CALL MR ROBESON A life, with songs.



A Monodrama

By

TAYO ALUKO
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Pianist's Score & Cue Script, January 2016

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Preset: LARRY BROWN at piano, playing a

medley of spirituals and other Robeson songs, as

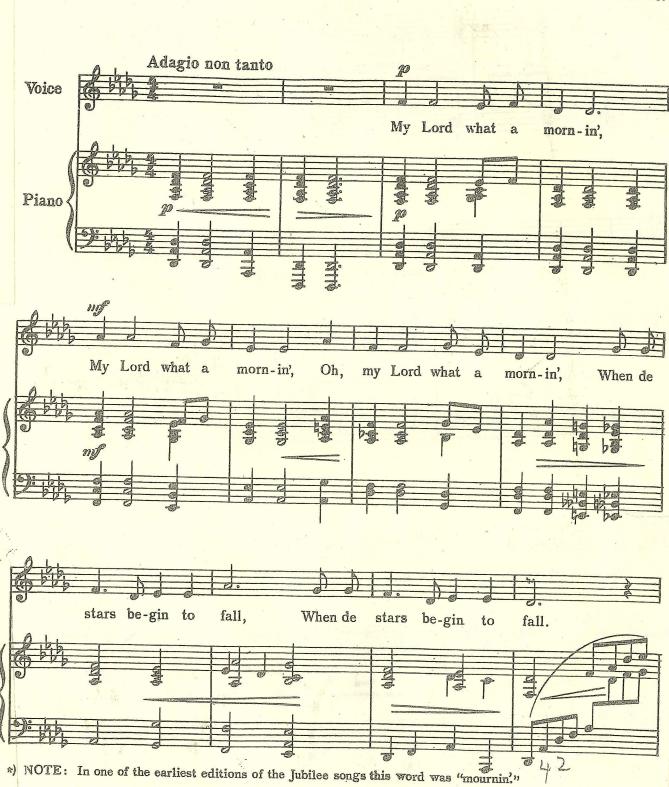
audience files in. Where possible, finish with My

Lord, What A Mornin'.

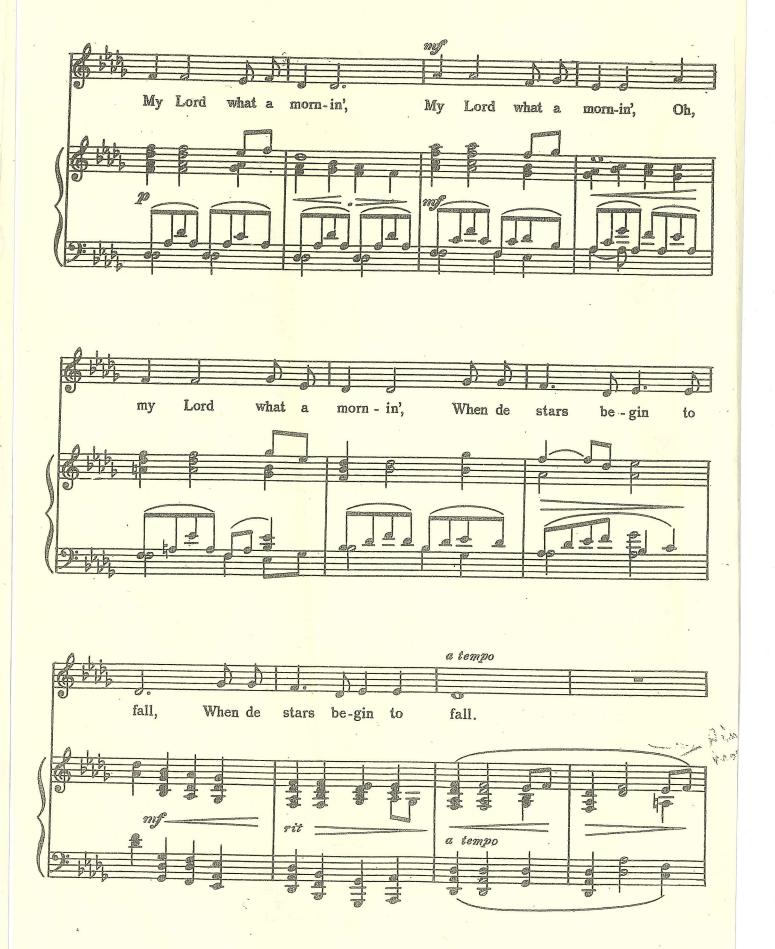
My Lord, What A Mornin'

