

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A STUDY OF ROBERT NATHANIEL DETT: HIS
CREATION OF *THE CHARIOT JUBILEE* AND
A SETTING OF A NEW ACCESSIBLE
REDUCED ORCHESTRATION

Jason Max Ferdinand, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2015

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This dissertation addresses the concern that music by Black composers remains inadequately represented in concert performances. Though a number of factors account for this unfortunate circumstance, the problem can be positively addressed. This dissertation focuses specifically on making Robert Nathaniel Dett's oratorio, *The Chariot Jubilee*, more accessible to performers and audiences alike. An instrumental accompaniment comprising of one flute, one oboe, one bassoon, one french horn, piano, organ and a string quartet affords access to choirs of many levels the opportunity to delve into this luminous piece of music. This has been demonstrated by combining the musical forces of the Oakwood University Aeolians, members of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra, and tenor soloist Roderick George from the University of Montevallo.

A STUDY OF ROBERT NATHANIEL DETT: HIS CREATION OF *THE CHARIOT*
JUBILEE AND A SETTING OF A NEW ACCESSIBLE REDUCED
ORCHESTRATION

by

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my grandfather, Thomas Alva, who informed me at a very early age that the sky is the limit, and for my parents, T. Leslie and Mary Janet, who have always been there as sources of encouragement and inspiration and the most selfless and supportive guardians a child could possibly ask for.

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My current group of Aeolians for being captive “accomplices.”

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

The development of music in the United States of America has been impacted greatly by the Negro race. From the terrain of Africa they brought their own music and in their new home new melodies were discovered. Life in America brought many changes and adaptations to their music. There was an intermingling of two music strains, which brought about new sounds, gestures, and reverberations.

Throughout the history of the world it can be clearly seen that music is a reflection of the societal mirror. Issues of politics, social injustice, wars, and other world matters are often used as inspiration for musical ideas. Classical music can easily be viewed as a white, European art form, but the last 150 years prove that it is an art that has become more diverse and nuanced. As America's first black president is in the midst of his second term, the progress of African-Americans and those of African heritage in classical music offers an intricate portrait. Though over the course of time the contribution of Blacks can be readily seen in jazz, gospel, rhythm and blues, hip-hop, and other popular styles, their influence in classical music remains unclear and under-appreciated.

Aaron Dworkin, an African American, was named a 2005 MacArthur Fellow, a Member of the Obama National Arts Policy Committee, and was President Obama's first nominee to the National Council on the Arts. He is the Founder and President of the Sphinx Organization, the leading national arts organization that focuses on youth development and diversity in classical music. I had the privilege of meeting Mr. Dworkin

in February of 2014. In that conversation he shared with me that in his research he had compared works done by North American composers each year and found that the percentage written by composers of color was much lower than their white counterparts. Note that in the calculation, North American composers were identified, due to the supremacy of European composers in classical music. Despite narrowing the research in this way, he still found that minority composers are so inadequately represented each year that a statistician would assign a zero rating.

Oakwood University is a private, historically Black university located in Huntsville, Alabama. I have the honor of teaching at this university and serving as the director of choirs. As part of the music curriculum, students are encouraged to attend as many orchestral concerts as they can. They often comment that few, if any, of the orchestral musicians they hear perform are of African descent. Opera has a greater concentration of Black performers, though casting can bring various challenges to Black singers. Often we see music by Black composers highlighted only at Black History Month or some other special Afro-centric occasion, such as those surrounding the commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday.

Black musical influences stretch far and wide. Jazz rhythms and blues intervals infuse concert music of Ives, Gershwin and Copland in America, Ravel, Milhaud, and Dvořák abroad, and many more recent composers from both sides of the Atlantic. Yet, many music history books have given an inadequate account of the many significant contributions to Classical music composition from persons of color.

My interest in the contributions of Black composers and arrangers to classical music was spurred while teaching at Pine Forge Academy in Pine Forge, Pennsylvania.

This academy is one of four Black boarding academies remaining in the continental United States and boasts a very high graduation rate and university acceptance rate, as well as a rich musical legacy. It was in 2002 that I decided to program Nathaniel Dett's *Listen to the Lambs* and *The Chariot Jubilee* for the Pine Forge Academy concert choir. As part of the learning process, students were asked to do a very short review on any aspect of the music that they found to be interesting. There were two consistent observations that were noted in reading those short essays. First, the students found the music to be unique, enjoyable, and moving. Second, they thought the composer was of European descent. It dawned on me that in their young minds, they equated a certain quality of music to certain demographic groups. These two observations coupled with my great love of Dett's music, sparked my resolve to educate students about the great musical contributions made by Blacks to the classical art form.

Robert Nathaniel Dett was of African descent. He was a composer, pianist and music educator of the 20th century. As with any composer, this musician-educator is perhaps best understood when he is seen against his ancestral backdrop. Dett arose in the American musical scene at a time when the Negro people of the United States experienced financial despair, thwarted desires, educational adversity, and physical brutality. In this societal atmosphere, Dett did not climb beyond the heights of a minor American composer. His musical outpourings were dominated by the idioms of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Dett, like Dvořák, did not start a new school by using Negro tunes in his larger forms. Yet, he did make dramatic and effective use of Negro spirituals and clothed them in Classical garb.

Dett seemed destined by the historical milieu of his time to become an attentive social thinker. His concerns and attitudes reverberate in his musical outpourings. Instead of conforming to more recognized musical forms, Dett chose to walk the path of preserving and further developing his unique Afro-American musical heritage. The Negro spiritual served as the toolbox from whence Dett expanded the simple tunes of the cotton fields into more extensive art forms.

Statement of the Problem

The Chariot Jubilee is a free fantasia for chorus and orchestra with tenor soloist, commissioned in 1919 by Howard Lyman, conductor of the Syracuse University chorus. This work is thought to be the first symphonic work based solely on that of a Negro spiritual. Soon after the initial performance, the orchestral score was lost for almost eighty years until composer and arranger Hale Smith took on the challenge of recreating the orchestral portion. In 1995, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Morehouse College Glee Club, the Spelman Glee Club, tenor soloist Mel Foster and conductor Yoel Levi collaborated in presenting this work. Having a full orchestra at one's disposal is not a reality for many; so, it was that idea which spawned the concept of doing an instrumental configuration that was more accessible.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of my dissertation is to make *The Chariot Jubilee* more accessible to performers and listeners alike. Included in this project is an instrumental accompaniment that is comprised of: one flute, one oboe, one bassoon, one French horn, piano, organ, and string quartet. It is my vision that with access to this reduced orchestration choirs of

many levels, be they high school, college, community choirs, and even church choirs will have the opportunity to delve into this luminous piece of music.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter I gives an introduction to the paper. Chapter II takes a brief biographical snapshot of Dett. Chapter III presents the motet: *The Chariot Jubilee* – the Performance History, Recordings, the Text and Birth of *The Chariot Jubilee*. Chapter IV consists of the Score and Musical Analysis. Chapter V describes the Preparation and presents the Performance of *The Chariot Jubilee*. Chapter VI summarizes the dissertation and makes conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

ROBERT NATHANIEL DETT, 1882-1943

Robert Nathaniel Dett, the youngest of four children, was born in Drummondsville, Ontario, Canada on October 11, 1882. Though his mother was born in Canada, his ancestors were of American descent. Both his parents were musical.

Dett's first music lessons were with an English lady named Mrs. Marshall. She was also the teacher of the two older Dett brothers, Samuel and Arthur. In 1893 the Dett family moved to Niagara Falls, New York, where they opened and operated a 17-room tourist home near the railroad tracks. At this juncture, an Austrian teacher, John Weiss, served as Nathaniel's music teacher. His progress in general pianistic proficiency was almost negligible, but his aptitude to improvise improved and his natural musicality blossomed.

When Dett was around fourteen years old, his parents separated, and his mother had the task of raising two sons, one being Nathaniel. It became imperative then for young Nathaniel to work a part-time job to help augment the family income. He tried selling newspapers but his shy disposition did not allow for success in that endeavor. He then landed a position as a bell-boy at the Cataract Hotel in Niagara Falls. In one of the hotel parlors was a grand piano, which he was allowed to play during his free time. His playing attracted the admiring attention of guests of the hotel and he made many friends in this manner.

