrepresent the culture of others in a harmful or offensive manner, subject appropriation could also be morally objectionable.[18]

This insider-outsider dynamic is a crucial element in understanding subject appropriation and why many

Black people are uncomfortable when those outside the culture, particularly whites, perform music of the African American experience. Historically, there have certainly been times when Black music has been misrepresented by those outside the culture that has resulted in harm and has been offensive.

When we think back to the period of the post-civil war, whites performed music known as pseudo-spirituals, "carry-me-backs," and coon songs. These songs denigrated Blacks, reinforced negative racial stereotypes, and promoted racist values and pro-slavery ideology. Samuel A. Floyd Jr. states that these various types of coon songs:

> portrayed the African American male as a fun-loving dandy, a chicken- or ham-loving glutton, a razor-totin' thief, gambler, or drunkard, or an outrageously unfaithful husband or lover. The [black] female was presented in these illustrations either as a very black, fat, large-lipped mammy or carouser, or as a beautiful light-skinned "Yaller Rose of Texas," showing the white male's ostensible preference for exploiting fairskinned females as well as the African American's indoctrination into the preference for white ideals of beauty. In the late nineteenth century, the advertising of musical products became the primary means of developing, perpetrating, and communicating the negative images of [black] people in American society. The coon song was the vehicle for repeating these messages in American society.[19]

A performance by Sister Rosetta Tharpe in the Cotton Club in 1938 arguably thrust gospel music (and spirituals, to some degree) into the mainstream. Not only did this highly public performance further blur the perceived lines between sacred and secular music, but her performance before a mostly white audience caught the attention of industry professionals, who saw the commercial potential of Black sacred music. The consequent commercialization of Black gospel music became a great concern for the Black church and gospel musicians. Although Thomas A. Dorsey had been working to promote gospel and grow its potential for commercial viability, having white promoters and other industry players involved in Black gospel in many ways usurped complete control of the music from the Black community. The commercialization and commodification of Black gospel was interpreted by the African American community as secularizing Black sacred music, and therefore sacrilegious and disrespectful to the Black community. Leaders in the Black gospel community, still in its infancy, sought to regain control and influence in the gospel industry. Dorsey, founder of the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses (NCCGC) established procedures and rules of conduct for gospel singers that affirmed their spirituality and would distinguish their conduct and behavior from gospel singers who were more flamboyant in their dress and performance. His partner, Sallie Martin, issued a statement that rebuked the behavior and conduct of more commercially minded gospel performers:

> Recently the enormous growth of gospel and Evangelistic singing in our churches has been widespread and self-evident. This is due to the enormous popularity and public reception of this type of music… It is sad to note though that even though Evangelistic and gospel singing is based on the highest type of songs conducive to the greatest spiritual values, the recent advent of "Followers after Fishes and Loaves" has reduced the effectiveness of this type of music and has brought down upon it the finger of scorn and derision. Too many of our contemporary Evangelistic or gospel singers are in it "for what they can get out of it or for purely commercial reasons."[20]

Historically, white-owned record companies have cheated Black artists out of royalties, from the time of race records and the blues to rock and roll and rhythm and blues. There have been several instances where white artists have re-recorded the music of Black artists and thus blocked them from receiving their due, financially and otherwise professionally. White artists have mimicked the style of Black performers while neglecting to give the artists credit for their artistry. Rock and roll legend Little Richard has articulated this claim on many occasions, frequently stating that he is the "originator" and architect of rock and roll.

> The dialectic of miscegenation and segregation surrounds the appropriation of black music by whites. Borrowing and mixing are normal aspects of musical development, but in the case of rock 'n' roll, white appropriation of black sound and style was devastating to many of the music's originators. Music producers and promoters recognized that it would be easier to sell white artists to a segregated, majority white nation. At the same time, bias against blacks encouraged and protected the use of unfair business practices that have always been a part of the American recording industry. White and black were mixing at a significant cultural level, but racial hierarchy was still very much in effect. Overall, access and opportunities were better for white performers. Black performers struggled to get a fair chance and were confined to inferior contracts, resources, and opportunities. In the end, with their greater visibility and a growing white fan base, white artists took over rock 'n' roll. From ragtime to swing to rock 'n' roll, this cycle of black innovation and profitable white appropriation has been repeated in American musical history.[21]

The fear of harm, insult, and appropriation of Black culture is well documented, practiced, and prolific. The Black community is understandably wary of whites, in particular, singing our music, resulting in harm and/or injury to us. Does this mean that white choirs should not sing Black music? No. This means that white choirs and their conductors should be cognizant of the history of Black music in America, the historical context in which this music is situated, and the ways this music has been appropriated. Educate yourselves. Learn the history. Do the research. Acknowledge the source community. Perform the music in a sensitive, informed, and respectful manner that is authentic to the Black aesthetic. CJ

NOTES

[1] Sr. Thea Bowman, "The Gift of African American Sacred Song," in *Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal* (Chicago: G.I.A. Publications, Inc., 1987).

