Negro Spirituals
By Elaine Ransom
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:

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

Hymns:

- Metrical Compositions introduced by European Missionaries
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/