Rev. VIII, 10

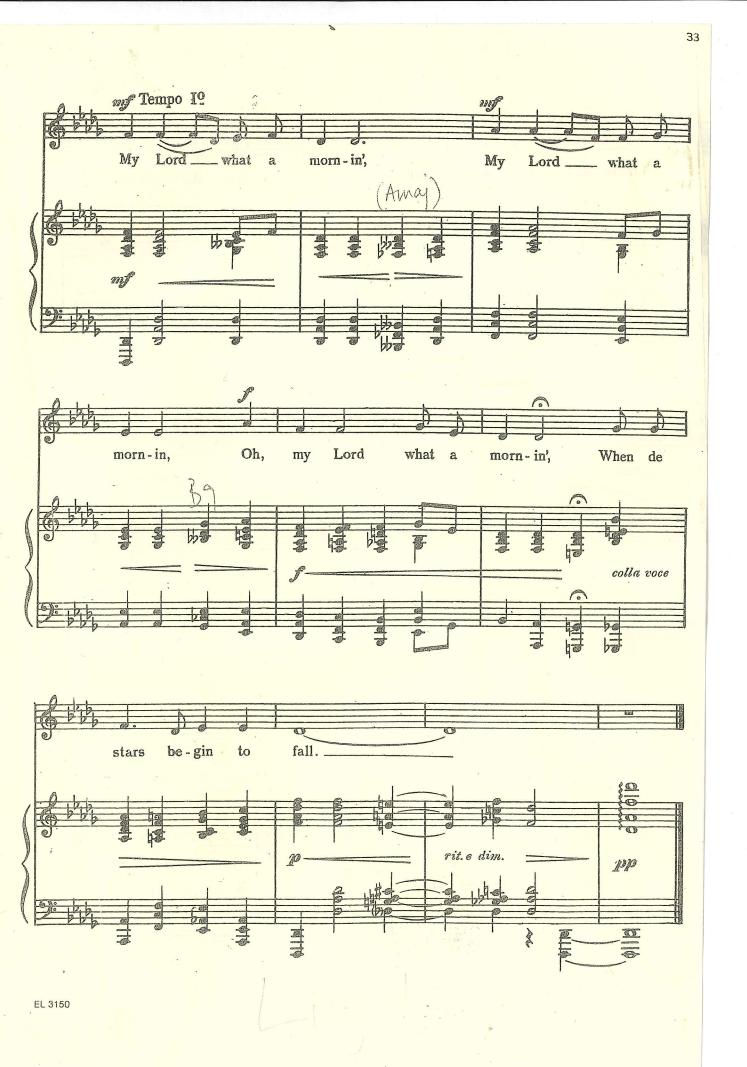
Negro Spiritual arranged by H. T. BURLEIGH



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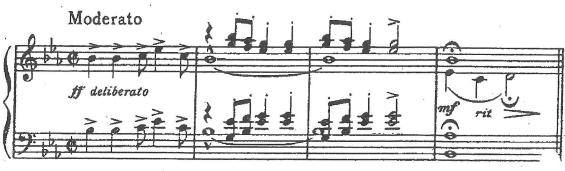


SHOW BOAT Ol' Man River

1021

Music by Jerome Kern Words by Oscar Hammerstein II

5 Capyright 1927 T.B. Harms & Comusey Incurporated, USA, Chappell Muse Limited, London W1.
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Once blackout reached

piano stops.

PAUL starts to sing off stage, a cappella,

Nobody knows de trouble I seen; (Enters USL carrying a chair)
Nobody knows my sorrow; Nobody knows de trouble I seen
Glory Hallelujah

He places the chair SC as he finishes, puts reading glasses on

LARRY starts to play the introduction to 01:

OL' MAN RIVER. PAUL begins to sing, in rehearsal.

(Sings) Niggers all work on de Mississippi
Niggers all work while de white folk play
Pulling dem boats from de dawn till sunset
Gettin' no rest till ...

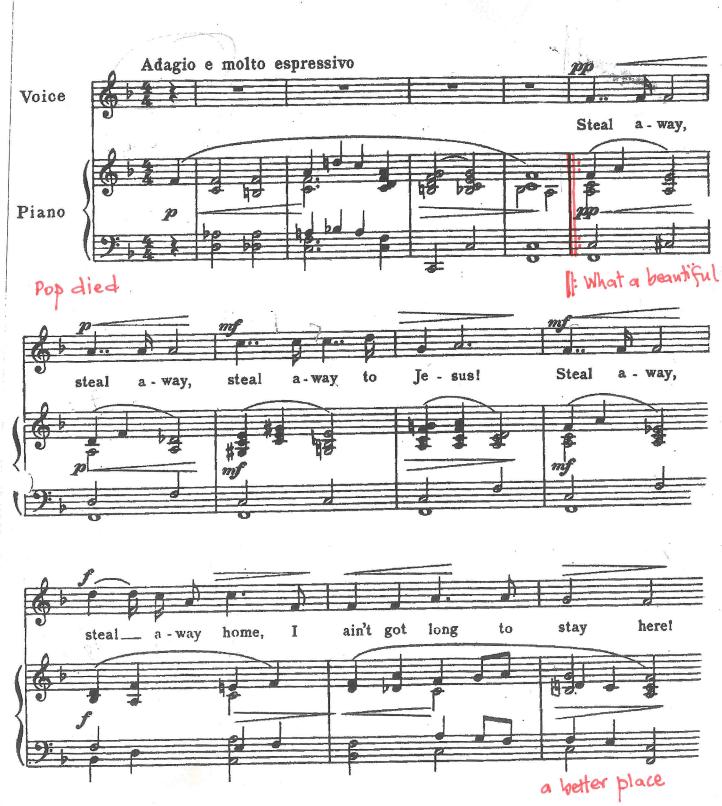
(He starts to address the audience as LARRY stops.)

