PANEL TWO
Abstractions from the Teachings of Both Old and New Testaments

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Abstractions from the Teachings of Both Old and New Testaments

African songs give instruction—often by allegory—and improvised song deals with a topical episode or emotion.

The Aframerican religious folk songs are belatedly discovered to be emblematic not of weakness and degradation under slavery, but of power which carried the race through slavery. The enslaved Indian of early Spanish conquest perished. The Aframerican slave survived.

As a race (the history of one hundred and fifty years of slavery in his consciousness) the Aframerican could easily have disintegrated, losing self-respect, initiative, hope. There was divine purpose in his singing. Balancing himself on the deep springs of his musical nature gave him flexibility, fluidity, hence continuity. His religion, his song, became a working principle; the promise had to be all around him. In work and church and field, song and word became functional, integrated. He could laugh at himself and others. My own mother, in the twinkle of an eye, could illumine a subject sacred to her with a shaft of golden humor. Also, there were the workers in the field discussing the Sunday gathering and song festival amid peals of laughter and discriminating review. This attitude, which springs from many sources, has helped shape the astonishing growth of the Aframerican intellectually and musically. Not the least of these sources I see in the many facets of his musical nature, that turns his inner eye, as in these songs, to God and man with purpose, feeling and form.
Giving to the appearance of things their true reality, achieving a philosophy of eminent good sense, has often mistakenly been labeled “happy-go-lucky.” But it seems to me to be a kind of wisdom, born out of experience and sense of proportion. This faculty represents uncanny and remarkable resourcefulness, besides furnishing proof of a psychological truth.

It was brought home to me in handsome terms one day down in Georgia. The community of Angel Mo’ Farm and I had planned a special festive event, featuring barbecue and baseball games. For two days there was vigorous preparation putting the ground in shape for the big day; when at the end of the second day I announced to the group of eight men my intention to have a look around, there didn’t seem to be any particular enthusiasm for my inquisitiveness. They just draped themselves around their tools to await my verdict with rugged calm. On being informed that, according to my judgment, much was still to be done, they simply walked away. Feeling just a bit foolish, I had a creeping suspicion of having been put in my place. My foreman, sensing the tense moment and my chagrin, sprang to the rescue. “Mr. Hayes,” he said, “I know what you want and you ought to have it, but if you make it too fine, we won’t enjoy ourselves. You see, Mr. Hayes, what it takes to have a good time for us is in us, and we can have a good time on a rock pile.”

I think there is more to this story than meets the eye. There are toughness, self-sufficiency and good common sense.

This group of eight men represented as many more important members of a singing choir in our Angel Mo’ Farm community. Competitive singing by various community choirs, scattered over an area of thirty to fifty miles, afforded a great incentive for our community folk to get together once or twice a week for rehearsals. On such Sundays as they were to go abroad to sing in other communities, the singers would pile into trucks, wagons pulled by mules, or any other possible conveyance and, rejoicing, would be heard singing snatches of favorite song passages as they journeyed along. These community folk had loads of fun; good fun, which their Bible teachings helped to keep chaste and in proper proportion.

It was my habit — especially in the early part of my return home after thirty years’ absence — to give concerts in the community area. The proceeds from these concerts went toward some community welfare. This gesture of good will was much appreciated by my homefolks, who in turn wished to do
something for me. So it was that one night in the winter of 1930, the Angel Mo’ community singers announced to me that they were going to give me an evening of music in my own Angel Mo’ farmhouse. The night came and my home was fittingly prepared for the occasion. Great waves of heat poured forth from wood fires which had been lit in the four fireplaces of the spacious rooms, and set off by pitch-loaded pine chunks. Luminously, the glow from these flames filled the rooms. Along with the singers came also parents and many children. The occasion took on the aspect of an African fete day when with African songs and folk tales they would celebrate the deeds of their heroes. To add to the spirit of festivity, I had prepared a generous variety of edibles for their pleasure, which were to be partaken of by the assembly after the singing. True, the evening turned out to be one of those rare, great joys of one’s life. The singers seemed inspired, and the surge and flow of spiritual significance in their singing made me feel that I had got religion a second time. My Angel Mo’ had died in 1923, but the singing of a folk song by these singers entitled “You’re Tired, Chile,” resurrected her and brought her presence vividly before me. As they sang, she stood there before me. The song told the story of an Aframerican woman of pre-Civil War days, who had worked hard as a slave and lived to a great age of eighty. Having been told of salvation through Christ for all those who remained faithful throughout their lives, she sat one day in the kitchen, after the dinner dishes had been cleared away, rocking in her chair and thinking on the promises of the Lord. She felt the time to be near when she would be called home to Heaven. Becoming intensely engrossed in the thought and contemplation of the event, she actually felt her moment had come. Immediately, she was surrounded by all of the heavenly hosts, who greeted her with loving enthusiasm. They saw how very weary and worn she was and with tender compassion begged her to sit down and rest awhile. But she couldn’t sit down. Her restless demeanor caused the angels to inquire, “Tell me what you waitin’ for?” To which she responded, “I’m waitin’ for my mother, I want to tell her bowdy.” Well, before the singers completed this song, unashamed, I was unable to control the deep emotion upon me. I urged the singers to repeat the song many times that evening. That song is the first of the next group of ten songs which I like to call abstractions from both the Old and the New Testament, based upon the teachings of the Bible, more than on episodes from it.
1. You’re Tired, Chile

