

From Cotton Field to Concert Hall...

The Art of the Negro Spiritual



Karin Skold

Vocal Recital

Randye Jones, soprano
Francis Conlon, piano

April 27, 2003
4:00 p.m.
Ascension Lutheran Church
Landover Hills, Maryland

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Greetings David Simmons, Minister of Music

Program

I

Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?	John Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954)
My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord	Florence Price (1888-1953)
City Called Heaven	Edward Boatner (1897-1981)
'Roun' about de Mountain	Roland Hayes (1887-1977)
Come Down Angels (Trouble the Water)	Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989)

II

Sweet Little Jesus Boy	Robert Mac Gimsey (1898-1979)
Witness	Hall Johnson (1888-1970)
Let Us Break Bread Together	William Lawrence (1895-1981)
Calvary	Betty Jackson King (1928-1994)
Toccata (from <i>Cantata</i>)	John Carter (1932-1981?)

Intermission

III

Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit	William Grant Still (1895-1978)
Stan' Still Jordan	Harry Thacker Burleigh (1866-1949)
Give Me Jesus Is There Anybody Here That Loves My Jesus	Hall Johnson Smith Moore
I'm Goin' To Thank God	Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943)
Great Day	Thomas Kerr, Jr. (1915-1986)

IV

Roll, Jerd'n, Roll Steal Away	Hall Johnson Maria Thompson Corley (b. 1966)
Free At Last	Julia Perry (1924-1979)
Jesus, Lay Your Head in the Window	Hale Smith (b. 1925)
Ride On, Jesus	Dett

You are cordially invited to a reception to follow the recital.

Proceeds from this recital will assist in the purchase of Orff instruments for the music program of the Ascension Lutheran Day School and will benefit The Art of the Negro Spiritual research project.

We wish to thank the Prince George's County Chapter of Thrivent Financial for Lutherans for their sponsorship.

*This recital is the third of three programs being recorded for commercial production. The compact disc, **Come Down Angels**, will be the first in **The Art of the Negro Spiritual** series of recordings. **Come Down Angels** is scheduled for release in June, 2003. For more information, please visit www.ahhj.com or www.artofthenegrospiritual.com.*

From Cotton Field to Concert Hall ... The Art of the Negro Spiritual

Negro spirituals are songs created by the Africans who were captured and brought to the United States to be sold into slavery. This stolen race was deprived of their languages, their families, and their cultures; yet, their masters could not take away their music.

These slaves and their descendents embraced Christianity, the religion of their masters. Their songs, which were to become known as spirituals, reflected their need to express their new faith:

My people told stories, from Genesis to Revelation, with God's faithful as the main characters. They knew about Adam and Eve in the Garden, about Moses and the Red Sea. They sang of the Hebrew children and Joshua at the battle of Jericho. They could tell you about Mary, Jesus, God, and the Devil. If you stood around long enough, you'd hear a song about the blind man seeing, God troubling the water, Ezekiel seeing a wheel, Jesus being crucified and raised from the dead. If slaves couldn't read the Bible, they would memorize Biblical stories they heard and translate them into songs.¹

The songs were also used to communicate with one another without the knowledge of their masters. This was particularly the case when a slave was planning to escape bondage and to seek freedom via the Underground Railroad.

Spirituals were usually created on the spur-of-the-moment, unaccompanied by any other instrument than the stamping feet of their creators. These songs were passed orally from person to person and were embellished as suited the singers. There is record of approximately 6,000 spirituals; however, the oral tradition of the slaves' ancestors—and the prohibition against slaves learning to read or write—meant that the actual number is unknown.

With the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865, most former slaves distanced themselves from the music of their captivity. The spiritual seemed

destined to be relegated to a handful of historical accounts by whites who had attempted to notate the songs they heard.

Then, a group of students from newly founded Fisk University of Nashville, Tennessee, began to tour in an effort to raise money for the financially strapped school. The Fisk Jubilee Singers not only carried spirituals to parts of the United States that had never heard Negro folk songs before, the musically trained chorus performed before royalty during their tours of Europe in the 1870's. The success of the Fisk Jubilee Singers encouraged other Black colleges to form touring groups. Professional "jubilee singers" also toured successfully around the world. Several collections of "plantation songs" were published to meet the public demand.