- This symbol indicates much monologue missing before this bullet point
- ... Essie barges in, just like that, and asks me, '
- "that darn song", but I do change the lyrics: (Sings, a cappella)
- Forty Thousand dollars!
- "that darn song".
- Gerry Neale,
- "Robey of Rutgers".
- Six years later, we had a boy. Paul Jnr. Pauli.
- I'd play football with Pauli.
- The Reverend William Drew Robeson.
- Both sides just (falls over) ... went for me,
- But Pop impressed on me ...
- And with his coaching, I became a Phi Beta Kappa scholar, and a prize winning orator. (*Beat*)



Steal Away

Negro Spiritual arranged by H. T. BURLEIGH



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Three days before my last oratorical contest, ...

Pop died. (Piano starts to play introduction to

02; STEAL AWAY) But I still entered it, and I won! He would have

been so proud...

(Sings)

- V1. Steal away, steal away to Jesus
- V2. My Lord calls me, he calls me by the thunder
- V3. Steal away, steal away to Jesus

Steal away, steal away home; I ain't got long to stay here.

(Piano continues to play to the end of this next

section. What a beautiful, dignified song! (Rises)

- he was actually born in slavery in Martin County, North Carolina, but
 at the age of fifteen he escaped North, to a better
 place. (Music out)
- QUICK TURN OVER for next piece: SONG

 OF THE VOLGA BOATMEN)



song of the volga Boatmen



Many times, I also escaped to what I thought was a better place: Russia.

(Piano starts to play 03: SONG OF THE

6

VOLGA BOATMEN). From the time I first visited there in 1934, I found that their folk songs bore a close relationship to those of the Negro people, and that a tremendous bond of sympathy and mutual understanding united us. **In Russia,** I was treated like a full human being for the first time in my life. There was no racial prejudice, so I – no, we - sent Pauli to school there, when he was nine. We felt it would be better for him to grow up in a non-racial, socialist country, rather than in America, where he would always be a **Second class citizen.** (**Piano out**)

- Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (Sound: Male Voice Choir) in London
- I soon came to realise that the same capitalist system that uprooted

 Africans from
- Royal Albert Hall, London, June 1937:
- I have made my choice. I had no alternative."
- Yolande Jackson.
- I had choices to make about my movie career too.

6

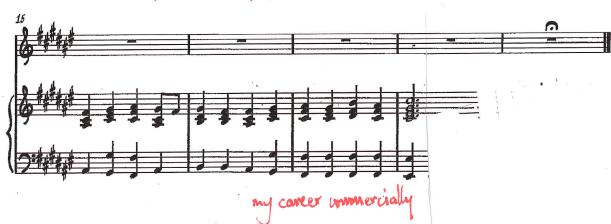


CUE: The Ballad for Americans









7

- ... like waiting for the freedom train itself.
- And then I had to decide whether to continue supporting International
 Peace and Socialist causes, or just entertain.
- ... so he was clearly plain wrong.
- (Rises) And then, back home in America a few years later, $oldsymbol{\mathbb{I}}$

recorded a very patriotic song called

The Ballad for Americans, (Piano starts

to play 04: BALLAD FOR

AMERICANS) and boy, did that make me big!

(Sings) V1. Ol' Abe Lincoln was thin and long

And he went down to his grave to free the slave...

(Piano continues) It was played on every radio station the length and breadth of the country! I toured all over, singing it with orchestras and choirs.

That was definitely the peak of my popularity, and of my career, commercially. (Piano stops) QUICK TURN

OVER

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THE OLD FOLKS AT HOME

Words and Music by STEPHEN C. FOSTER



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Everywhere I went, my concerts were packed. (Piano

starts playing introduction to 05: THE OLD

FOLKS AT HOME) I remember singing one night in Kansas

City sometime in 1942, the Municipal Auditorium:

(Steps onto "stage" DSC) (LXQ11)

V1. Way down upon de Swanee Ribber
V2. All around am sad an' dreary
Everywhere I roam

Oh, fellas, how my heart grows weary...

(He stops singing, and piano stops soon after)

- Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen...
- You see, only the previous week, I had sung *The Ballad for Americans* at the Hollywood Bowl,
- He goes out on stage (I can hear him from the dressing room):
- "I see that Jim Crow is alive and well in Kansas City tonight,

Joshua fit

Joshua fit de battle ob Jerico











Yes, Sir, Madam, you may leave if you wish, and be sure to ask for a
 refund on your way out. Larry, Battle of Jericho,
 please. (LARRY plays 06: BATTLE OF

JERICHO)

- V1. Joshua fit de battle ob Jericho,
- V2. You may talk about your King ob Gideon
- V3. Up to de walls ob Jericho
- V4. Den de lam' ram sheep horns begin to blow
- V5. An de trumpets begin to soun'
- V6. Joshua fit de battle ob Jericho
- Frederick Douglass
- "I go back to the United States not as I landed here
- Amen to that! (Beat)
- Listen to this: "Paul Robeson says..."
- I need to draw attention of people here in Europe to what's happening in my country.
- "The wealth of America was built
- REPORTER: Mr Robeson, you are reported as denouncing your government in Paris. What do you have to say for yourself?
- REPORTER: Mr Walter White of the NAACP denounced your Paris speech as unpatriotic. What do you say to that, Mr Robeson?