It was at one of Dett's impromptu recitals at the Cataract Hotel, that a Dr. Hoppe from Berlin, Germany became very impressed with the young talent. Dr. Hoppe conversed with him, imparting information about Dvořák and his use of Indian and Negro

melodies as thematic seeds for larger forms. Dr. Hoppe urged Dett to come to Germany to receive musical training there.

It is interesting to note that the aforementioned discussion made no impression on Dett at that time. The singing of Negro spirituals was not foreign to Dett, but for him, they had no particular meaning. In fact, Dett himself later shared that the discussion of Negro spirituals or other Negro folk music was embarrassing to Black people as the general public attitude toward such music was unappreciative or even mildly contemptuous. Dett spoke of this feeling in an interview published by *Musical America* in 1918.

The Negro people as a whole cannot be looked to as a very great aid in the work of conserving their folk music. At the present time they are inclined to regard it as a vestige of the slavery they are trying to put behind them and to be ashamed of it.¹

From 1901 to 1903, Dett studied with Oliver Willis Halstead at the Halstead Conservatory in Lockport, New York. This period of study not only showcased his technical deficiencies at the piano, but also made him realize the serious approach that was needed towards his growth at the keyboard. It was at the end of the first year of study at the Halstead Conservatory that Dett gave his first serious piano recital. This included, in addition to works by Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, and McDowell, several of his own unpublished compositions.² It was the success of this recital and the confidence showed in him by Mr. Halstead that prompted Dett to think seriously about a musical career.

¹ Dett, "Negro Music," *Musical America*, XXVIII (July 6, 1918).

² McBrier, "Life and Works," p. 7.

In 1903, Dett enrolled in a five-year course of study at Oberlin College, in Ohio. His intention upon entry was to devote himself to the study of music theory. One has to take note of the factors that directed the choice of Oberlin College. Few colleges in this time period admitted Black students and Oberlin was, without question, one of the finest conservatories of music. With intentionality, Oberlin reached out to Black students encouraging them to enroll and if that was not enough, created employment opportunities to help them through school. “Learning and Labor” is a part of the official seal of Oberlin College and that attitude was one that was put into practice. Dett, in accordance with this philosophy, held two jobs: one directing the choir at Mt. Zion Baptist Church and the other firing furnaces at the school.

From all accounts, Dett seemed to have a very charismatic personality. He was always well dressed and quickly became well loved by both the faculty and fellow students. Warner Concert Hall was always crowded when Dett gave recitals. This trait of being able to bring people together for a central purpose would be seen time and time again in the life and career of Dett.

With more than an average degree of diligence, Dett accomplished an admirable academic record. He gained entry into Phi Beta Kappa and at graduation he received first class honors in a class of 100. Dett’s studies at Oberlin included, among others, four years of piano, organ, and composition. The greatest influence on Dett was the instruction in both composition and piano that he received from G. W. Andrews. It was also during his time at Oberlin that the Kneisel Quartet appeared in recital. When Dett heard the slow movement from Dvořák’s Quartet in F, which is based on traditional airs, the idea was born of using Negro folk melodies in art music.

In 1908, Robert Nathaniel Dett received the Bachelor of Music degree with a major in composition and piano, thereby becoming the first Negro to complete the five-year course in music at Oberlin. His knowledge of counterpoint and harmony, coupled with a spark of the Negro tradition and the zest of being a recent graduate launched Dett in what was to become a career in serious music.

In September of 1908, Dett embarked upon his long teaching career. His first teaching assignment was at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, where he taught piano and conducted the choir. It was at this small school that Dett garnered knowledge of many new Negro songs from the students and the people in the community. The vast majority of these songs was Negro spirituals.

Consistent with his earlier experience at Oberlin, he quickly became loved and respected by fellow faculty and students. Dett lived on the campus in a small cottage. This humble abode also served as his teaching studio. It was outside of his studio that two boys were dancing in fun one day. Dett was watching as they played and was so captivated by the rhythm that he composed a piece. Upon studying the piece after its completion, he realized that that rhythm was from an early New Orleans dance called *Juba*. This piece, which is part of the suite *In the Bottoms*, is perhaps Dett's most famous piano offering. This work was composed at that time but was published later, in 1913.

Music was without question the central motivation in Dett's life. He maintained an arduous teaching load, rigorous practice regimen, and served as the organist of a local church. As if this were not enough he added a community chorus while at Lane College. His charismatic nature and impeccable reputation made the gathering of such a vocal force easier than the norm.

Lane College received three years of service from Dett. He subsequently accepted a position in the music department of Lincoln Institute (now Lincoln University) in Jefferson City, Missouri. He found that at this institution, music was more popular than athletics. This trait remains largely true today in some smaller institutions in the South. One year later, in 1912, his *Magnolia Suite* for piano was published. This suite comprises five individual pieces and aptly depicts imagery related to the life of the Negro in the South. The suite is an interesting cross between parlor music conventions and African-American melodies.

True to his manner of operation, Dett maintained a rigorous workload. He did not socialize much as he was busy with vocal classes, choirs, the orchestra, composing, performing and maintaining a piano studio of about 100 students. He was considered an excellent instructor by all accounts. It was during this time period that he traveled to Memphis, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama and performed successful recitals. The recitals attracted record numbers, reminiscent of his days at Oberlin. News of the success of all his work in academia and the triumphs in his recitals spread far and wide.

Another person who was doing great work in the education of Negro musicians and the advancement of Negro music was Madame E. Azalia Hackley. In 1912 Madame Hackley presented a Christmas recital at Hampton Institute. She recommended to the administrative powers, that Dett be considered for the position of Director of Music. Her voice in the music world was an audible one and Hampton Institute administrators took heed. They invited Dett to become the Director of Music, and also promised that a School of Music would soon be established.

Dett was appointed Director of Music at Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia in 1913. At the time the institution enrolled the highest number of Negroes in the country and enjoyed a reputation of high scholastic success. It was in this atmosphere that Dett began to water his seeds of thoughts in regards to the education and musical heritage of the Negro people.

The then President of Hampton Institute, Dr. Hollis B. Frissell, shared with Dett his wish to form the Hampton Choral Union, with the goal of bringing the community and the Institute closer. Dett reached out to various church choirs and musical organizations in the community to join forces with personnel from the college. Rehearsals were held in Clarke Hall, which even today, reverberates with the sounds of its ancestors. In May of 1914 the first concert of this choral force was presented. The large crowd that gathered for this event enjoyed a varied program and had as its musical guest soloist Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949). Burleigh was a famous Negro singer-composer living in New York. The concert comprised arrangements of Indian and Negro melodies of Burleigh plus Dett's setting of *Listen to the Lambs* by the Hampton Institute choir.

Although Dett continued to be busy with his musical activities, he did find time for romance. On December 27, 1916, Dett and Helen Elise Smith, a talented New York pianist, were married at St. Phillip's Church in New York City. Shortly thereafter, the couple took residence on the Hampton campus. It was not long after this move that the institution invited Mrs. Dett to join the faculty as a piano instructor.

Dett founded The Musical Art Society in 1919 and it became one of the most outstanding college concert series in the nation. The National Symphony, Marian

Anderson, and the Westminster Choir were some of the featured guests. The students of Hampton Institute were recipients of these nuggets of cultural life and the community was enriched as well.

In 1920, Dett took a brief sabbatical to study at Harvard University. While there, he won the Bowdoin Literary Prize for his essay, "The Emancipation of Negro Music." In this narrative he warned about the danger of losing the real essence of African-American music through commercialization. Later he won the Francis Bott Music Award for his composition for six-part chorus, *Don't Be Weary, Traveler*.