In 1916, singer and composer Harry T. Burleigh published a setting of the Negro spiritual, "Deep River." By that point in his career, he had written a few vocal and instrumental works based on the plantation melodies he had learned as a child. However, his setting of "Deep River" is considered to be the first work of its kind to be written in art song form specifically for performance by a trained singer.

"Deep River" and other spiritual settings became very popular with concert performers and recording artists, both black and white. It was soon common for recitals to end with a group of spirituals. Musicians such as Roland Hayes and Marian Anderson made these songs a part of their repertoires. Paul Robeson is credited as being the first to give a solo vocal recital of all Negro spirituals and worksongs in 1925 at the Greenwich Village Theatre, New York, New York.

Over the years, composers have published numerous settings of Negro spirituals specifically for performance on the concert stage, and singers, such as Leontyne Price, Jessye Norman, Kathleen Battle, and Simon Estes, have also successfully recorded them for commercial release.

These art songs challenge both the vocalist and the accompanist to display their technical skills and musicality. More importantly, the songs demand that both musicians tap into the deep well-spring of emotions that inspired those slaves of ages past. One can not sing spirituals without an understanding of what forces

such powerful songs to rise up from the souls of the men and women who created them. As noted by composer Hall Johnson:

True enough, this music was transmitted to us through humble channels, but its source is that of all great art everywhere—the unquenchable, divinely human longing for a perfect realization of life. It traverses every shade of emotion without spilling over in any direction. Its most tragic utterances are without pessimism, and its lightest, brightest moments have nothing to do with frivolity. In its darkest expressions there is always a hope, and in its gayest measures a constant reminder. Born out of the heart-cries of a captive people who still did not forget how to laugh, this music covers an amazing range of mood. Nevertheless, it is *always* serious music and should be performed seriously, in the spirit of its original conception.²

Soprano Ruby Elzy simply expressed the art of singing spirituals by stating, "the singer who strives to sing the spirituals without the divine spirit will be like the man who plants pebbles and expects them to grow into lilies."³

¹Velma Maia Thomas. *No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation through Song* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 14.

²Hall Johnson. *Thirty Spirituals: Arranged for Voice and Piano*. (New York: G. Schirmer; dist., Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1949), [5].

³Ruby Elzy. "The Spirit of the Spirituals: Religion and Music, a Solution of the Race Problem," *Etude* 61, no.8 (August, 1943): 495-496.

-- R. L. Jones

The Composers

John Rosamond Johnson (b. Jacksonville, Florida, 11 August 1873; d. New York, New York, 11 November 1954). This composer, singer, educator and conductor studied voice and piano at the New England Conservatory. He partnered with his brother, James Weldon Johnson, to become successful writers and performers in vaudeville and musical theatre. The pair also collaborated on the creation of the anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” and on two of J. Rosamond Johnson’s African American music anthologies. “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?” appeared in *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, first published in 1925.

Florence Beatrice Smith Price (b. 9 April 1888, Little Rock, Arkansas; d. 3 June 1953, Chicago, Illinois) Music was an important part of her life from an early age, as evidenced by her public performance at the age of four. Price was a teacher and composer, especially of works for the piano. As with many of her compositions, she drew upon her exposure to Negro folk music for her setting of “My Soul’s Been Anchored in the Lord.”

Edward Hammond Boatner (b. 13 November 1898, New Orleans, Louisiana; d. New York, New York, 16 June 1981) Boatner became known as a successful singer, composer and educator. He was instructor at his own academy, the Edward Boatner Studio. “City Called Heaven” was one of over 200 spirituals he set for solo voice and piano.

Roland Hayes (b. 3 June 1887, Curryville, Georgia; d. Boston, Massachusetts, 1 January 1977). Hayes was the first African American to establish an international career as a classically trained vocalist, becoming one of the highest paid musicians of his era. He was also a composer of numerous spiritual art songs. His setting of “Roun’ About the Mountain” was derived from what Hayes described as an “African American Tennessee folk song.”

Undine Smith Moore (b. Jarrett, Virginia, 25 August 1904; d. Petersburg, Virginia, 6 February 1989). Moore’s career as an educator included a 45-year tenure at Virginia State College. She shared her interest in the music of Black America through workshops and lectures across the United States. She composed

choral works, chamber and orchestral music, and solo works for the voice and for various solo instruments.