07: DEEP RIVER



- I don't think they liked that very much.
- I arrive there by train, and Helen is there to er, that's er, Helen

 Rosen –
- There must be twenty thousand people out there.
- The crowd are all up on their feet. They're cheering so loud that

 Larry and I have to wait. **Eventually we start,**

(LARRY plays a bit of 07: DEEP

RIVER tentatively) and we do a few songs. I can

tell that poor Larry is terrified, from the way he's playing. Well, there had been talk of snipers out there in the hills somewhere.

(DEEP RIVER stops, prepare

for next piece) QUICK TURN:

OL' MAN RIVER

show boat Ol' Man River



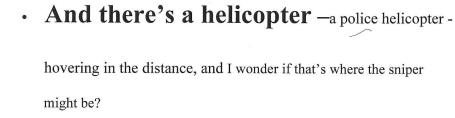
Music by Jerome Kern Words by Oscar Hammerstein II

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And as Larry starts (Piano plays

introduction to 08: OL' MAN RIVER)

to play the opening notes to our final

number, the helicopter starts coming towards us.

(Sound of helicopter approaching, then circling during the song)

- V1. Dere's an ol' man called de Mississippi;
- V2. Ol' man river, dat ol' man river; ;
- V3. He don't plant taters, he don't plant cotton;
- V4. You an' me, we sweat an' strain
- V5. Ah keeps laughin' instead of cryin'



09: WE'LL KEEP A WELCOME





12

(Beat. Steps down.)

- There were worse riots after the concert.
- In the mid 1940s I could earn one hundred thousand dollars a year, easy.
- We held a concert at the border
- "Comrades. I can't act or sing in any sort of decent place in my own country. And yet, the British actors have sent a request saying that they would welcome me in England to play *Othello*.
 And at the same time, I have received an

invitation (Piano starts to play 09: WE'LL

KEEP A WELCOME) and no invitation could mean more - from the workers, the miners in Wales, where I first understood the struggle of Negro and White together - to appear at a festival over there in October, and **I very much**

hope to be able to get there to do that." (Piano stops)

TURN OVER

Joe Hill

Words by Alfred Hayes Music by Earl Robinson

On November 19, 1915, a young Swedish immigrant named Joseph Hillstrom was executed by a litch firing squad on a phony murder charge. The Hill as he was known to workers throughout the west, was an IWW organizer and bulled writer. His immortal last words were. "Don't mourn for me organize."

Not Ton Slow



- 3. "The copper bosses killed you, Joe.
 "They shot you, Joe," says L
 "Takes more than guns to kill a man,"
 Says Joe, "I didn't die." (Repeat last line.)
- Joe Hill ain't dead," he says to me,

 "Joe Hill ain't never died.

 Where workingmen are out on strike,

 Joe Hill is at their side." (Repeat last line.)

• But our government

- Why do they take my passport away
- That's too bad

- that there is no force on earth that will make me go backward one-thousandth part of one little inch!"

And now, comrades, brothers and sisters,

(LXQ27) Joe Hill. (SQ21: Track 9 out, 3s).

LARRY gives **OPENING NOTE** to

10: JOE HILL)

(Sings)

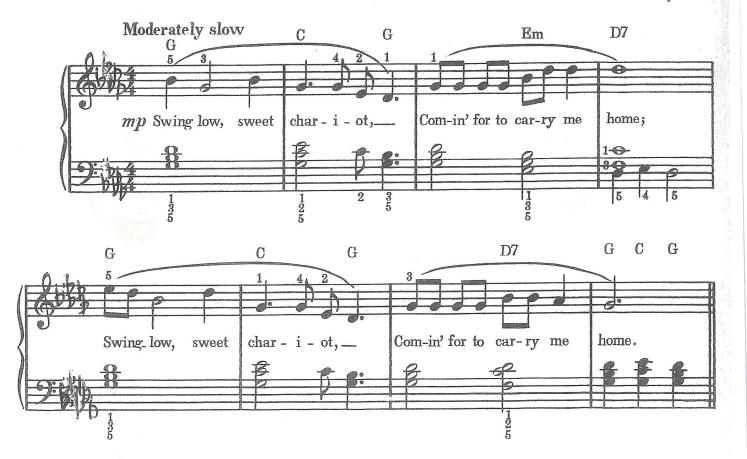
- V1. I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
- V2. The copper bosses killed you Joe,
- V3. Joe Hill ain't dead, he says to me,
- Nine years, that went on.
- They visit me, tell me they've got tapes:
- Did I ever tell you about the pentatonic scale?
- Listen to this.