(To the memory of my Angel Mo')

Allegretto, ma con vivo

Arranged by Roland Hayes

Oh, sit down, sister, sit down! I know you're tired, sit down! 'Cause you come a long-way;
sit down, chile!  Sit down, an' res' a lit'-l while. Oh, while. Oh, you

come a long-way.         An' you had hard trials.    An' I

know you're tired,       Sit down, chile!        Sit down, an' res' a lit'-l

while! Oh, you come a long-way.     An' you had hard trials.
An' I know you're tired, sit down, chile! Sit down, an' rest a lit'-l' while. Tell me what you're wait-in' for. I'm a--

wait-in' for my mother. 'Cause I want to tell her howdy.

Sit down, chile! Sit down, an' rest a lit'-l' while. Oh, you
Come a long way, An' de road is dark, An' I know you're tired, Sit down, chile! Sit down an' res' a lit'-l while. Oh, sit down, sis- ter, sit down! I know you're tired, sit down! 'Cause you come a long-way, Sit down, chile! Sit down, an' res' a lit'-l
while. Oh, you come a long-way, An' you had hard trials, —

I know you're tired, sit down, chile! Sit down, an' res' a lit'-l while.

II. In-a-Dat Mornin'

Great strength moves gravely throughout the religious mysticism of this next song. Through rugged form pour the sentiments of one whose fervidly sure faith breathes an air of complete confidence and security. The Judgment holds no semblance of despair or concern for this soul. Irrespective of where the body may be buried, the soul is certain to be numbered among the redeemed "In-a-Dat Mornin'."
In-a-Dat Mornin’

Arranged by Roland Hayes

Voice
Adagio

1. You may bury me in de East. You may
2. Good ole Christ-ians in dat day, Dey'll take

Piano

bur-y me in de West. But I'll hear de trump- pet sound.

in-a-dat morn-

in! In dat morn-

in’! My Lord, how I long to go,

For to hear de trump- pet sound.

In-a-dat morn-

in!
III. Plenty Good Room

Joy in anticipation of happiness, mirrored through faith, is one of the mighty pillars that support the Aframerican throughout his experiences. That portion of Scripture according to Saint John, XIV.2–3: “In my Father’s house are many mansions . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself,” filled him with exuberant, rhythmic emotion. Promises forced up through love and devotion to an outburst of a song of welcome are ideally represented in the next song. Though different in the circumstances of its origin, it parallels “You’re Tired, Chile” in its spontaneity, easy lilting flow and rhythmic verse.

 Plenty Good Room

Arranged by Roland Hayes
plenty good room, plenty good room, Good room in my Father's kingdom,

Plenty good room, plenty good room, A-yes' choose yo' seat an' set down.

Broad

would not be a sin-na; I tell you de reason why 'Cause
would not be a back-slid-er,

if my Lord-a should call on me, I wouldn't be read-y to die.
Plenty good room, plenty good room, Good room in my

Father's kingdom. Plenty good room, plenty good room, A jes'

choose yo' seat an' set down. Oh, Plenty good room,

plenty good room. Good room in my Father's kingdom,
Plenty good room, plenty good room, A- jes' choose yo' seat an' set down,

ritardando a tempo

— Oh, yes a plenty good room, plenty good room,

ritardando leggero—legato molto a tempo dim.

Good room in my Father's kingdom, Plenty good room,

slow

plenty good room, A-jes' choose a yo' seat an' set down.
IV. I’m Troubled

This song is closely associated with one of the rarest friendships in my life. On that day we met in Paris in 1922, Noel Sullivan had opened up for him the literature of Aframerican folk songs, and I became blessed with a friend of human and artistic value. We talked for hours about the religious folk songs of my people — their emotional, racial background, their spiritual content. Noel was so deeply moved by the significance of what he felt in these songs, which, in a sense, was his heritage as well as mine (both being American born and a part of America’s traditions), that I was inspired to make for him the present musical setting. The following note on the song is taken from a book entitled The Story of the Jubilee Singers:

The person who furnished this song (Mrs. Brown of Nashville, Tenn., formerly a slave) stated that she first heard it from her old father when she was a child. After he had been whipped he always went and sat upon a certain log near his cabin, and with the tears streaming down his cheeks, sang this song with so much pathos that few could listen without weeping from sympathy; and even his cruel oppressors were not wholly unmoved.¹


I’m Troubled

(To my great friend Noel Sullivan)

Arranged by Roland Hayes

Voice

Piano

mf cantabile con rubato

mf ten. (with pathos)

1. I’m troubled, I’m troubled, I’m

col canto
troubled in min'. If Je-sus don'-

help me, I surely mus' die. 2. When bowed down in-

sor-row and bur-dened with grief, To

Je-sus in se-cret I go for re-lief.
V. Heaven

The expressed joy of the next song reminds me of my ecstasy as a child which the anticipation of a brand-new pair of brass-tipped brogans at Christmas time stirred in me. That those shoes had to last me until the next Christmas made the joy of anticipation all the more keen. Heavenly shoes, long white robes and starry crowns, while taking on the hue of supernatural significance, nevertheless moved the adults of my people to like ecstatic sense. It was a thrill not to be described in mere words when they contemplated “Heaven” and the royal gifts of shoes and other adornments which are promised every true and faithful child when he reaches God’s Heaven.

Heaven

Arranged by Roland Hayes

Voice

Andante con moto e sempre legatissimo

Piano

1. I got a robe, You got a robe, All-
2. I got a shoes, You got a shoes, All-

-a God’s chil-lun got a robe. When I get to heav’n goin’ to
-a God’s chil-lun got a shoes.
put on my robe, I'm goin' to shout all over God's heav'n,

shoes walk

heav'n, heav'n, heav'n. Ev'y-bod-y talk-in' 'bout-a

heav'n ain't a-goin' dere, heav'n, heav'n. Goin' to

shout all over God's heav'n.
3. I got a song, You got a song, All -

- a God's chil-lun got a song. When I get to heav'n goin' to

sing a new song, I'm goin' to sing 'all o - ver. God's

heav'n, heav'n, heav'n. Ev -
VI. Steal Away

Most slaveowners considered the maintenance of illiteracy among the slaves to be for the best interest of both whites and blacks. But always an inspired leader arose here and there who learned to read the Bible, or drawing on a prodigious memory acted as a storehouse for those unable to read. Since the masters found that singing got more work out of the slaves, it became a natural outlet through which leaders could pour their Bible lore. And these historical narratives and words of wisdom were, I believe, mated to music brought from Africa, or improvised in similar mold. Such a leader amongst the slaves was my paternal great-grandfather.

The song “Steal Away” is said to be so inspired and was born in a cotton field where there were a great number of slaves hoeing cotton. The leader who always planned the date when the slaves would go secretly, after nightfall, to hear a Northern white clergyman preach the gospel of salvation through Christ would first whisper, “Steal away,” to the slave next in line to him. This whispered word, spoken over rhythmic measures of hoe strokes of the choppers, was passed along the line until it reached the last individual. Work, of course, took on a more lively gait from this moment. Then the spoken word gradually took on melody which surged forth increasingly on the rhythmic verve of spirited melody of a decidedly African idiomatic pattern. The hoes were simply playing an ecstatic rhythm as an accompaniment background to the song. Now and again, the leader would halt the flow of a smoothly conceived legato to introduce a sort of recitative occasioned by the oncoming of wind or a threatened storm, which he used to stress the urgent call to the meeting. This kind of spirited melody kept up until the end of the workday. Thus the plan of the slaves to attend the religious services secretly, after nightfall, was effectively hidden from the master.
Steal Away

Andante con moto

Piano

Voice

Steal away, steal away, to Jesus.

Steal away, steal away home. I ain't got long to stay here; I ain't got long to stay here.
My Lord, He calls me, He
green trees a bend-in', Po'
calls me by the thunder,
Sinner stands a tremblin'.
with in-a my soul. I ain't got
long to stay here.
VII. Po' Pilgrim

The following song is indelibly etched with the memory of the first time I heard it sung. An old wayfaring man of my race came upon our woodpile at my Angel Mo's little farm in Georgia. I was a mere child at the time. It seems that he had reached the great age when his services were of no further use to his former owners, so they turned him out. With a bundle of rags fixed to the end of a stick and a banjo under his arm, he became a wanderer.

My Angel Mo' had left me at the house to mind a younger brother. While playing in the yard I heard a voice of heartbreaking pathos. It is my first memory of having been moved by our religious folk songs. I looked, I peeped into the woodpile from behind a big cedar tree. There I saw a dejected-looking old man. He was singing, sitting on a fire log, his face resting on his right palm. The sound and sight affected me so intensely that I, not knowing why at the time, obeyed the impulse and ran into the kitchen and fetched the old man a part of the food my Mo' had left for the baby. This act was the means of gaining not only a great friend, but an early mentor.