It was after this year of study that he returned to Hampton Institute with a fire to use American Negro folk melodies as thematic material for developing larger artistic forms. Dett pressed toward his goal and kept up his heavy schedule of composing in addition to his teaching, directing the Choral Union, managing the Musical Art Society, performing recitals, writing and conducting the Hampton Choir. It was in these inspired years that *The Chariot Jubilee* (1919) was born. His original setting of this small oratorio for tenor solo and mixed voices, with accompaniment of piano, organ, or orchestra, represents his first attempt to use the Negro Spiritual as a thematic germ for an extended choral work. The oratorio was dedicated to the Syracuse University Chorus and its conductor, Howard Lyman, who had commissioned the work. The first performance took place in 1921 at the Music Festival in Syracuse with the Syracuse University Chorus with orchestra.

Dett received invitations from many parts of the United States and Canada to lecture, to perform recitals, to present the Hampton Choir, and to arrange Negro spirituals. He received the honorary Doctor of Music degree from Harvard in 1924 and

from Oberlin in 1926. Dr. Dett had the opportunity in 1929 to travel to Paris and study with Nadia Boulanger at the Fountainebleau School of Music. In 1930, the Hampton Institute choir did a European tour, performing in major concert halls and singing for European dignitaries.

In a swift turn of events, Dett was asked to resign from his position by the then President at Hampton Institute, Arthur Howe. This occurred in July of 1931. Dett, in a very professional manner, questioned and fought the request, but to no avail. The issue was resolved with Dett's official resignation in 1932, missing retirement by one year. This was an unfathomable reward for nineteen years of illustrious service. It seemed only reasonable to allow Professor Dett the opportunity to retire with dignity and security after giving of himself and his talents to Hampton Institute. No substantiated reason has ever been found for the requested resignation. There were, however, great suspicions of harassment and pettiness waged by the administration against Dett. From all accounts, President Howe was not aligned with the philosophies of Professor Dett as it related to exposing music students to all aspects of music.

In the midst of the resignation saga, Dett had secured a leave of absence from Hampton for the academic year 1931-1932. He sought instruction at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and on June 30, 1932, received the Master of Music degree in composition. *The Ordering of Moses*, was his compositional thesis that was later published.

Without a job, this time period proved difficult for Dett and his family. He opened a teaching studio at 154 East Avenue in Rochester, New York, in a bid to earn a

living. Additionally, he conducted a sixteen-voice choir which did a weekly broadcast for Stromberg-Carlson over the National Broadcasting System.

In 1937, Dett accepted a visiting directorship at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Bennett is a small, private, historically Black Methodist Church school for women. It then became necessary for Dett to immediately start arranging and composing music for women's voices.

On May 7, 1937, the oratorio, *The Ordering of Moses*, was premiered. It was under the patronage of the Cincinnati Music Festival Association. Eugene Goossens served as conductor of a chorus comprising of 350 voices and the Cincinnati Civic Orchestra. The venue was the Music Hall in downtown Cincinnati. Dett, despite the love his family had for the Bennett campus, became very restless. His schedule did not allow him much time to compose and he missed the stimulation afforded by bigger cities. His mind wandered back to Rochester, and the facilities of the university that had been at his disposal. Consequently, he resigned his position at Bennett College in 1942 and, with his family, returned to Rochester, New York. Without missing a beat, he involved himself in the music and culture of the city. He also joined the United Service Organization (USO) as musical director in February of 1943. In July of that year, he was sent to Battle Creek, Michigan, to direct the musical arm of the USO club.

On October 2, 1943, just nine days before his sixty-first birthday, he died in Battle Creek following a heart attack he had suffered more than a week earlier. One wonders if he would have lived longer had he not maintained such a sustained intense lifestyle.

Like Dvořák, Coleridge-Taylor, Harry T. Burleigh, among others, Dett truly was sold on the idea that the Negro folksongs were significant enough to merit the

construction of larger forms around them. Armed with his distinguished training, he proved to be a champion for that cause.

CHAPTER III

THE MOTET: *THE CHARIOT JUBILEE*

Performance History

Despite the success and glowing praise for the initial performance, interest in the work seemed to have come to a virtual halt. My research has not shown any documented performances for another seventy-seven years. It was in the years leading up to the seventieth birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King that interest in performing works based on Negro spirituals became increasingly popular. *The Chariot Jubilee* was often considered, but the orchestra parts could not be found.

Notwithstanding this significant challenge, several performances of *The Chariot Jubilee* would later occur through the noteworthy collaborative efforts of a number of musicians. The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in conjunction with the music faculty at Morehouse College chose to resurrect Dett's work. Benjamin Roe commissioned noted African-American composer Hale Smith, on behalf of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, to provide an orchestration for *The Chariot Jubilee*. With a completed orchestration, the piece was performed in January of 1998 and then again on January 15, 1999. The 1999 performance celebrated the seventieth birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King.³ The personnel for these two presentations of *The Chariot Jubilee* were:

- *Atlanta Symphony Orchestra - Yoel Levi, Music Director*
- *Ebenezer Baptist Church Choir - Dr. Uzee Brown, Jr., Music Director*
- *Morehouse College Glee Club - Dr. David Morrow, Director*
- *Spelman College Glee Club - Dr. Norma Raybon, Director*

³ Email correspondence from Dr. Uzee Brown and Dr. David Marrow.

- *Wendell P. Whalum Community Chorus - Dr. David Morrow, Director*
- *Michael Foster - Tenor Soloist*

Another group that has fostered the revival of *The Chariot Jubilee* is the Nathaniel Dett Chorale, an ensemble based in Toronto, Canada. Brainerd Blyden-Taylor is the founder, artistic director and conductor of this ensemble, formed in 1998. During a conversation with Mr. Blyden-Taylor, I learned that the group was formed to fill a void in the Canadian musical scene at that time. There had never before been a professional ensemble that was dedicated to the performance of Afro-centric choral music.⁴ It is evident that the accolades that the group has received have given credence to Mr. Blyden-Taylor's vision. *The Chariot Jubilee* has become a staple of the ensemble's repertoire and has been met with great reviews. However, to this date the Nathaniel Dett Chorale has never performed the piece with orchestration.

In June of 2014, I visited Dale Music Company in Silver Spring, Maryland. This store was a favorite of mine and I was accustomed to spending many hours perusing music scores. After sixty-four years of operation, Dale Music Company was in the midst of singing its swan song and many loyal supporters were taking advantage of the deep discounts that were being afforded. After about four hours of poring over scores, I made my way to the check-out line. I asked the cashier about a publication that contains a set of Dett Negro Spirituals. It was in that conversation that I discovered another scholar, Dr. James Armstrong, who is also an avid proponent of Nathaniel Dett's work and had recently performed *The Chariot Jubilee*. Dr. Armstrong is an Associate Professor of music and director of choirs at The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg,

⁴ Phone conversation, August 27, 2014.

Virginia. He has dedicated many hours of research and teaching to the African-American spiritual. The Choirs of William and Mary College performed concerts from March 14 - 19, 2014, as part of their annual spring tour. Professor Armstrong, being a lover of Dett, found joy in programming *The Chariot Jubilee*. Later in the spring, May 15- 25 of 2014, his choral ensemble embarked on a tour of the Baltics and Scandinavia. On this tour *The Chariot Jubilee* was also performed in the section of the program that featured American music⁵. What struck me and further propelled the intent of my project is that all of the performances were accompanied by organ.

Yet another group that has aided in the revitalization of Dett's work is the Boston Landmarks Orchestra. This orchestra was established in 2000 by Charles Ansbacher and provides free concerts at varying locations in the greater Boston area. Joanne Barrett serves as public relations director of the orchestra and shared with me that some additional goals of the orchestra are to provide high quality music and make it available to all, foster a broad appreciation of classical music, enhance the awareness of greater Boston as a cultural destination, and promote the appreciation and preservation of historic and architectural landmarks in the area.⁶

Christopher Wilkins currently serves as the music director for the Boston Landmarks Orchestra and on August 13, 2014, he led a performance of *The Chariot Jubilee* with the New England Spiritual Ensemble and the One City Youth Choir serving as the choral forces. Davron Monroe served as the tenor soloist. The orchestration that was utilized for this performance was the Hale Smith version that was used by the Atlanta Symphony in the 1998 and 1999 performances. An interesting connection

⁵ Email correspondence with Dr. James Armstrong.