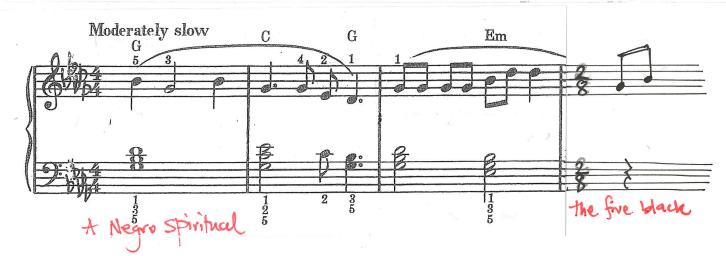
TURN OVER



Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

Traditional Spiritual







The five black keys of the piano. The pentatonic scale.

(Sings and plays few bars of Iwe Kiko)

The pentatonic scale! Listen to this one:

(Sings and plays).

Swing low, sweet chariot (LARRY takes up the

accompaniment as PAUL continues singing).

Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home

(LARRY continues SWING LOW)

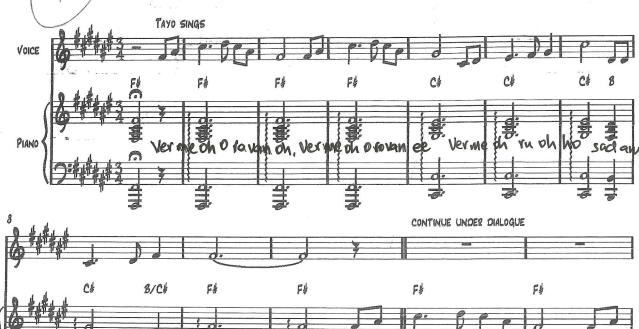
A Negro spiritual, the folk music of my own

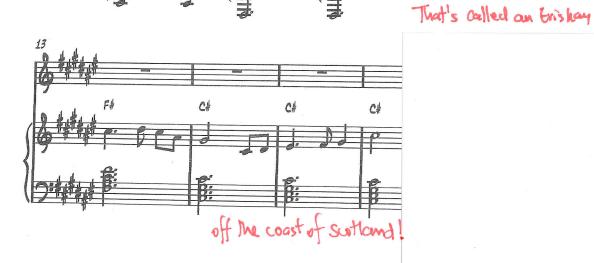
people. Again, the pentatonic scale! (LARRY

plays the introduction to 11: ERISKAY LOVE

LILT) The five black keys of the piano!





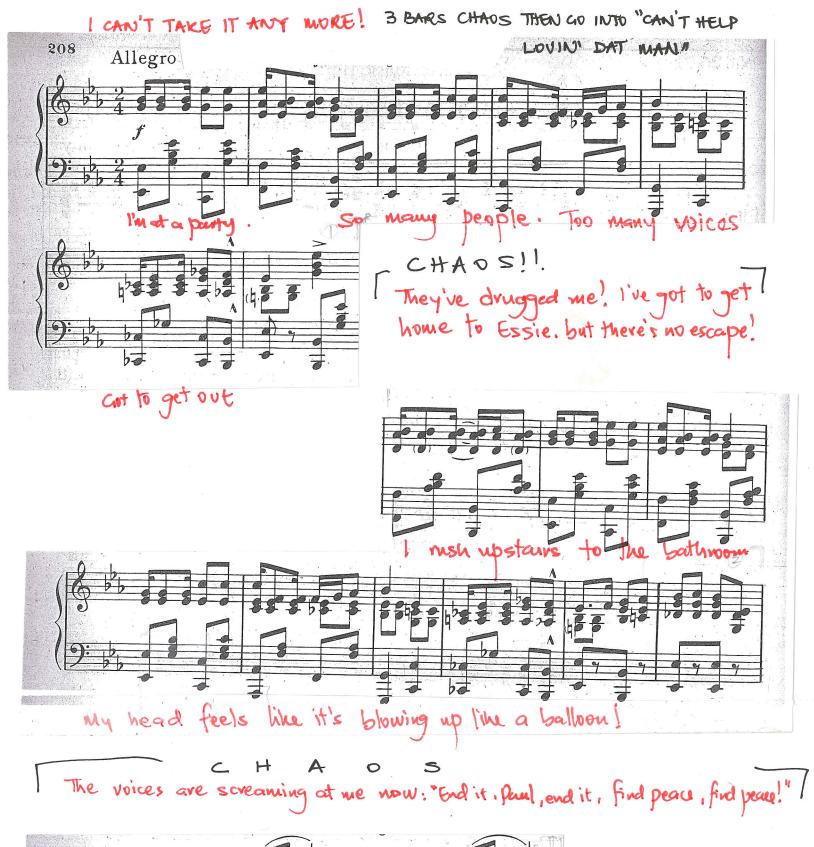


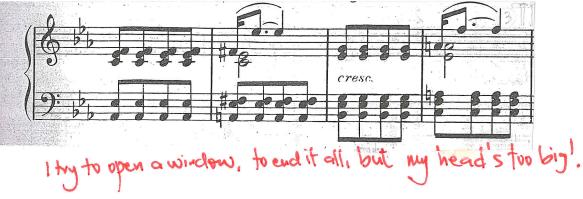
Here's another one.