[2] Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), 19.

[3] James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues.* Paperback ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1972), 30.

[4] Mellonee V. Burnim, "Gospel," in *African American Music: An Introduction,* ed. Mellonee Burnim and Portia Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 189.

[5] Walker, 111.

[6] Ibid., 117.

[7] Zora Neale Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," in *The Negro in Music and Art,* ed. Lindsay Patterson (New York: Publisher's Company, Inc., 1933), 15.

[8] Hurston, 15-16.

[9] Ibid., 15.

[10] André J. Thomas, *Way Over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual* (Dayton: Heritage Music Press, 2007), 87-88.

[11] Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals,* 3rd edition (Boulder: Leave a little Room, 2005), 140-141.

[12] Ibid., 137-138.

[13] Wendell Phillips Whalum, "Black Hymnody." *Review & Expositor* 70, no. 3 (Summer 1973), 353.

[14] Cone, 31.

[15] Burnim, "The Black Gospel Music Tradition: A Complex of Ideology, Aesthetic and Behavior," in *More Than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians,* ed. Irene V. Jackson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 162.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Miriam Webster Dictionary

[18] James O. Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 9.

[19] Samuel J. Floyd, Jr., *Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 60.

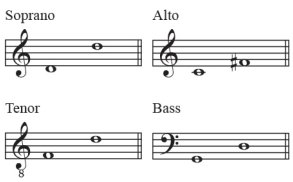
[20] Jerma A. Jackson, *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 119; Kenneth Morris, *Improving the Music in the Church* (Martin Morris Music, 1949.

[21] Maureen Mahon, *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 148.

Sacred Music Choral Reviews

Entrance Antiphons for the Easter Season
Text: Roman Missal
Arr. by Maureen Briare
SATB, cantor, organ, congregation, optional handbells
Oregon Catholic Press, OCP 3014664
https://ocp.org

Performance demonstration: https://www.jwpepper.com/11316912E.item#.YFyOm2RKhQN



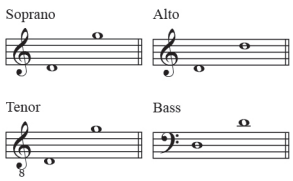
Composer and pastoral musician Maureen Briare has provided a wonderful, well-written worship resource for the weeks of Easter in her *Entrance Antiphons for the Easter Season.* This brief arrangement provides significant flexibility of instrumentation, and with it the ability to vary the presentation of the liturgical material for each Sunday in Easter, Pentecost, and Ascension.

The arrangement is set for cantor and SATB choir, with keyboard accompaniment. Optional handbells supplement the arrangement, while a convenient chord progression with guitar-friendly alternatives for capo use allow for the expansion of the consort.

Utilizing a simple chant on "alleluia" introduced by the cantor, the choir or choir and congregation responds antiphonally utilizing facile harmonies. The *alleluia* response remains the same for all the antiphons, which helps to minimize rehearsal time—a bonus! Over the course of the Easter season, a terraced approach to the musical presentation adds excitement, as well as breeds familiarity within the congregation. Briare's work is succinct, yet she adroitly moves from the minor to the Major in a way that launches the congregation into the opening of worship.

How Firm a Foundation
Tune: FOUNDATION (anon.)
Text: "K." from Rippon's "A Selection of Hymns, 1787)
Arr. by Tom Trenney
SATB, organ, optional congregation
MorningStar Music Publishers, MSM-50-5180
www.ecspublishing.com/how-firm-a-foundation-satb-tom-trenney.html

scrolling performance demonstration: https://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/media-player.jsp?&type=video&productID=11316654



Tom Trenney's fantastic arrangement of the beloved hymn *How Firm a Foundation* is set for choir and congregation. What distinguishes this arrangement from a plethora of others is Trenney's lilting organ introduction and interlude, which dances

between each verse, calling to mind the rustic roots of the anonymous tune.