⁶ Telephone conversation, October 8, 2014.

discovered in my research is that Benjamin Roe, who had commissioned Hale Smith on behalf of the Atlanta Symphony, served on the board of the Boston Landmarks Orchestra.

Recordings

In addition to the aforementioned live performances, two professional recordings have been made of *The Chariot Jubilee*. The first is part of the debut recording of the Nathaniel Dett Chorale, which also features some other beautiful compositions and arrangements of spirituals by Dett. The recording shows the composer's unique and distinctive voice. It is my opinion that the center-piece of this musical offering is *The Chariot Jubilee*. Justin Bacchus is the tenor soloist and Chris Dawes is the organist. The performance was under the ensemble's label in 2002.⁷

VocalEssence, a professional group based in Minnesota and founded in 1969, did the second recording of this oratorio. Philip Brunelle is a well-known conductor and organist and is the founder of VocalEssence. He is known for and has received numerous awards for his adventurous programming.

In 2004 VocalEssence recorded an album that featured choral music in the jazz age. The album was titled "*Got the St. Louis Blues*" and featured music by composers Hall Johnson, Harry T. Burleigh, Florence Price, Carl Diton, William Grant Still, Edmund Jenkins and Nathaniel Dett. The Hale Smith orchestration of *The Chariot Jubilee* was utilized and this is the only recording to date of the oratorio with orchestra.⁸

⁷ *Listen to the Lambs* by the Nathaniel Dett Chorale.

⁸ *Got the Saint Louis Blues* by VocalEssence.

The Text

The text, composed by Dett, is based on both Scripture and folklore. The Bible has, of course, been a source of inspiration for composers of many genres. Also, African-American spirituals are revered as heartfelt expressions of faith. The two sources of Dett's inspiration are so cleverly combined that at times it is difficult to differentiate between what is a Biblical quotation and what is original verse. The form of the text is very free and embraces a number of styles. Blank verse is often used in tandem with rhymed sections.

Dett does not seem to draw his lyrical content from a single passage, but rather a collection of stories, passages, and Biblical events. I have done a study of those correlations that are most recognizable and indicated (see Table 1). Where needed, brief commentary has been supplied. As Dett does not intentionally supply a specific passage, all of my suggested references should be considered hypotheses.

Table 1. *The Chariot Jubilee* Text and Hypothesized References

<i>The Chariot Jubilee</i> Text – R. Nathaniel Dett	Hypothesized References
<p>Down from the heavens, a golden chariot swinging, Comes God's promise of salvation. (Amen, Amen!) Hallelujah, hallelujah!</p>	<p>Golden Chariot -- may refer to 2 Kings 2:11 where Elijah is taken up in a flaming chariot.</p> <p>Swinging -- probably appropriated from the Negro Spiritual, <i>Swing Low Sweet Chariot</i>.</p> <p>God's promise of salvation -- in Scripture and in the slave-spiritual tradition, salvation (healing, freedom) was thought to come from <i>above</i> (John 3:31, 36)</p> <p>Amen! Hallelujah! -- As one would imagine, these words are found throughout the Bible. However, Revelation 19 is a freedom context, so this may apply.</p>
<p><i>Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home, Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home!</i></p>	<p>See 'Golden Chariot' and 'Swinging' above.</p>
<p>God made a covenant, For the glory of His grace Through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His gospel, full and free, Like a chariot swung from heav'n, Shall bear the true believer home, Safely home.</p>	<p>God made a covenant -- This is an interesting line. Initially, I thought Dett might be alluding to God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15: 18-21). The covenant motif runs throughout Scripture, starting in the old testament and making its way to the new testament. The basic summary is what we find in Dett's text "God made a covenant...through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." This is the centerpiece of the covenant motif (Jeremiah. 31:33, 34; Hebrews 8:6).</p> <p>Covenant = promise of salvation = salvation = safely home</p>

	<p>For the glory of His grace -- Ephesians 1:6, 7 (read vv. 3-6, 7-14 for context). The covenant is essentially about God giving grace in and through Jesus.</p> <p>His gospel, full and free, like a chariot swung from heaven -- Here, he connects <i>gospel</i> with <i>promise of salvation</i>, both of which come/swing down from heaven...full and free=grace.</p> <p>True believer -- John 3:16, 18, 36.</p>
<p>Salvation, sweet cov'nant of the Lord, I shall ride up in that chariot in that morning. (Tell it, tell it.)</p>	<p>See 'Salvation', 'Cov'nant' and 'Golden Chariot' above.</p>
<p>He who doth in Christ believe, Though he were dead, Yet shall he live. King Jesus triumphed o'er the grave! His grace alone Can sinners save.</p>	<p>He who doth in Christ believe – John 3:16, 18, 36.</p> <p>Though he were dead, yet shall he live– John 11:25, 26.</p> <p>King Jesus triumphed o'er the grave – 1 Corinthians 15:55; Acts 2:24.</p> <p>His grace alone can sinners save – Ephesians 2:8, 9.</p>
<p>O Hallelujah!</p>	<p>See 'Amen! Hallelujah!' above.</p>

Birth of *The Chariot Jubilee*

Before beginning a detailed musical analysis of *The Chariot Jubilee*, it is interesting to note that Dett, being a product of the North, did not have a first-hand knowledge of the folk culture and the performance practices of the South. There is no indication in his early education of Dett giving thought to composing or performing music based in the tradition of the slaves. In some of his essays Dett notes that as a child his grandmother would sing spirituals to him and that he found them to have a strange sound.

It was not until his matriculation at Oberlin Conservatory that he was swayed into visualizing the great potential of this music. Dett attended a performance by the visiting Kneisel String Quartet, where he heard a slow movement from a Dvořák String Quartet that was known to be based on traditional airs. This music was likely the slow movement from the composer's String Quartet in F major op. 96. Dvořák composed this piece during his residency in the United States and it was premiered on January 1, 1894, in Boston. Though he quoted no actual American melodies, his goal was to capture the essence of American music in the work's melodic flow and harmonic construction.

Hearing music that was familiar to him from his youth, now clothed in the garment of the concert hall, proved to have an enormous effect on Dett. It was at this point that he began to re-evaluate the potential of music outside the European tradition.⁹ Dett's initial disinclination to embrace the traditional African-American religious songs of the nineteenth century was an opinion typical of the composers that came of age during the 1880's and 1890's. The spirituals were seen as too redolent of the conditions

⁹ Robert Nathaniel Dett, *From Bell Stand to Throne Room*, Etude 52 (February 1934).

of slavery to have a positive force in any way. However, it is out of the crucible of suffering which the music portrays, the ambitious goal for spreading awareness and appreciation of them to the general public took root.

A critical description of the oratorio was given after the first performance in 1921:

It is only a short score of some thirty-one pages, yet may claim to be a masterpiece of its kind. It has that inner cohesion, that unity of inspiration, of progressive culminating movement, the free yet musically logical simultaneous development which harmonizes rich detail with breadth of outline, all of which are so much more important than any mere outward and uninspired formal development. It is built – a whole throbbing, pulsing movement, whose fermatas are less interruptions of the mounting tide of choral motion than points of emphasis and departure for a more sustained and colorful working up – on a few themes. These the composer has handled with a master's control of his material. The richest variety of dynamic and interpretative effect, sole passages with cantellations that stand forth gloriously, a splendidly contrasted handling of inner and outer voices in a counterpoint which is never arid: an ever-increasing fervor of expression, a stretto of movement, sonorous body of choral sound, and passionate intensity culminate in the magnificent allegro finale, rightly marked con abandon. The low basses at times have the ritual quality of the Greek Catholic male-choir voices. If R. Nathaniel Dett had written no other work, The Chariot Jubilee would suffice to make his name. It has potentialities of effect present in very few, if any, choral works of its length.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hampton Institute Press Service – *The Chariot Jubilee* Inspired

The following chapter will present the accompanying instrumentation that I have constructed and also examine the musical fabric of the work. In it we will discover seamless voice leading, a complex weave of slow and fast moving vocal parts and a bevy of rhythmic variations. There is even an evocation of trains, which spirituals often compared to heavenly chariots. As a result of the analysis, the work will be seen as disciplined, yet decorously expressive.

