

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 17 February 2024
3.00pm

The African Concert Series Spirituals

Leon Bosch double bass
Rebeca Omordia piano

Spiritual

arranged by Leon Bosch

Nobody knows de trouble I've seen
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me
Swing low, sweet chariot
Ev'ry time I feel de spirit
By an' by
Deep River
I want to be ready
Death's Gwineter Lay His Cold Icy Hand On Me
Go Down, Moses
My Little Soul's Goin' to Shine
I am Bound for the Kingdom
I'm Workin' on my Buildin'
Roll, Jordan, Roll
My Soul's Been Anchored in de Lord
Were You There

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The forcible enslavement of people taken from West Africa to the Territories and States of the American South reached its zenith in the second half of the 18th Century. As the States grew in number and cohesion, the practice led to the Civil War between the northern-based Unionists and the Confederacy of the southern States before being abolished in the 1860s. Traces of this deep stain on American history have taken longer to eradicate, but the abiding musical legacy of African-American religious folksong – often referred to as Negro Spirituals – is now recognised as one of the most significant and lasting of all the influential strains within indigenous American music.

The Spirituals' melodic lines and harmonies were often derived from age-old folk roots. Many were composed, complementing those as transplanted folk music, with melodic lines often cast from pentatonic scales, and almost always danced. The earliest examples were performed in what evolved as being a 'ring shout' – a shuffling-style circular dance, propelled with group chanting and handclapping. The texts of almost all Spirituals derive from Biblical sources. The term itself is clearly inspired by St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians - 'Speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns and Spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.'

It is a fabulously rich musical heritage, and its influence is easily found even today. Several so-called Freedom Songs, such as Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song', share their musical roots with those of the great Spirituals, and several songs by the great reggae singer John Holt can also be traced to this tradition. The deep, wide-ranging male black voice, refined through a dignity of natural musical expression, produces a profound depth of utterance finely reflected in the range and concert arrangements of Leon Bosch.

In these concert arrangements it is the powerful melodies and simple but telling harmonies that produce the deep emotional impact, a remarkably original and memorable series of haunting *musical* expressions that, at the distance of several centuries, speak to all with a directness of utterance that remains immortal. Such significant, concert Spiritual

arrangements assert an unstated sense of genuine racial pride – understood and shared by all sympathetic listeners.

Examples of sorrow songs within today's collection include 'Nobody knows de trouble I've seen', 'Go Down Moses', and 'Were You There'. Additionally, and in contrast, jubilee songs include 'Ev'ry time I feel de spirit'. Spirituals often feature microtonally-flatted notes, syncopation and counter-rhythms, suggestive of handclapping, so naturally expressive when instrumentally recreated as here on the double bass.

The most significant original composer of Spirituals was Henry Thacker (HT) Burleigh (1866-1949), who learned many original Spirituals from his grandfather, a former slave. It was Burleigh who introduced Dvořák to the genre when the great composer was director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. Burleigh, who also possessed a fine singing voice, played the double bass and timpani in the National Conservatory Orchestra, making Leon Bosch's arrangements doubly authentic. Burleigh also travelled with Samuel Coleridge-Taylor during the Englishman's American visits, introducing the Englishman to many Spirituals, which caused Coleridge-Taylor to claim that Burleigh was 'the greatest singer of my songs.' Visiting England, Burleigh performed for King Edward VII a selection of his original songs and arrangements of plantation and minstrel songs; he also sang at the Temple Emanu-El in New York City.

It is impossible to over-emphasize Burleigh's significance in the history of Spirituals – as an early 'ethno-musicologist' (before the term was invented), a proselytiser of the genre, a performer of such music as singer and double bass player, teacher of both the great black concert singers Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson, and a composer of immortal melodies in various Spiritual styles – Burleigh was, without question, both the keeper and sword-bearer of the great Spiritual tradition. There can be little doubt that, had Burleigh not existed, the great lineage of these songs might have withered on the vine of history.

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Spiritual

arranged by Leon Bosch

Nobody knows de trouble I've seen

Oh, nobody knows de trouble I've seen,
Nobody knows but Jesus,
Nobody knows de trouble I've seen,
Glory, Hallelujah!

Sometimes I'm up,
Sometimes I'm down;
Oh, yes, Lord;
Sometimes I'm almos' to de groun'
Oh, yes, Lord.

Oh, nobody knows de trouble I've seen,
Nobody knows but Jesus,
Nobody knows de trouble I've seen,
Glory, Hallelujah!

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long ways from home, a long ways from home

True believer,
A long ways from home, a long ways from home.

Sometimes I feel like I'm almos' gone,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almos' gone,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almos' gone,
A long ways from home, a long ways from home

True believer,
A long ways from home, a long ways from home.

I know de Lord's laid his hands on me

O I know de Lord,
I know de Lord,
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me;
O I know de Lord,
I know de Lord,
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me.
Did ever you see de like before?
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me.
King Jesus preaching to de poor.
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me.

O I know de Lord,
I know de Lord,
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me;
O I know de Lord,
I know de Lord,

I know de Lord's laid his hands on me.
My Lord's done just what he said.
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me.
He heal'd de sick and rais'd de dead,
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me.

O I know de Lord,
I know de Lord,
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me;
O I know de Lord,
I know de Lord,
I know de Lord's laid his hands on me.

Swing low, sweet chariot

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.

I look'd over Jordan,
What di I see;
Comin' for to carry me home?
A ban' of angels comin' after me,
Comin' for to carry me home.

