

Negro Spirituals

By Elaine Ransom

Time Period

- The precise start date of spirituals is unknown, but one could say they became popular in the late 1700s after the first Great Awakening
- We can only track spirituals from the earliest accounts from Slave Owners

Spirituals



Hymns

Spirituals:

- Call & response
- Polyrhythmic foundation
- Lyrics linked to conditions
- F.U.B.U

Hymns:

- Metrical Compositions introduced by European Missionaries

Double Entendre Texts

Call: Run Mary, run! Oh-

Tell Martha, run! Oh-

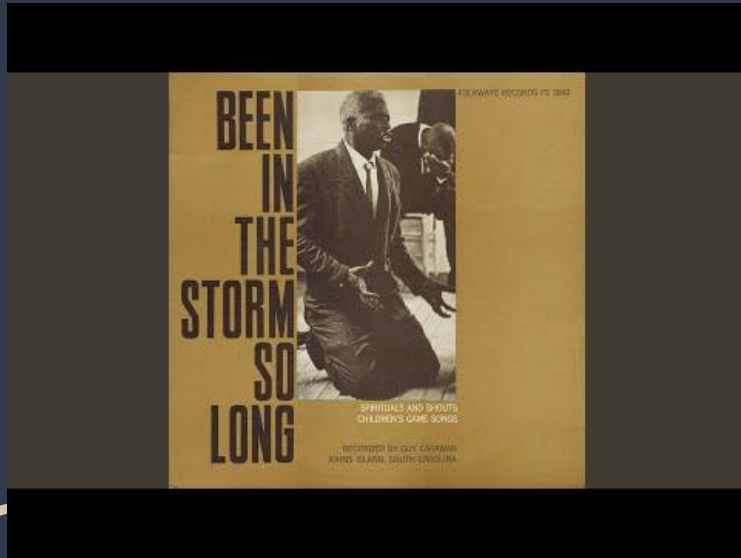
Tell Martha, run, I say!

Response: You got a right to the

tree of life

- Texts such as these would have double meanings, covertly encouraging the enslaved people to flee.

Folk Spirituals



- The earliest form of indigenous a capella religious music created by Black people during slavery
- Heterophonic textures
- Character irregular pulse-
Rhythm > Text

Ring Shout



A type of folk spiritual characterized by leader-chorus antiphonal singing, hand clapping, and other percussion, which incorporates highly stylized religious dance as participants move in a counterclockwise circle

Arranged/Concert Spirituals



- The post-Civil War form of spirituals in a fixed, non-improvised form, which evolved in schools to educate emancipated slaves
- Ex. Spelman College Glee Club Spring Tour 2015 “Steal Away” Arr. Dr. Kevin P. Johnson

Impact & Conclusion

Spirituals have functioned as religious and cultural expression for hundreds of years. Many original meanings hold true while also providing room for growth and reimagination. They have been and will continue to be performed by millions of black people around the world due to their strong historical and religious background.

Thanks!

For more information refer to the African American Music Textbook (pgs. 50-68) and <https://blackmusicscholar.com/artists-by-genre/negro-spirituals/>

R.B.R.
Mus.C.
#1691

Respectfully dedicated to Miss Mary Jordan

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Deep River

Old Negro melody
Arranged by
H. T. BURLEIGH

Lento

Voice

Deep riv - er, my

Piano

home is o - ver Jor - dan, Deep

riv - er, Lord, I want to cross o - ver in - to camp-ground.

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The image shows a page of a musical score for the song "Deep River". It is arranged by H. T. Burleigh and is an old Negro melody. The score is written for voice and piano. The tempo is marked "Lento". The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with the lyrics "Deep riv - er, my". The second system continues with "home is o - ver Jor - dan, Deep". The third system concludes with "riv - er, Lord, I want to cross o - ver in - to camp-ground." The piano part features a steady accompaniment with chords and moving lines in both hands. There are dynamic markings like "p" and "pp". The page is aged and has some staining.