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Ruth Freedman

Ruth Freedman, born in Los Angeles, CA, in 1937, picked up a harp one day while she was studying nursing at the University of Nevada at Reno, and it became a life-long hobby. During her 10 years as a nurse on Molokai at Kalaupapa, she discovered her true calling - harp therapy. Ruth took refuge in her harp while caring for her father who had Alzheimer's, playing for him throughout his condition. Although Ruth has helped many people with her music, she has said that, in a way, it is just as therapeutic for her. Aside from harp therapy, Ruth has performed at other venues and events – providing beautiful harp music for particular seasons and occasions.

Foreword

Over 30 years ago, in a small music shop, I found a collection of African-American spirituals. This got nearly passed over; it had little interest to me (being Jewish). But, I bought it anyways, because the price was a bargain and because it looked rather harpistic.

A then I played the music...

I have played it ever since – as well as Mr. Burleigh's other arrangements, to add to my collection (should a singer be interested).

Gradually, I saw many of these as concert variations on a theme: worthy of adaption to solo harp – even without words.

I learned that this man was an American hero and felt that I had discovered gold!

I think you will too.

~Ruth Freedman

Respectfully dedicated to President Barack Obama

An Introduction

What songs belong to the American? What melody would stop him on the street of a strange land, and make a home-feeling well up within him? The most potent, and the most beautiful in my estimation, are the plantation melodies and slave songs.

~Anton Dvorak*



Harry Thacker Burleigh (1866-1949) was born to the daughter of a slave, Hamilton Waters, set free from a Maryland plantation, on becoming blind. He cared for his young grandsons, while his widowed daughter was working as a maid, in Pennsylvania, and unable to read, sang spirituals to the young boys, as they led him through the city streets.

Graduating from high school, Harry became renown in his Church Choir and synagogue, as a wedding singer. The mother of Edward MacDowell heard his voice – and as a registrar, enabled Harry to apply for a work scholarship at the New York Conservatory of Music. Here he studied, worked, and sang: for the eminent director, as he took notes, with deep baritone live dinner music: delighted to find such a source of American folk music.

Harry studied music, voice, languages and composition, as a student: while mastering the double bass and tympani, in the school orchestra. Upon hearing of a vacancy in the nearby St. George Episcopal Church choir, he auditioned and became the first black singer – a post he remained at, for over 50 years. (Six years later, he joined the choir of Temple Emanu El, where he also sang, for 25 years).

After Dvorak returned to Bohemia in 1895, his protégé graduated, with a spot on the faculty, in voice performance. He was sought out by eminent international singers – John McCormack, Enrico Caruso, Paul Robeson, and Marian Anderson, among others.

In 1900, Booker T. Washington came to the New York Conservatory, to invite Harry to accompany him on summer fundraising trips – on behalf of his Tuskegee Institute to recruit sharecropper students needing remedial reading and writing, bricklaying fundamentals, and social refinements – how to achieve a better chance, in a life long passing them by. The two made many summer trips during their 14 years together.

After Booker T. Washington passed away, Harry continued writing out the spirituals that gained such popularity on those trips: as a music editor for G. Ricordi in New York and Milan, “Deep River” was the first of a hundred superbly arranged art-songs and spirituals. As a charter member of ASCAP, he was supremely positioned to save these spirituals for the ages.

~Harry T. Burleigh II

A Celebration of 100 Years of American Spirituals preserved by H.T. Burleigh

Anton Dvorak. Harper’s Magazine, Feb. 1895.

The Spirituals of Harry T. Burleigh. Miami: Belwin Mills Publishing Corp., 1919.

Deep River

This is Mr. Burleigh's first arrangement. It was set down by him in 1909. The music begins slowly and quietly, with an earnest middle section, and then ends in the reflective meditation of "crossing over."

Deep River

arranged by H.T. Burleigh
harp arrangement by Ruth Freedman

Andante flowing/arpeggiated

The first system of musical notation consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The time signature is common time (C). The music begins with a series of arpeggiated chords in the right hand, while the left hand plays a simple harmonic accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) is present. The system concludes with a repeat sign.

The second system continues the piece. The right hand features a melodic line with some grace notes, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment. Chord symbols G^\sharp , F^\sharp , G^\sharp , and F^\sharp are written below the bass staff. The system ends with a repeat sign.

The third system shows the right hand (RH) and left hand (LH) parts more clearly. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur, and the left hand has a corresponding accompaniment. The system ends with a repeat sign.

The fourth system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur, and the left hand has a corresponding accompaniment. Chord symbols F^\sharp and F^\sharp are written below the bass staff. The system ends with a repeat sign.