(Sings) V1. Ver mee o O rovan O (LARRY continues) That's called "An Eriskay Love Lilt", and that too is based on the pentatonic scale! And you know where it's from? The Hebridean Islands off the Coast of

Scotland! (Piano stops).

14

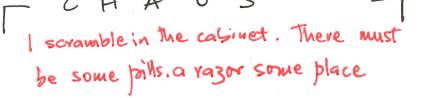


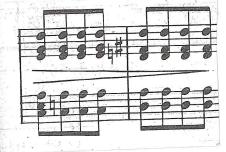


Go to Australasia, China, the Middle East, anywhere,

I'm going to get the message across... about ...la fraternité du monde ... Mi vsyor braati! and What? (Behind him) Who's there? Those darn voices! It's getting too much. I can't take it any more. I CAN'T TAKE IT ANY

MORE! (Sits) (LARRY plays chaotic music, interspersed with CAN'T HELP)





f2

Find Peace

CHAO S

Find ... Yes. A razor! No time toffinh Just Find feare. Find Pearl



I gets weavy an' sich of tryin

- CHAOS

Oh, that davn song!



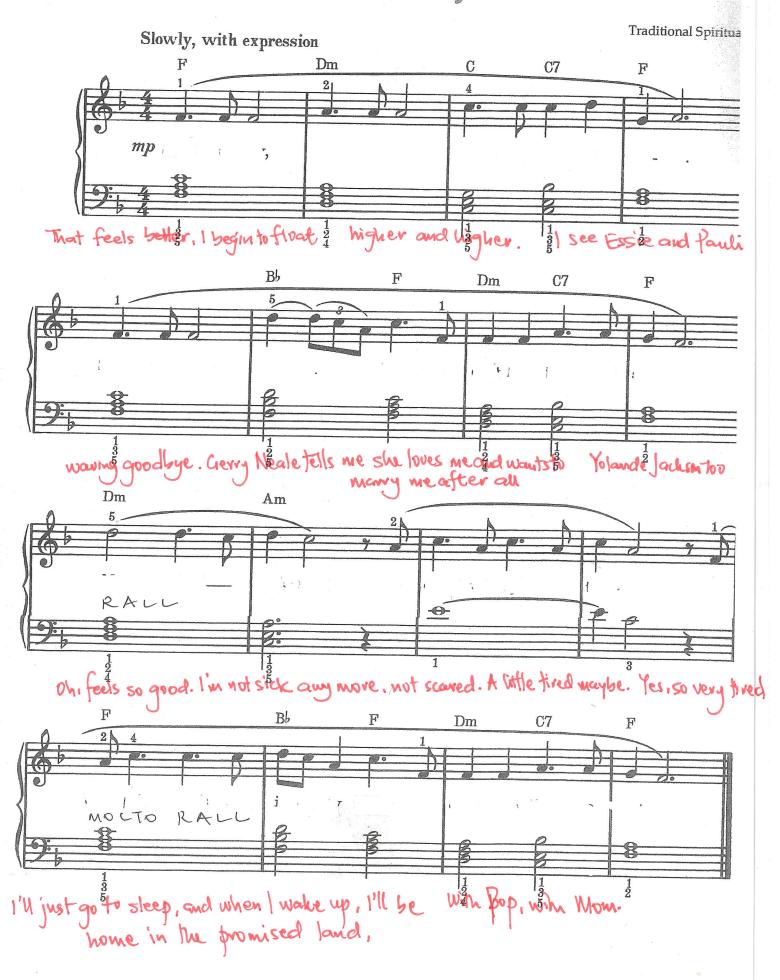
(Build up until arms rise)

CHAOS -

15

9: 10

29678 and scared of olyin!



Ah, at last (Piano music starts to resolve to key of F That feels better. tuneful rendition of 12:

STEAL AWAY Reprise)... I begin to float.. Higher and higher... I

see Essie and Pauli waving goodbye.... Gerry Neale tells me that she loves me and wants to marry me after all. Yolande Jackson too. Oh, feels so good... I'm not sick any more... Not scared. Just - tired. So, so tired... I'll just go to sleep, and when I wake up ... I'll be home... In the promised land, with Pop,... with

Mom...(Slips out of consciousness. Piano plays last line of STEAL AWAY and stops)

- VOICE 1 CALL MR ROBESON!
- I had insisted on testifying, see?
- VOICE 4 Mr Robeson? Mr Robeson! Are you now a member of the Communist Party?
- VOICE 4 Do you know Ben Davis?
- VOICE 1 (Interrupts) Just a minute. I have endured as much of this as I can. The hearing is now adjourned.
- PAUL I think it should be adjourned forever!

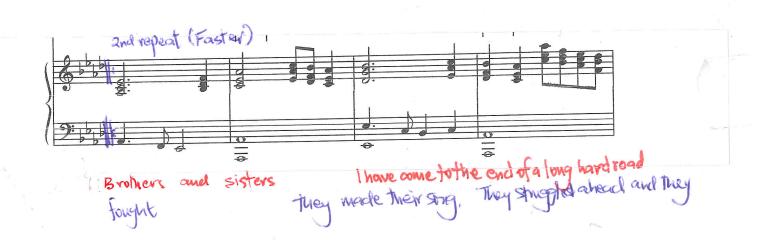
(Pause) The struggle continues.