Robert MacGimsey (b. Pineville, Louisiana, 7 September, 1898; d. 13 March 1979, Phoenix, Arizona). MacGimsey received his musical training at Juilliard. After a brief career as a lawyer, he became a professional whistler, performing on the radio and in recordings. He also pursued a career as a singer and composer. His songs reflected his southern roots, especially the Negro folksongs he heard. His “Sweet Little Jesus Boy” was published in 1934.

Francis Hall Johnson (b. Athens, Georgia, 12 March 1888; d. 30 April 1970, in New York, New York). Johnson began his musical professional career as a violinist, but in time, his interest turned to choral music. His famed Hall Johnson Chorale performed in the feature film, “Green Pastures.” He wrote numerous works for choir as well as spiritual settings for solo voice and piano, including “Give Me Jesus,” “Roll, Jerd’n, Roll,” and “Witness,” which was published in 1940.

William Lawrence (b. Charleston, South Carolina, 20 September, 1895; d. 17 March 1981, New York, New York) Lawrence studied music at Avery Normal Institute, Charleston, the New England Conservatory, Boston, Boston University, as well as in Paris. He toured extensively, both as accompanist for tenor Roland Hayes and as part of the Hayes Trio. His setting of the communion hymn, “Let Us Break Bread Together,” was published in 1945.

Betty Lou Jackson King (b. 17 February 1928, Chicago, Illinois; d. Wildwood, New Jersey, 1 June 1994). After completing her education in music composition, she developed a career as an educator, church musician, lecturer, choral director, composer, and music publisher.

John Carter was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1932. It is assumed that he is no longer living; however the reported year, 1981, is uncertain. Carter served as composer-in-residence with the National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, DC) in 1968 and was an instructor at Federal City College, Washington, in the 1970’s. He published Cantata in 1964. After a short piano prelude, he used four Negro spirituals—“Peter Go Ring Dem

Bells,” “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,” “Let Us Break Bread Together,” and “Ride On, King Jesus”—as melodic source material for the individual sections of the work.

William Grant Still (b. Woodville, Mississippi, 11 May 1895; d. Los Angeles, California, 3 December 1978). Known as the “Dean of Black Music,” Still studied at Wilberforce University and Oberlin College and received a Guggenheim Fellowship. His *Afro-American Symphony* was the first by an African American composer to be performed by a major orchestra. While he wrote for the operatic stage and for television, as well as vocal and instrumental works for the concert stage, he set few spirituals as art songs. He preferred, instead, to use blues elements for his inspiration. However, he did set “Ev’ry Time I Feel the Spirit” for voice and piano in 1930.

Harry Thacker Burleigh (b. Erie, Pennsylvania, 2 December 1866; d. 12 September 1949, Stamford, Connecticut). Burleigh attended the National Conservatory of Music, where he introduced the plantation songs he had learned from his grandfather to composer Antonin Dvořák. During his career, he was baritone soloist at St. George’s Episcopal and Temple Emanu-El (New York), editor for G. Ricordi, lecturer, and a charter member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). His compositions included between 200-300 songs. Among them is the setting of the spiritual, “Stan’ Still Jordan.”

Robert Nathaniel Dett (Born Drummondsville, Ontario, Canada, 11 October 1882; died, Battle Creek, Michigan, 2 October 1943). He attended Oberlin College Conservatory, becoming the first of African descent to receive a bachelor’s degree there, and studied at several other prestigious schools in the U.S. and Europe before earning his Master of Music from Eastman School of Music. A choral director and educator, Dett also composed approximately 100 works for piano, chorus, and solo voice. He published “I’m Goin’ To Thank God” and “Ride On, Jesus” especially for soprano Dorothy Maynor in 1940, during his tenure as choral director at Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina.

Thomas Kerr, Jr. (b. Baltimore, Maryland, 3 January 1915; d. Washington, DC, 26 August 1988). Kerr attended the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, New York, where

he received the Bachelor of Music degree. He joined the faculty at Howard University, Washington, DC, in 1943 and served for 35 years as a piano and composition instructor and organist. He also toured extensively as a concert pianist. Kerr composed primarily for the organ; however, he also wrote piano, choral, and solo vocal works, including “Great Day,” composed in September 1966.