CHAPTER IV

SCORE AND MUSICAL ANALYSIS

Process of Orchestration

I garnered experience with the oratorio after several performances directing my high school choir in 2002 and then again in 2009 with my collegiate choir. Even with very experienced accompanists, it was evident that playing the organ accompaniment was a tall order. This enigma can be easily understood as the accompaniment is an orchestral reduction.

With one sole accompanist, several issues were apparent. First, the soloistic lines that are in the accompaniment tended to be lost. Even with the use of different organ stops the colors seemed too blended to be effective. Second, the organ did not provide the best support for the percussive and rhythmic natures of certain passages. Third, the layout of many churches created a logistical challenge with the organ being some distance away from the choir. This led to delays in sound, sight lines became an ordeal, and there was a breach in ensemble security.

After many performances I was firmly convinced that the work would be better performed with an instrumental accompaniment that would allow for greater independence of musical lines. My auditory imaginings caused me to think that various accompanying timbres would increase the musical palette making the performance more interesting. The goal was to match this concept with an instrumental accompaniment that would not be too expensive for any choral program. The size of the instrumental

ensemble and the difficulty level of the parts were the two factors that helped shape my decisions in considering the potential cost.

It seemed fitting to use a string quartet comprised of the usual complement of two violins, viola and cello. This grouping would be reminiscent of Dvořák's *String Quartet in F*, which inspired Dett's composition of this work. Compared to the full cadre that is found in a full orchestra, a string quartet is much more accessible. Moreover, the string instrument family offers the greatest range of expression, intensity, and nuance. It is in essence the foundation of any orchestra and such is the case in this instance.

In assembling the woodwind section, I chose to depart from the typical pairing of parts. Again, this consideration was financially motivated. After studying the organ score I chose from the woodwind family the flute, oboe and bassoon. The flute has a sweet middle range that can be used to support harmonies. However, its greatest function in my reduced orchestration is the use of the top of its range. The flute was assigned many of the lyrical musical lines that needed to be highlighted. The timbre of an oboe typically does not blend well. However, the characterful sound that the oboe produces was what I was seeking. The bassoon has a nasal quality but blends well with low strings. I wanted to make use of its sonorous low tones and sweet mid-range. The bassoon also has the ability to sound noble and lyrical as well as humorous. There are passages in the oratorio that are bouncy in character and the bassoon would give that emphasis on the low end.

The French horn is the wildcard of this setting. It is a difficult instrument to play and in this setting the sole player can be exposed if not well prepared. The horn's mellow

sound can turn a simple musical line into something that both soothes and lifts the spirit. I used the horn mainly to highlight various lines and to fill in harmonies. Horns are perfect for playing lines with longer note values above which melodies can float, around which accompaniments weave and beneath which bass lines can wander. It has a unifying effect in pulling the instrumental forces together.

Admittedly, the decision to score for piano was based on my knowledge of and familiarity with the location of this instrumental premiere. The church on the campus of Oakwood University poses a unique challenge when it comes to music for choir and organ. The Rodgers organ is an electronic organ. The speakers are housed in sound cabinets located high up on stage left and right. The sound tends to go right over the heads of the choir and conductor. This causes a liquefied sensation for the singers and security in rhythm is often vague. My experience has taught me that adding piano to those settings greatly mitigates this challenge because of the percussive qualities the piano affords. I also used the piano because of its wide range. This characteristic of the piano and its ability to play arpeggios were useful in adding filigree.

Having made a thorough study of Dett's original choral/organ score, I proceeded to orchestrate for these instruments. I met with a number of instrumentalists during this process to ensure that the parts were within the boundaries and capabilities of the instruments. In so doing, I was convinced that the parts were playable by both professionals and good amateurs.

Score

All the markings that appear in parentheses () are edits made after my detailed study of this oratorio.

The Chariot Jubilee

by R. Nathaniel Dett

for Flute, Oboe, Bassoon, Horn in F, Piano and/or Organ, Choir & Tenor Solo
String Quartet

The Chariot Jubilee

R. Nathaniel Dett

Adagio $\text{♩} = 58$

Flute
Oboe
Bassoon
Horn in F
Piano
Organ
Pedals
Tenor Solo
Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello

This page of a musical score features the following instruments and parts:

- Flute (Fl.):** Treble clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Oboe (Ob.):** Treble clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Bassoon (Bsn.):** Bass clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Horn (Hr.):** Treble clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Piano (Pno.):** Grand staff (treble and bass clefs), featuring arpeggiated figures and sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Organ (Org.):** Grand staff, playing sustained chords with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Pedal (Ped.):** Bass clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Vocalists:** Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.) parts, all of which are currently silent.
- Violin I (Vln. I):** Treble clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Violin II (Vln. II):** Treble clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Viola (Vla.):** Bass clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.
- Violoncello (Vc.):** Bass clef, playing sustained notes with dynamics *pp* and *(mf)*.

A

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

A

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Fl. *Maestoso* *mp*

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno. *cresc.* *f* *(mp)* *mp*

Org. *cresc.* *f* *(mp)* *mp*

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I *f* *(mp)* *mp*

Vln. II *f* *(mp)* *mp*

Vln.

Vc. *(mp)* *mp*

rit. Tempo 1

Fl. *p* *poco rit.*

Ob. *p* *poco rit.*

Bsn. *pp* *p* *poco rit.*

Hn. *pp* *p* *poco rit.*

Pno. *pp*

Org. *pp* *p* *poco rit.*

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I rit. Tempo 1 *pp*

Vln. II *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

B

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

p

mp

p

p

mp

Down from the heav-ens, a gold-en char-iot swing-ing,

(mp) Down from the

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

(p)

(mp)

Comes... God's prom-ise... of sal-va-
 tion, heav-ens, on a gold-en char-iot swing-ing,

Fl.
 Ob.
 Bsn.
 Ho.
 Pno.
 Org.
 Ped.
 I. S.
 S.
 A.
 T.
 B.
 Vla. I
 Vla. II
 Vln.
 Vc.

tion; Hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu - jah! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot,
 Comes. God's prom - ise. of sal - va - tion.
 A - men, a - men!...
 (mp) A - men, a - men!...
 (mp) A - men, a - men!...

Fl. I

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pnc.

Org.

Ped.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Com-ing for to car-ry me... home. Swing low, swing low, Swing low, swing low, low, low, low, low, low, low.

(mf)

(p)

molto rit.

Fl. *subito f*

Ob. *subito f*

Bsn. *subito f*

Hn. *subito f*

Pno. *(mf)*

Org. *(mf)*

Ped.

S. *subito f*

A. *subito f*

T. *subito f*

B. *subito f*

Vln. I *subito f*

Vln. II *subito f*

Vla. *subito f*

Vc. *subito f*

molto rit.

low, swing low, Hal-le-lu-jah! Swing low!

Swing low, swing low, Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

low, low, Swing low, sweet char - i - ot!

low, low, Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

low, low, Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, swing low!

C *a tempo*

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S. *pp*
Down from the heav-ens, a gold-en chari-ot swing-ing, Comes God's prom-ise of sal-

A. *pp*
Down from the heav-ens, a gold-en chari-ot swing-ing, Comes God's prom-ise of sal-

T. *mf*
Swing low, sweet char-i-ot, Low swing

B. *mf*
Swing low, sweet char-i-ot,

C *a tempo*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

29

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

tion; Down from the heav ens, a gold - en char - iot swing - ing,

tion; Down from the heav ens, a gold - en char - iot swing - ing,

low, swing low sweet char - i - at Swing low, swing low, sweet

Swing low, swing low sweet char - i - at Swing low, swing low, sweet

(*mp*)

(*mf*)

(*sf*)

(*mf*)

(*sf*)

(*mf*)

(*sf*)

(*mf*)

più rit. *a tempo più marcato*

Fl. *mf*

Ob. *mf*

Bso. *(mf)*

Hn. *(mf)* *mf*

Pno. *mf*

Org. *(p)*

Ped. *mf*

V. S. *mf*
 Swing low, sweet

S. *mf*
 Comes God's prom - ise of sal - va - tion! Swing low, sweet

A. *mf*
 Comes God's prom - ise of sal - va - tion, sal - va - tion! Swing low, sweet

T. *(p)*
 char - iot, char - i - ot of sal - va - tion! Down from the heav - ens, like a

B. *(p)*
 char - iot, swing low, Down from the heav - ens, like a

più rit. *a tempo più marcato*

Vln. I *mf*

Vln. II *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

char - i - ot, Com-ing for to car-ry me home;
 char - i - ot, Com-ing for to car-ry me home;
 char - i - ot, Com-ing for to car-ry me home;
 gold-en char-iot swing - ing; Down from heav-en, down from heav-en, Like a gold-en char-iot swing-ing.
 gold-en char-iot swing - ing; Down from heav-en, down from heav-en, Like a gold-en char-iot swing-ing.

