

SING MY SOUL

CD LINER NOTES

01 William Smith: Ride the Chariot

Despite their generally upbeat nature, Spirituals originate from those dreadful days when Slaves looked forward to escaping this temporal world to be with their Lord in Heaven. This is a call and response style song where the teller declares “I’m gonna ride the chariot in the morning, Lord” then asks, “Are you coming, my brother/sister?” to which they reply “Yes, Lord!”

02 Thomas Tallis: If ye love me

From England’s *Golden Age* comes Tallis’ magnificent anthem depicting Jesus’ New Commandment.

03 Tomas Luis de Victoria: O magnum mysterium

The Spanish composer Victoria takes the Christmas Eve motet *O great mystery* which evokes the night of Jesus’ birth. All is very calm and still, and the only witnesses to the miracle were the animals in the cattle shed.

04 Arr. Russell Jackson: Steal Away

Another Spiritual, but this time of a hushed and almost secretive, desolate nature: Steal away, steal away to Jesus; I ain’t got long to stay here.

05 Stephen Paulus: Pilgrims’ Hymn

The Pilgrims’ Hymn is actually the last movement of Paulus’ opera *The Three Hermits* which is a short story by Leo Tolstoy. The moral of the story is that it doesn’t matter what words you make up to pray; God already knows.

06 Antonio Lotti: Crucifixus à 8

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate: He suffered death and was buried. This line from the Credo is expressed in grindingly ironic harmonies of eight voices that build both texture and agony in equal parts. Lotti describes the suffering and ultimate bleakness of Good Friday.

07 Charles Villiers Stanford: Three Motets

I Justorum animae. II Beati quorum via. III Coelos ascendit. Though a Dublin born Irish Protestant, Stanford wrote these three Latin motets towards the end of his life. The first takes the text *The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God.* The second, *Happy are the upright who walk in the way of the Lord.* And finally, *Today into heaven has ascended Jesus Christ.* Three totally different moods, the third motet taking on a comical air as Choir II keeps interrupting Choir I before they can finish their phrase.

08 Thomas Dorsey: Precious Lord

Not to be confused with the band leader, Thomas was music director at Pilgrim Baptist on Chicago’s Southside. Precious Lord was born of a tragedy: Dorsey had left his pregnant wife to attend a revival in

St. Louis. When he arrived there was a telegram saying to return; his wife was dead but the baby was alive. Caught between grief and joy he returned to Chicago to find the baby had died also. Nettie and the baby boy were buried in the same casket. It took Dorsey some time to find his voice again, but when he did it was in this form: *Precious Lord, take my hand; lead me on, let me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn... Lead me home.*

09 Ola Gjeilo: Ubi caritas

Gjeilo wrote his setting of *Where love and charity are found* while still a teenager. The fact it has become so popular says a lot about his compositional style considering the sheer number of settings out there.

10 Diego de las Muelas: Cum audisset Iohannes

Among other positions, Muelas was Choirmaster at Santiago de Compostela where he wrote some marvelously austere motets. This one is for the Second Sunday of Advent and takes the reading: When John (the Baptist) was in prison and heard of the works of Christ, he sent his disciples to ask “Are you the one to come?”

11 John Tavener: The Lamb

This effective little anthem makes use of mirror image and retrograde writing whereby the soprano statement is then inverted and/or sung backwards. The poem is by William Blake.

12 Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina: Sicut cervus desiderat

Psalm 42 (Like as the hart) has always been a favorite text for composers of any period. Palestrina was the very apotheosis of the Italian Renaissance, and it was said that rather than sending them to prison criminals should listen to his music in order for it to break their hearts.

13 Daniel Gawthrop: Sing me to heaven

Often one outshines the other but this is a case of true congruence between text and music. Jane Griner crafts eloquent language with image, and fills it with meaning: *If you would comfort me, sing me a lullaby; If you would win my heart, sing me a love song; If you would mourn me and bring me to God, sing me a requiem, sing me to Heaven.* Likewise, Dan Gawthrop handles the text with exquisite care; the musical phrase will reflect an unfinished thought, or the texture of a chord will reinforce the feel of a word.

14 William Dawson: Ain't that good news!

Ending with another Spiritual, the Dawson piece recalls Smith's upbeat nature regarding hope in the world to come, and a similar tragedy to Dorsey when Dawson lost his wife, Cornella, during their first year of marriage. Dawson went on to become Director of the Tuskegee Institute's School of Music where he developed a world-class music program with a 100-voice choir.

I got a crown up in-a the Kingdom, ain't-a that good news.

I'm-a gonna lay down this world, gonna shoulder up-a my cross.

Gonna take it home-a to my Jesus, ain't-a that Good News!!