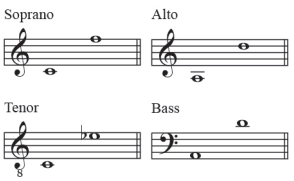
The syncopated and spritely opening strongly ushers in the congregation and choir in unison. The second verse features the altos on the hymn melody with a delicate descant in the sopranos. Trenney continues a similar treatment in the tenors and basses for verse three, though he varies the descant in the tenors to provide contrast. This hymn's lengthy text has a tendency to bog down in many arrangements—not so in this gem, whose brisk tempo and syncopations drive the musical momentum ever forward.

Trenney combines the full chorus in a three-part canon over a pulsing organ obligato, separated by two beats. Choirs may choose an SAB division, or perhaps divide more evenly and include the congregation. The interlude launches out of the final canonic echoes into the last verse, featuring the altos and the basses in unison on the tune with the tenors and sopranos soaring over in energetic descant. He adds excitement on the final measures in the thickened organ accompaniment over simple and celebratory harmony in the upper voices.

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

Tune: Coronation by Oliver Holden (1793) and Diadem by James Ellor (1838)
Text by Edward Perronet (1780)
Arr. by Michael Burkhardt
SATB, organ, brass quintet, and timpani
MorningStar Music Publishers, MSM-60-4040
e-address: www.ecspublishing.com/composers/b/michael-burkhardt.html?p=2

scrolling performance demonstration: www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/media-player.jsp?&type=video&productID=11316669



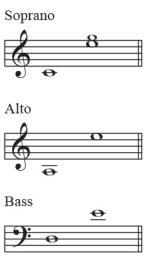
Michael Burkhardt's arrangement of the beloved hymn *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name* effectively combines the two tunes most closely associated with this text. Burkhardt wisely provides the congregation with the more familiar and accessible Diadem to open the arrangement. James Ellor's only known hymn tune perfectly captures the majesty of Perronet's soaring text. Burkhardt alternates each congregational stanza with a choral treatment of Coronation, a rollicking shape-note tune revered by choirs for more than two hundred years for its almost orchestral, Handel-like celebratory refrain on the word "crown."

In the third verse, the *a cappella* congregational texture is punctuated by a sudden brass fanfare, as if the instruments cannot or will not be contained, enthusiastically joining the voices in full-throated harmony. Coronation returns *a cappella* as well on the next stanza in the choir, though the organ joins the famous accented "crown him" figures similarly to the brass on the previous stanza. Burkhardt moves the musical tension forward through each verse with subtle rising modulations and *piu mosso* tempos.

The final verse returns to Diadem and features a soaring soprano descant and full instrumental ensemble to accompany the congregation. This arrangement will complement any festival occasion, but specifically could make Christ the King or Trinity Sunday memorable.

The Lord's my Shepherd
Text: Psalm 23 from the Scottish Psalter (1650)
By Bob Chilcott
SAB, descant, keyboard
Oxford University Press
OUP 9780193365711
e-address:
https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-lords-my-shepherd-9780193365711?cc=us&lang=en&

performance demonstration: https://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/media-player.jsp?&type=audio&productID=11315630E



Bob Chilcott's setting of the beautiful Psalm 23 psalter from 1650 is accessible and yet beautifully written. Originally published in Oxford's *Book of Flexible Anthems,* this SAB anthem will be a lasting part of any choir's repertoire. The piece could function as a small trio or quartet ensemble with piano, but could also soar as an organ-accompanied choral work with larger choir appropriate for almost every season of the church year. Its ease is welcome in a time when singers are not always able to be in rehearsal and performing forces are often depleted.

Chilcott's iconic use of pop-inspired suspension harmonies and gentle keyboard accompaniment conservatively paint each verse under a singable *cantabile* melody. The third verse features a rising duet between the SA voices and the baritone, providing contrast to the melodic content, and leading into the final verse, which is distinguished by a beautiful, flowing descant.

The most effective moment is actually at the very end of the piece. Chilcott includes a lovely accompaniment figure in A minor as a coda, that seems to symbolize a flowing stream. It is a subtle and nostalgic touch, that along with Chilcott's facility with voices make this easy anthem a winning addition to the choral library.