

Choral Programme Series

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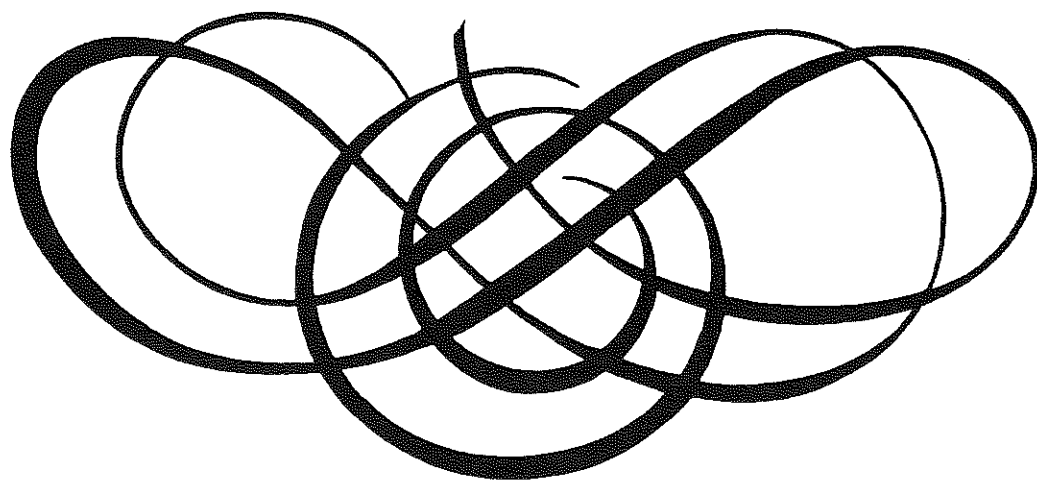
A Gospel Christmas

SPIRITUALS FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

*THE VIRGIN MARY HAD A BABY BOY
CHILDREN GO WHERE I SEND THEE
STEAL AWAY/POOR LITTLE JESUS
PRETTY HOME
GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN*

(SATB/Piano)

ARRANGED BY DARYL RUNSWICK



FABER *ff* MUSIC

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PERFORMANCE NOTE

These Christmas Spirituals are from North America and the Caribbean, and I have arranged them in Gospel style. This is the joyful and powerful way of singing which sprang up in the Deep South of America in Baptist and other black churches: a felicitous marriage of European hymns and African chant. Its jazz influence is obvious (though which came first is a matter of opinion). Gospel, though, is much simpler than jazz, and gets its power from avoiding the more complex harmonies, rhythms and performance styles of its more 'arty' sister.

Accordingly you will find here a set of arrangements which lack the subtle nuances of key-change, harmonies and dynamics which I have sometimes used elsewhere. This is quite deliberate, and it means that a different style of singing is required also. Gospel choirs who use these arrangements will not need to be told what to do: others may find the following tips helpful.

Vocal production

This should be open-throated and free, even when the music is soft. Don't go for a sound which will 'blend' but for a more raw, energetic, spirited one. Don't hold back!

Dynamics

Subtle ebb-and-flow is inappropriate here: terraced dynamics are called for. Hit a level (say *mf*) and hold it without falling off at the ends of phrases (except where marked). Any marked *crescendos* and *diminuendos* must be done less decorously than in European-style music.

Rhythm

If you sing this music with the right vocal production and with energy, there is no need to overdo the 'jazziness'. Just do the rhythms energetically and in strict tempo and they will sound good.

'Swung' rhythm (i.e. ♩ and ♪ = ♩♩) should be used in *Children go where I send thee*, *Go tell it on the mountain* and *Poor little Jesus* (but not the *Steal away* parts of that arrangement). The remaining pieces are to be sung in 'straight' rhythm like most rock music.

Pronunciation

Many printed copies of these songs have "De Virgin Mary", "Po' Lil' Jesus" etc. I find this offensive and have used ordinary spellings wherever possible (you will have to forgive the occasional 'Yeah'). This leaves non-Caribbean and non-American choirs with the choice of how far to go towards 'authentic' pronunciation. My own suggestion would be the minimum distance for good style and no further.

Accompaniment

Three of the arrangements have piano parts – bass (or bass guitar) and drums/percussion can be added ad lib. The piano parts themselves are quite simple. I really like them that way, but a talented improvising pianist with a good grounding in Gospel style will always want to add to them.

Above all, these arrangements are to be enjoyed. No pussy-footing, good rhythm, good intonation and lots of commitment!

Daryl Runswick

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