Po' Pilgrim

Arranged by Roland Hayes
morrow, I'm strivin' for heav'n my home. Some
own me, Because I am tryin' to get in.

Times I'm both tossed and driven, Some times I know not where to roam
I've heard of a city called heav'n, I've

D.S. "1. started to make it my home. My home.
D.S. 2. broadl

ritard.
VIII. Good News

Whenever the sorry lot of my people in slavery reached a near breaking point, the mind gave itself over to fevered contemplation of the promise of Christ's Kingdom. At the appointed time, God sent down a chariot of fire that took Elijah to Heaven (II Kings II.11). This fulfillment of God's promises to Elijah paralleled the promise of Christ's Kingdom as felt by the redeemed of my people. There were no doubts in their minds. Jubilation took the part when the slaves anticipated release from the tortures of existence.

It was utterly natural to identify their daily life with that of the children of Israel; to bring the Bible, Old and New Testament, into constant and immediate relationship with their experience. They would be ready with the breaking of the "Good news, de chariot's a-comin'." Liberty, freedom, were realities of their earth, not far removed from celestial promises found in their Bible, their religion.

Good News

Arranged by Roland Hayes

Voice

Allegretto con molto anima

Piano

Good news, de chariot's a-comin', Good

sempre con moto

news, de chariot's a-comin', Good news, de chariot's a-comin', An' I
1. Dere's a long white robe in de heav'n I know, Dere's a
2. Dere's a bran' new song in de heav'n I know, Dere's a

long white robe in de heav'n I know, Dere's a long white robe in de bran' new song in de heav'n I know, Dere's a bran' new song in de

heav'n I know, An' I don't want it to leav'-a me be-hin'.

Good

colla voce
tempo primo
news, de chariot's a-comin', Good news, de chariot's a-comin', Good news, de chariot's a-comin', An' I don't want it to leav' a me be-hin'. Good news, de chariot's a-comin', Good news, de chariot's a-comin', Good news, de chariot's a-comin', An' I don't want it to leav' a me be-hin'. An' I
IX. You Mus’ Come in By an’ Thro’
de Lamb

As my people contemplated the limitless power of the Almighty He was viewed by them in terms of a fourth dimension, which is to say, no matter what one does or what powers one may muster in an effort to escape God it is not possible to do so by going over Him; irrespective of mortal man’s scheming it is not possible to get under God; never mind what conniving to get around Him, that too is futile. Only one procedure is open, "You mus' come in by an' thro' de Lamb."
You Mus' Come in By an Thro' de Lamb

Allegretto e con spirito grandioso

Arranged by Roland Hayes

Voice

Piano

My God is so high, You can't get over Him; He's so low you can't get under Him; He's so wide, dat you can't get around Him. You mus' come in by an' thro' de Lamb.

One day as I was a walkin', a tell you fellow members, things
long the heav'n-ly road, My Sav-iour spoke un-to me, An' He
hap-pen might-y strange. The Lord was good to Is-rael, An' His

filled my heart-a wid love. Oh He's so high, you can't get o-ver Him; He's
ways don't ev-er change.

too wide to get a-roun' Him, You
so low you can't get un-der Him; He's so wide dat you can't get a-roun' Him, You

mus' come in by an'tho' de Lamb!

X. 'Roun' About de Mountain

This song is said to have originated in the Appalachian Mountain system of Tennessee. A young woman, before departing this life, acknowledged God as her Lord and Saviour. She did not die in her sins, which is the good reason for the exalted joy felt by the entire community — comprising women and children, too — as they jubilantly followed the ox-drawn cart which bore the body to its final resting place off a winding road among the hills.

'Roun' About de Mountain

(A Recessional)

Arranged by Roland Hayes

My God's a-rul-in', An' she'll rise in His arms...
'Roun' a-bout de moun-tain, 'Roun' a-bout de moun-tain,

My God's a-rul-in', An' she'll rise in His arms.

Lord loves de sin-na, De Lord loves de sin-na man, De

Lord loves de sin-na, An' she'll rise in His arms.
When I was a sinner, A-seeking Jesus like you,

I went down in the valley, I prayed till I come through. You

hypocrite, you concubine, You're placed amongst the swine. You

go to God with your lips and tongue, But you leave your heart behind. De
Lord loves de sin-na, De Lord loves de sin-na man, De

Lord loves de sin-na, An' she'll rise in His arms.

'Roun' a-bout de moun-tain, 'Roun' a-bout de moun-tain,

My God's a-rul'in', An' she'll rise in His arms.
Goin' a-roun' de mountain, There I'll take a my stan'. I heard de voice of Jesus, Thank God He's in dis-lan'. De

Lord loves de sin-na, De Lord loves a sin-na man, De

Lord loves de sin-na, An' she'll rise!