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Pcd.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Swing

Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Swing low,

Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Swing low,

Down from heav-en, down from heav-en, Like a gold-en char-iot swing-ing, Comes God's prom-ise

Down from heav-en, down from heav-en, Like a gold-en char-iot swing-ing, Comes God's prom-ise

D *a tempo recitando con moto*

più rit. e dim.

p

p

p

p

cresc. *p*

p

p

f Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! *p* *mp*

low, swing low, Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! *p* *mp* God made a cov-en-ant, for the

swing low, Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! *p* *mp* God made a cov-en-ant, for the

of sal - va - tion, *f* swing - ing low, *p* *mp* God made a cov-en-ant, for the

of sal - va - tion, *f* swing - ing low. *p* *mp* God made a cov-en-ant, for the

più rit. e dim.

p

p

p

p

D *a tempo recitando con moto*

with increasing enthusiasm

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

I. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

f

mf

ff

with increasing enthusiasm

glo - ry of His grace, God made a cov-en - ant, God made a cov - en-ant,

glo - ry of His grace, God made a cov - en-ant,

glo - ry of His grace, God made a cov-en - ant,

glo - ry of His grace, God made a cov-en - ant,

with increasing fervor

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hr.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf

mp

mf

marcato

with increasing fervor

with increasing fervor

Thru our Lord, thru our Lord, Thru our Lord and Sav-our, Je - sus

Thru our Lord, thru our Lord, Thru our Lord and Sav-our, Je - sus

Thru our Lord, thru our Lord, Thru our Lord and Sav-our, Je - sus

Thru our Lord, thru our Lord, Thru our Lord

Thru our Lord, thru our Lord, Thru our Lord

molto espress. *calmato*

Fl. *mp*

Ob.

Bsn. *mp*

Hr. *mp*

Pno. *mp*

Org. *(f)*

Ped.

T. S.

S. *(mf)*
 gos - pel flow - ing free, like a char - iot swung from heav'n, Shall bear the true be - liev - er

A. *(mf)*
 gos - pel flow - ing, flow - ing free like a char - i - ot swung - from heav - en, Shall bear the true be - liev - er

T. *(mf)*
 A cov - en - ant flow - ing free, a char - iot swung from heav - en, Shall bear the true be - liev - er

B. *(mf)*
 cov - en - ant, like a char - iot swung from heav'n, Shall bear the true be - liev - er

molto espress. *calmato*

Vln. I *mp*

Vln. II *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

poco rit. *a tempo*

Fl.
 Ob.
 Bsn.
 Hn.
 Pno.
 Org.
 Pcd.
 T. S.
 S.
 A.
 T.
 B.
 Vln. I
 Vln. II
 Vla.
 Vc.

home,
 home, safe - ly home,
 home, safe - ly home,
 home, safe - ly home,
 Safe - - - ly home;
 Shall hear the true be - liev - er home; His
 Shall bear the true be - liev - er home; His
 Shall bear the true be - liev - er home;
 Safe - - - ly home;
 Shall hear the true be - liev - er home; His
 Shall bear the true be - liev - er home; His
 Shall bear the true be - liev - er home;
 Safe - - - ly home;

poco rit. *a tempo*

20

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

gos - pel flow - ing free, like a char-i - ot swung from heav - en, Shall bear the true be-liev - er

gos - pel flow - ing free, like a char-i - ot swung from heav'n, Shall bear

God made a cov-en-ant, God made a cov-en-ant, Thru our Sav - our Je - sus, Thru Je - sus Christ, our Lord,

Swing low, sweet char - iot, com - ing for to car - ry me, car - ry me home;

più marc. e cresc.

Fl. *più marc. e cresc.*

Ob.

Bso.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.
safe - ly home; Shall bear the true be - liev - er home, shall

A.
safe - ly home. His gos - pel flow - ing, flow - ing free, shall

T.
our Lord, His gos - pel flow - ing, flow - ing free shall

B.
Com - ing to car - ry me, com - ing to car - ry me home. God made a cov - en - ant to

più marc. e cresc.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln.

Vc.

molto allarg. rit. *a tempo*

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hr.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S. *(ff)* bear the true be-liev - er home! Swing low! *(mf)* com-ing for to car-ry me

A. *(ff)* bear the true be-liev - er home! Swing low! *(mf)* Car - ry, car - ry me

T. *(ff)* bear the true be-liev - er home! Swing low! Swing, swing low;

B. *(ff)* bear the true be-liev - er home. *mf* Swing low! *a tempo* Car - ry, car - ry me

Vln. I *rit.*

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

home Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Sweet cov - nant of sal - va - tion,
 home, O swing! low,
 Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Swing low,
 home; Swing low;

pp Sw. add Tremulant

pp

pp

pp

pp

dim. e molto espress.

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Swing low, O swing low!

Swing low, Swing low, swing low, sweet char-i-ot,

più marcato

Swing low, sweet char-i-ot, sweet, cov'nant of sal-va-tion, Swing low, sweet char-i-ot,

swing low, Swing,

dim. e molto espress.

rit. _____ *a tempo* _____ *molto rit.*

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hr.

Pno.

Org. *Tremulant off*

Ped.

T. S.

S. *p*
Swing low.

A. *p*
swing low.

T. *mf*
swing, swing, swing low, sweet char - i - ot, swing low.

B. *mf*
swing, swing, swing low, sweet char - i - ot, swing low.

Vln. I *rit.* _____ *a tempo* _____ *molto rit.*

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

F *a tempo (joyously and very rhythmic)*

Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
Pno.
Org.
Ped.
T. S.
S. *mf*
A. *mf*
T. *(mp) exhorting, rhythmically*
B. *(mp) exhorting, rhythmically*
Vln. I *(p) pizz.*
Vln. II *pizz. (p)*
Vla. *(p) pizz.*
Vc. *(p)*

Sal - - - va - - - tion, sweet cov - 'nant of our Lord, I shall
Sal - - - va - - - tion, sweet cov - 'nant of our Lord, I shall
Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,
Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pnc.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

ride up in the char - iot in that morn - ing!

ride up in the char - iot in that morn - ing!

Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

I. S.

S.
ride up in the char - iot in that morn - - - ing!

A.
ride up in the char - iot in that morn - - - ing!

T.
Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

B.
Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

G

Fl. *f declamato*

Ob. *f declamato*

Bsn. *f declamato*

Hr. *f declamato*

Pno. *f* *mp* *mf*

Org. *mf* *mp* *mf*

Ped. *f*

S. He who doth on Christ be-lieve Tho he were dead, yet shall he live. *f declamato* *mf*

A. Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet *f declamato* *mf*

T. Tell it! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet *f declamato* *mf*

B. Tell it! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot! Sweet *f declamato* *mf*

Vln. I *f declamato* *mp* *mf*

Vln. II *f declamato* *mp* *mf*

Vla. *f declamato* *mp* *mf*

Vc. *f declamato* *mp* *mf*

Fl. *f* *jubilate*
 Ob. *f* *jubilate*
 Bsn. *f* *jubilate*
 Hn. *f* *jubilate*
 Pno. *mf*
 Org. *mf*
 Ped.
 I. S. *f* *jubilate*
 S. *f* *jubilate*
 A. *f* *jubilate*
 T. *f* *jubilate*
 B. *f* *jubilate*
 Vln. I. *(marcato)* *f* *jubilate*
 Vln. II. *(marcato)* *f* *jubilate*
 Vla. *(marcato)* *f* *jubilate*
 Vc. *f* *jubilate*

con espressione King Je-sus triumphed o'er the grave, His
 char-i-ot, swing low! Swing low, sweet char-i-ot!—
 char-i-ot, swing low! Swing low, sweet char-i-ot!
 char-i-ot, swing low! Swing low, sweet char-i-ot!
 char-i-ot, swing low! Swing low, sweet char-i-ot!
 char-i-ot, swing low! Swing low, sweet char-i-ot!