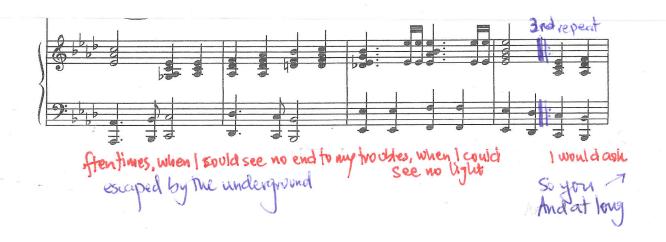
 And of course, Essie – she's with me all the time, like she'd always been. My rock!

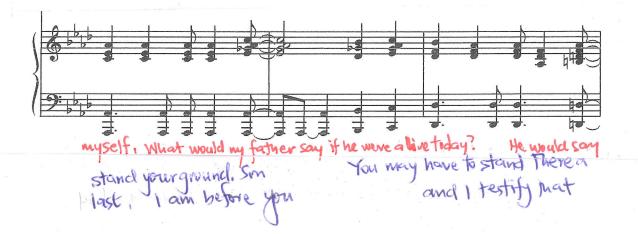
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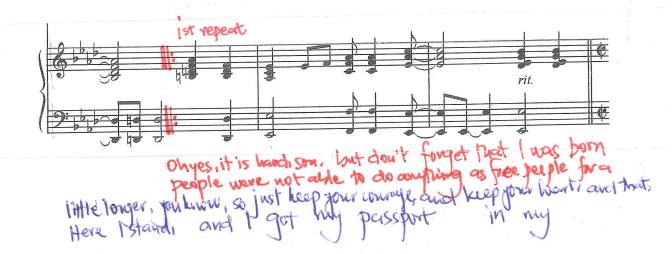
13: OH, FREEDOM

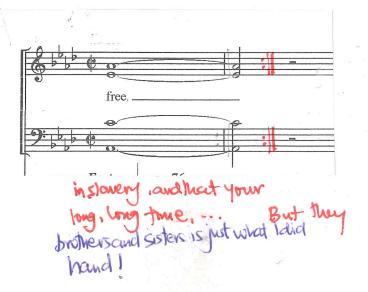












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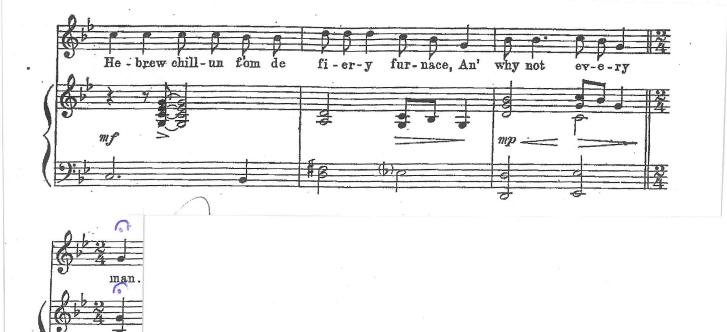
DIDN'T MY LORD DELIVER DANIEL?



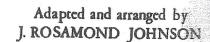
To Robert Russa Moton

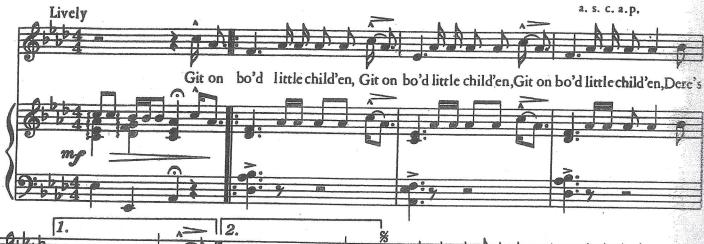


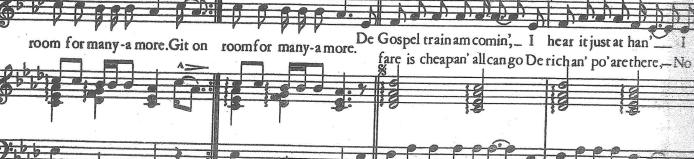
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I'm free to travel again, and I waste no time! I'm off to Europe with Essie. We do England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Russia.

(Piano: opening notes to melody of 15:

GIT ON BOARD) Round and round!. I sing! I speak!. I

play Othello! Everywhere, I feel nothing but - love!

(Sings a cappella)

Git on board, little children

I can go anywhere I please! The Caribbean, East Germany, Australia, New

Zealand. I'm away for five whole years, then back home to the US

of A!