Hale Smith (b. Cleveland, Ohio, 29 June 1925). Smith’s professional career included serving as an editor and music choral consultant for various music publishing houses and teaching at Long Island University and the University of Connecticut, Storrs. He has composed numerous orchestral and chamber works, as well as several choral and solo vocal pieces. His setting of “Jesus, Lay Your Head in the Window” was written in 1986 and published by his Halsco publishing company.

Maria Thompson Corley (b. Jamaica, 1966). Corley’s undergraduate work was completed at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, and she received both masters and doctorate degrees in piano performance from the Juilliard School. She is an author, composer and arranger of music for both solo voice and chorus, as well as an educator. Her first CD, a collaboration with tenor Darryl Taylor, was released internationally on the Naxos label this summer. She noted that for her setting of “Steal Away,” “...the trills at the beginning are to create an aura of expectancy and mystery—the feelings of the slave who is going to steal away before the departure. It also must be quiet, because no one can know. Then, the chromaticism in the piano is the ‘sneakiness’ needed to accomplish the objective of leaving undetected....”

Julia Perry (b. 25 March 1924, Lexington, Kentucky; d. 24 April 1979, Akron, Ohio). Perry attended Westminster Choir College, where she studied voice, piano, drama, and conducting, and received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees. She gained international acclaim for her *Stabat Mater* for contralto and string orchestra. Her compositions included over 50 works for a variety of solo instruments and large and small ensembles, as well as solo vocal and choral works. “Free at Last” was written in 1950 for high voice and piano.

Margaret Bonds (b. 3 March 1913, Chicago, Illinois; d. 26 April 1972, Los Angeles, California). Bonds received her bachelor’s

and master's degrees in music from Northwestern University, with additional study at the Juilliard School. The pianist was the first African American to perform with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. An educator and composer, Bonds wrote works for the theater, ballet, orchestra, and piano, but the majority were art and popular songs. Her best known is the setting of the spiritual, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hand", commissioned by Leontyne Price in 1963.

The Performers

Randy Jones received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Education from Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina, where she was named to "Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities." She completed her Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from Florida State University, Tallahassee, where she studied with Barbara Ford and Enrico Di Giuseppe. She served as a music cataloger for the Florida State University Libraries before accepting a library manager position at the George Washington University, Washington, D.C. In addition to her ongoing research on "The Art of the Negro Spiritual," Ms. Jones created and maintains the much-cited Web site, Afrocentric Voices in "Classical" Music. Her professional affiliations include: the National Association of Negro Musicians, the Recording Academy, and the Washington Area Music Association.

Francis Conlon received both his Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from the Catholic University of America. He has played in New York City at Carnegie Recital Hall, and in Washington at such notable sites as the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Library of Congress. Mr. Conlon has performed with several orchestras, including the Washington Chamber Orchestra, the Montreal Chamber Orchestra, and the Washington Sinfonia. His awards include the National Society of Arts and Letters competition and the Jordan Awards Contest in Washington. He has served as official accompanist for the National Symphony Young Soloist Competition, the National Opera Institute Auditions, and the National Federation of Music Clubs Contest. His teaching duties include his current position on the music faculty of The George Washington University in Washington.

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The Art of the Negro Spiritual

The Art of the Negro Spiritual is a research project that is looking into the rich history of the Negro Spiritual as written for solo vocal performance. We are researching the development of spirituals from the folk music of slaves of the United States to the art songs set for performance on the concert stage.

The goal of this project is to gather into one source information for the singer, vocal teacher, accompanist and musicologist. Topics of our research include:

- History of the Negro spiritual
- Biographies of composers and performers
- Annotated bibliography of resources
- Discography of commercial recordings
- Analysis of published scores

The anticipated results of this research will be presented as a book with accompanying compact disc recording of selected spirituals performed by the lead researcher, soprano Randye Jones.

In advance of the book, a compact disc recording of Negro spirituals is being prepared for release in 2003. Songs on the recording will come from recitals presented by Ms. Jones and pianist Francis Conlon. For information about purchasing a limited edition, signed and numbered, copy of the recording, please visit www.ahhjay.com.

To learn more about The Art of the Negro Spiritual research project, or to engage Ms. Jones for an ANS recital, please visit www.artofthenegrospiritual.com or call 202/904-3635.

About the Images: Artist Karin Skold has portrayed a runaway slave who, exhausted after crossing a river, hears her pursuers on the other side. The woman drops to her knees in prayer. Amidst the clouds, an angel comes down to guide the slave to freedom.