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

I. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

cresc.

dim.

più rit. et marcato

grace a-lone can sin-ners save!

f *molto jubilato*

Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu, Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu-jah!

f *molto jubilato*

Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu, Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu-jah!

f *molto jubilato*

Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu, Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu-jah!

f *molto jubilato*

Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu, Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu-jah!

f *molto jubilato*

Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu, Sweet char-i-ot, swing low! Hal-le-lu-jah!

f *molto jubilato*

f *molto jubilato*

f *molto jubilato*

f *molto jubilato*

Fl.

Ob. *(mf)*

Bsn.

Hn. *(mp)*

Pno.

Org. *mf*

Ped.

T. S.

S. *mf*
Sal - va - tion, sweet cov-'nant of our Lord, I shall ride up in the char - iot in that

A. *mf*
Sal - va - tion, sweet cov-'nant of our Lord, I shall ride up in the char - iot in that
(mp)

T. *(mp)* Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

B. Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

Vln. I *(mf)*
pizz.

Vln. II *(mf)*
pizz.

Vla. *(mf)*
pizz.

Vc. *(mf)*

Fl.
 Ob.
 Bsn.
 Hn.
 Pno.
 Org.
 Ped.
 T. S.
 S.
 A.
 T.
 B.
 Vln. I
 Vln. II
 Vla.
 Vc.

mf
mf
arco
arco
arco
arco

mor - - - ing, Sal - - - va - tion, sweet
 mor - - - ing, Sal - - - va - tion, sweet
 Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,
 Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it, Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,
 arco
 arco
 arco
 arco

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

I. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln.

Vc.

rit.

molto marcato *f*

molto marcato *f*

molto marcato *f*

molto marcato *f*

rit.

cov'nant of our Lord, Sol - va - tion! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Com - ing for to car - ry me home, *rit.*

cov'nant of our Lord, Sol - va - tion! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Com - ing for to car - ry me home, *rit.*

Sol - va - tion! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Com - ing for to car - ry me home, *rit.*

Sol - va - tion! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot, Com - ing for to car - ry me home, *rit.*

H agitato et accel. quasi stretto

(mf)

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

I. S.

ff agitato et accel. quasi stretto

S. God made a cov-en-ant for the glo-ry of His Grace,

A. God made a cov-en-ant for the glo-ry of His Grace,

T. Sweet char-i-ot, Sweet char-i-ot

B. Sweet char-i-ot, Sweet char-i-ot

God made a cov-en-ant, God made a cov-en-ant, Glo-ri-ous for His Grace, God made a cov-en-ant

H agitato et accel. quasi stretto

gen

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

decresc. un poco

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

God made a cov-en-ant for the glo-ry of His grace,
 Sweet char-i-ot,
 Sweet char-i-ot, Sweet char-i-ot

(God-made-a-cov-en-ant, God-made-a-cov-en-ant, -- Glo-ri-ous-for-His-grace, God-made a cov-en-ant,

un poco accel.

Fl. *p*

Ob. *p*

Bsn. *p*

Hn. *p*

Pno. *p*

Org. *p*

Ped.

T. S.

S. *decrease. un poco*
 God made a cov-en-ant, God made a cov-en-ant,

A. *low*
 Swing low,

T. *low*
 Swing low,

B. *low*
 Down, like a char-i-ot swing-ing low, flow-ing free, Comes the sweet cov-en-ant of our Lord Je-sus Christ

un poco accel.

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

T. S.

S. *decesc. un poco*
God made a cov-en-ant, God made a cov-en-ant,

A. ~~Swing~~ low

T. ~~Swing~~ low

B. God made a cov-en-ant, God made a cov-en-ant, Glo-ri-ous for His grace, God made a cov-en-ant,

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

molto allarg. et rit. I *molto meno mosso quasi grandioso*

Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
Pno.
Org.
Ped.
V. S.
S.
A.
T.
B.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

O hal - le - lu - jah! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot,
 O hal - le - lu - jah! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot,
 O hal - le - lu - jah! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot,
 O hal - le - lu - jah! Swing low, sweet char - i - ot,

molto allarg. et rit. I *molto meno mosso quasi grandioso*

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

I. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

home, Swing low,

Com-ing for to car-ry me home, car-ry me home, Swing low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot,

home, car-ry me home, Swing low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot,

Com-ing for to car-ry me home, car-ry me home, Swing low, swing low, sweet char - i - ot,

Com-ing for to car-ry me home, car-ry me home, low sweet char - i - ot,

J

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Pno.

Org.

Ped.

I. S.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

più accel. et molto cresc. **ff**

Com-ing for to car-ry me home, to car-ry me home!

Com-ing for to car-ry me home, to car-ry me home!

Com-ing for to car-ry me home, to car-ry me home!

Com-ing for to car-ry me home, to car-ry me home!

Swing low, sweet char-i-ot, sweet

Gr. Full Organ

J

K Allegro $\text{♩} = 96$

Fl. *(mf)*

Ob. *(mf)*

Bsn. *mf*

Hr. *mf* *con abandon* *f* *f* *f*

Pno.

Org. *(mp)*

Ped.

V. S.

S. *mf con abandon*
home. O hal-le - lu - jah O hal-le - lu - jah, O hal-le - lu - jah! Hal-le - lu - jah,

A. *mf con abandon*
home. O hal - le - lu - jah, hal-le - lu - jah, O hal - le - lu - jah, O hal-le -

T. *mf con abandon*
home. O hal-le - lu - jah, hal-le - lu - jah, hal-le - lu - jah! Hal-le - lu - jah, O hal-le - lu -

B. *mf con abandon* *f* *f* *f*
home. O hal-le - lu - jah! O hal-le - lu - jah, hal-le - lu - jah, hal-le - lu -

K Allegro $\text{♩} = 96$

Vln. I *mf con abandon*

Vln. II *mf con abandon*

Vla. *mf con abandon*

Vc. *mf* *f* *f* *f*

Musical Analysis

In viewing the work as a whole, one observes that R. Nathaniel Dett has used the spiritual, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, or fragments thereof, for motivic, harmonic and contrapuntal development. The harmony employed in the piece includes nineteenth and twentieth century idioms. Several kinds of scales are used, including, major, minor, chromatic, pentatonic, and modal. Contrast is achieved through new themes, varying rhythms, textural changes and accompaniment treatment.

The opening chords of the oratorio are a reflection of the homesickness, turmoil and loneliness that an individual slave may have felt in the midst of the cotton field. The anguish of the opening B minor chord, followed by an E minor⁷, followed by a more hopeful E⁴₂ chord, the increasing of the dynamic leading to a D⁹ chord and then finally the pleading sentiment of the negro spiritual is outlined in the bassoon and organ in what will be the home key of G major. A similar chord sequence starts at measure 11. However, the Negro spiritual theme is now stated in B^b major, a minor third up from the first statement. The French horn, because of its colorful timbre, is used to give more buoyancy to this melody.

At measure 21 Dett introduces a new short-lived theme. He composes a clarion call out of the despair that was portrayed in the opening moments of the piece. At measure 27 we see the Negro spiritual theme in the organ and French horn. This time the Negro spiritual melody is repeated over four measures, thereby adding to the gesture of anticipatory hope. The home key is then fully established at measure 33. The musical events are now occurring over the G major drone that goes till measure 62. The second

part of the Negro spiritual melody “coming for to carry me home” is for the first time heard in measure 37 in the flute and organ.