(Sings, with piano accompaniment, 15: GIT ON BOARD)

V1. Git on board, little children

V2. The gospel train's a coming

V3. Git on board, little children

Git on board, little children

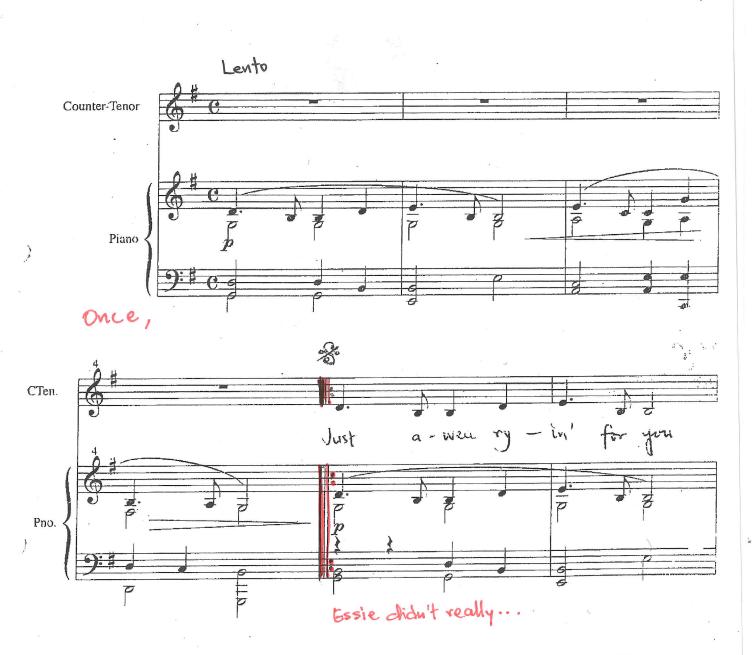
Git on boa...

(Stops suddenly. Piano stops after. Pause)



Just A-wearyin' for you

Carrie Jacobs - Bond







Essie died. (Sits in chair, CS)

She'd had cancer, but never told me how bad it was. (Pause.)

Once, (Piano starts playing introduction to 16: JUST A WEARYIN FOR YOU) years ago,

• Are you feeling alright?" (IXQ41) Chuckles and then almost breaks down. Sings, haltingly)

V1. Just A wearyin' for you
Wishin' ...
Restless, don't know what to do
Just A wearyin' ..

(Piano continues under speech) Essie didn't really want to

go back to America, you know. She preferred England, or Russia.

• - now officially known as "The Civil Rights Movement".

(Piano stops. PAUL finds photo)

• Yes, I'd been hearing a lot about those new young fellows,

We shall overcome 6 variations

Gaël Liardon 28-30.11.13









• His own people, we'd be led to believe. But you know, I reckon the FBI were behind that. In the interests of National Security, of course. (Beat)

And then (Piano starts to play 17: WE SHALL

OVERCOME) about a year after I got back to

America,

• Like Frederick Douglass, like Ida Wells, Toussaint L'Ouverture,
Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and so many others.

(Beat) Well (incidental music stops

abruptly)..., King was shot dead too

- Now, that young reporter.
- I can't go that way".

(Beat. Remembers something, then goes to pick up photo of W E B Du Bois)

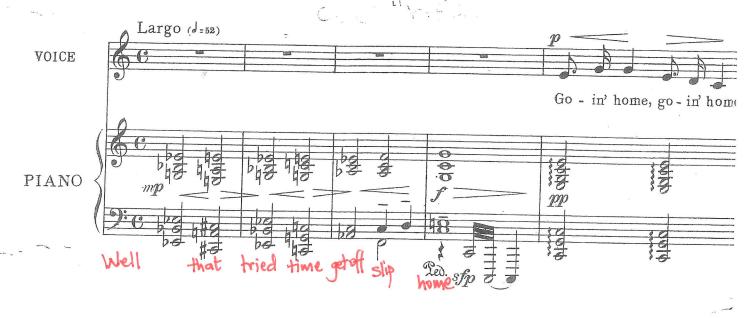
My great friend and mentor, Dr W E B Du Bois

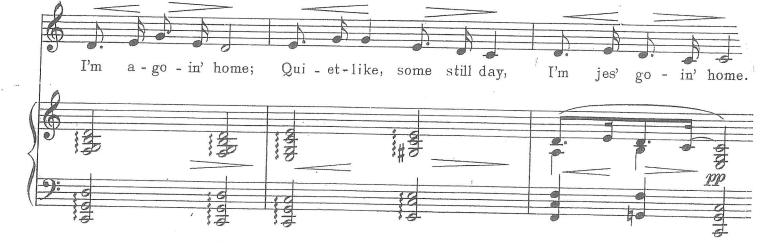
From the Largo of the Symphony "From the New World," Op.95



Words and adaptation by WILLIAM ARMS FISHER

ANTON DVOŘA







N. B. When desired the text may be sung without dialect.



It's always been (taps his chest) here. Always will be. (Replaces photo)

Well (Piano starts to play 18: GOIN' HOME)

(Sings)

V1. Goin' home, goin' home

V2. It's not far, jes' close by

V3. Mother's there 'spectin' me

All the friends I knew.

(Piano continues quietly underneath as he speaks.)

(Piano pauses as he picks up the chair. Rejoins him as he carries on singing and heads for exit USL)

Home! Play last chord and then finish with riff of Ol' Man River.



END OF PLAY.