Ev'ry time I feel de spirit

Ev'ry time I feel de spirit movin' in my heart I will pray.
Ev'ry time I feel de spirit movin' in my heart I will pray.

'Pon de mountain my Lord spoke,
Out his mouth came fire and smoke.
In de valley on my knees,
Ask my Lord have mercy please.

Ev'ry time...

Jordan river chilly and col'
Chills de body but not de soul.
All aroun' me looks so shine,
Ask my Lord if all was mine.

Ev'ry time...

By an' by

Oh, by an' by, by an' by
I'm goin' to lay down dis heavy load.

I know my robe's goin' to fit me well,
I'm goin' to lay down my heavy load;
I tried it on at de gates ob Hell,
I'm goin' to lay down my heavy load.

Oh, by an' by ...

Oh, somea dese mornin's bright an' fair,
I'm goin' to lay down my heavy load.
Gwine to take a my wings an' cleave de air,
I'm goin' to lay down my heavy load;

Oh, by an' by ...

Deep River

Deep river,
My home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp-ground.

Oh, don't you want to go to that gospel feast,
That promis'd land where all is peace?

Oh, deep river, Lord
I want to cross over into camp-ground.

I want to be ready

When Peter was preachin' at Pentecost,

I want to be ready,
I want to be ready,
I want to be ready, my Lord,
To walk in Jerusalam, Jus' like like John.

Walk in Jerusalam, jus' like John.
An' he declar'd he'd meet me there,
Walk in Jerusalam, jus' like John.

I want to be ready ...

When Peter was preachin' at Pentecost,
Walk in Jerusalam, jus' like like John.
He was endow'd wid de Holy Ghost,
Walk in Jerusalam, jus' like like John.

I want to be ready ...

Death's Gwineter Lay His Cold Icy Hand On Me

Death is gwineter lay his cold icy hand on me,
Lord, on me.

Death is gwineter lay his cold icy hand on me, an'
Death is gwineter lay his cold icy hand on me,
Lord, on me.

Death is gwineter lay his cold icy hand on me.

One mornin' I was walkin' long,
I heard a voice an' saw no man:
Said 'Go in peace an' sin no mo';
Yo' sins forgiv'n an' yo' soul set free'
One o'dese mornin's, it won't be long,
You'll look for me an' I'll be gone.
Yes, one o'these mornin's bout twelve o'clock
Dis ol' worl' am gwine to reel an' rock.

Death is gwineter lay his cold icy hand on me,
Lord, on me.

Death is gwineter lay his cold icy hand on me, Lord!

Go Down, Moses

'Go down, Moses,
'Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharoah to let my people go.'

When Israel was in Egypt land,
'Let my people go.'
Oppressed so hard they could not stand
'Let my people go.'

'Thus spoke the Lord,' bold Moses said.
'Let my people go.'
If not I smite your first born dead.
'Let my people go.'

'Go down, Moses ...

My Little Soul's Goin' to Shine

I'm goin' to join that big 'soc'ation,
I'm goin' to join that big 'soc'ation,
I'm goin' to join that big 'soc'ation,
Then my little soul's goin' to shine, shine;
Then my little soul's goin' to shine along.

I'm goin' to climb up Jacob's ladder,
I'm goin' to climb up Jacob's ladder,
I'm goin' to climb up Jacob's ladder,
Then my little soul's goin' to shine, shine;
Then my little soul's goin' to shine along.

I'm goin' to feast off milk and honey,
I'm goin' to feast off milk and honey,
I'm goin' to feast off milk and honey,
Then my little soul's goin' to shine, shine;
Then my little soul's goin' to shine along.

I'm goin' to walk and talk with the angels,
I'm goin' to walk and talk with the angels,
I'm goin' to walk and talk with the angels,
Then my little soul's goin' to shine, shine;
Then my little soul's goin' to shine along.

I am Bound for the Kingdom

I am bound for the Kingdom,
I am bound for the Kingdom,
I am bound for the Kingdom,
Glory in my soul!

If you get there before I do,
Glory in my soul!
Look out for me, I'm a-coming too,
Glory in my soul!

I am bound for the Kingdom ...

I'm Workin' on my Buildin'

I'm workin' on my buildin'; workin' on my buildin',
I'm workin' on my buildin', all for my Lord.

If I was a mourner I'll tell you what I'd do,
I'd give my heart to Jesus and work on my buildin' too.

If I was a sinner I'll tell you what I'd do,
I'd give my heart to Jesus and work on my buildin' too.

I'm workin' on my buildin'; workin' on my buildin',
I'm workin' on my buildin', all for my Lord.

Roll, Jordan, Roll

Roll, Jordan, roll!
Roll, Jordan, roll!
I want to go to heaven when I die,
To hear old Jordan roll.
Oh, brothers, you ought to have been there,
Yes, my Lord.
A sittin' up in the Kingdom,
To hear old Jordan roll.

My Soul's Been Anchored in de Lord

In de Lord, in de Lord,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.
In de Lord, in de Lord,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.

Befo' I'd stay in hell one day,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord;
I'd sing and pray myself away,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord;

O Lord,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.
O Lord,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.

I'm goin' to pray an' never stop,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord;
Until I've reached de mountain top,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord;

O Lord,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.
O Lord,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.

In de Lord, in de Lord,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord.
In de Lord, in de Lord,
My soul's been anchored in de Lord;
God knows my soul's been anchored in de Lord.

Were You There

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh!

Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?

Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?

Oh!

Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,

Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?