The tenor solo enters with a simple folk-like melody and almost immediately Dett uses word painting on the word “swinging”. The sopranos answer in an almost identical fashion. The hope on which the entire piece is based is stated in the next line, “comes God’s promise of salvation” to which the chorus answers “amen”. One stylistic trait of the Negro spiritual is a choral response, with textual repetition, following the solo. A brief duet occurs between the solo voice and the soprano voices in measures 52-55. As the rhythmic pulse of the music intensifies, symbolizing the movement of the chariot, we see Dett using the tenor solo as counterpoint to the choir. This leads to the *subito forte* at measure 63 with all the instrumental forces being utilized. A dominant pedal in the organ is employed which ends this opening section.

I find the introduction from measures 1- 66 to be very effective with its broadly arching and entirely unified lament moving effortlessly to its culmination. The backdrop of the oratorio is now set and all of the musical themes have been introduced.

After the emphatic conclusion of the introductory phrase, the music now returns to its melancholic and more reflective frame of mind. I have observed that Dett loves to set in antiphonal style, women’s voices versus men’s voices. This can be found in *Listen to the Lambs* and *O Hear the Lambs A-Crying* for example. At measure 67 this is clearly the compositional tool being employed. The tenors and basses state the melody of the spiritual on which Dett has based the piece. The melody of the first soprano line has the characteristics of a *cantus firmus*. We find two melodies being employed: one being the spiritual and the other a simple *cantus firmus*-like strain. This initial statement is made

clear because of the unaccompanied setting. The instruments make their syncopated entrance at measure 71. The roles of the antiphonal choirs are reversed at measure 75. The women are now singing the melodic material from the spiritual and the men the cantus firmus-like phrase. The tenor soloist joins the female voices as the accompaniment thickens. The harmony here is over an e minor chord as opposed to the initial G major.

Another technique that Dett uses in measure 75 is accompaniment that serves as harmonic counterpoint to the melody. In the choral score on which this new instrumentation was based, a new melody appears in the organ. I have put that idea in the flute and oboe parts. The textual imagery in the soprano and alto lines in measures 81 and 82 is crystal clear. “Swing” uses two slurred notes with a rocking feeling and then the octave drop depicts the word “low”. Another trait of Dett’s writing is setting the solo voice as counterpoint to the choir. It is seen here in measures 81-84 as the tenor serves as an obbligato voice.

The choir cleverly introduces the new text in measures 85 and 86 without any instrumental accompaniment. This simple technique is very effective in making the text plain. Furthermore, Dett gives an instruction “recitando con moto”, which means to recite in a declamatory manner with motion. Of note is the musical and textual differentiation between “God” and “Lord”. In measures 87 and 88 “God” is followed by a sudden instrumental hit on a G major chord. In measures 89-91 “Lord” is given a more horizontal accompaniment. It is my opinion that Dett is describing the Christian-based teaching that the “Lord” was the person sent to earth to carry out the plan of salvation as opposed to “God” who sits in heaven.

The next phrase, measures 94-121, is the longest of the piece. This is the development section where Dett is expanding the musical ideas that were introduced previously. In this passage we see more frequently than in any other part of the piece tonality shifts, rhythmic changes, sweeping lyrical lines, tempo changes and articulatory instructions. Instrumental parts are used here to contrast, to support and to help dramatize the text. The point of structural significance is the contrapuntal texture that is created by the use of two antiphonal choirs between the female and male voices.

From the onset of the phrase at measure 94 we see Dett superimposing a two against three rhythmic feel. All the voice parts are singing different sections of the text “God made a covenant for the glory of His grace”. This technique adds to the contrapuntal effect. At measure 96 and the downbeat of measure 97 we see a brief moment of unison in the voices. This is noteworthy as it is describing the three in one concept of “Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ”. The music then quickly returns to a very lyrical nature reminiscent of Brahms with beautiful melodies and lush harmonies. Dett is successfully making use of word painting on the phrase “flowing free”. The word “home” is set over an F# major chord at measure 101 and with the longer note value gives the sense of a final destination. The sentiment is expressed again in the following two measures, however, with more emphasis as Dett indicates a slowing down of the tempo. With a sweeping effect, as was the case in measure 98, Dett goes back to the lyrical treatment in measure 104. The voices are singing individual lines of text and it is in measure 110 that they join in homophonic texture sharing the same text. At measure 113 we see a half cadence. From measures 113-118 we see where one voice takes the principal line as the other three voices accompany. Augmentation is seen in measure 116

in the soprano voice. The unstable nature of the tonal center coupled with the slower harmonic rhythm makes for a very reflective ambiance.

The tonal center for this new section is D major. The new melody introduced at measure 122 is folk-like in nature and is heard distinctly in the soprano line. The female voices are entrusted with exalting the message of “salvation”. Dett sets the female voices in simple harmonies that sometimes spread to four parts. In striking contrast, the tenor and bass voices are exhorting on the text “tell it”. A conversational effect is created with the men admonishing the women to share with joy and excitement the story of “salvation”. The accompaniment is helping to punctuate the rhythmic vitality of the passage. Suddenly at measure 130 the tenor soloist reappears in the style of a preacher giving the sermon appeal. With the introduction of the tenor solo the choir is now set in a homophonic response on the text “sweet chariot, swing low”! At measure 132 the text is set in a recitative style. The recitative technique in such a sudden manner causes the listener to ponder the meaning of the text. In measure 136, extravagant use is made of embellishments that give the effect of improvisation. The music then returns to the setting that was seen in measure 122, but now with the oboe and horn beginning the phrase for further emphasis. The conclusion of this phrase, measures 144-146, is tonally unstable.

Repetition deepens the impression and Dett makes use of this tool between measures 147 and 156. The text “God made a covenant for the glory of His grace” is repeated over a dominant pedal between measures 147 and 150. Then a partial reiteration of the text is made over a tonic pedal between measures 151 and 154. The dominant pedal followed by the tonic pedal gives a strong unifying effect. At the change of text,

“O hallelujah,” the harmony goes back to the V tonal area. In the alto voice in measure 156, Dett uses a 4-3 suspension very effectively followed by a fermata. To the listening ear it creates an effect of great anticipation.

At measure 157 the suspense is alleviated and the complete spiritual melody is harmonized. This is the first and only time we see this occurrence. Dett follows the form of the spiritual and uses its natural cadences. The harmony here is very simple and in rapport with the mood of the spiritual. The marking that Dett indicates, “molto meno mosso quasi grandioso,” suggests that the tempo is to be slow but stately. Text painting is employed on the word “home” which symbolizes heaven, and this is depicted by the ascension of all parts at the end of the phrase.

The next phrase, starting at measure 163, is six measures in length and though short, serves as a pivotal segue to the concluding musical passage. The tenor solo is declamatory in nature as Dett for the very last time is describing the salvific theme of his oratorio. The almost even musical arc can literally be seen in measures 163 and 164. This may be indicative of the belief that salvation is attainable by all of humanity. The choir enters on a IV chord in measure 165 and after some harmonic shifts does the expected by landing on a V chord at measure 167. Dett uses text painting on the word “carry” as he smoothly moves through the chord changes. The harmonic rhythm in conjunction with the tempo and decreasing dynamic is such that it gives the listener a sense of peaceful assurance. Dett overlaps this phrase with the upcoming conclusive statement. The downbeat of measure 168 ends the reflective passage and then the second part of the first beat bursts into the celebratory final declaration.

The final statement of the oratorio makes use of the text “O Hallelujah”. The various entrances of the voice parts are like the members of a church responding to the preacher with resounding agreement. The joyous cacophony that would follow a great sermon in the African- American church is recreated here by Dett and his use of the term “con abandon”, to alert the musicians to sing and play without restraint, reinforces this. The tonality returns to the home key of G major and that is amplified further with the use of the arpeggios in many of the measures. In measure 183, a tonic pedal is used that goes to the end of the piece. Of interest are the appoggiaturas in the alto and tenor lines. The appoggiaturas here are of rhythmic importance to the overall exuberance of this phrase.

The re-entry of the tenor soloist at the last three measures is an editorial decision. Throughout the oratorio the tenor soloist serves the role as leader and that clarion voice seemed an appropriate addition to the end.

On the basis of the above analysis, Chapter five is devoted to describing the preparation and performance of Dett’s *The Chariot Jubilee*. It identifies the choir, instrumental accompaniment and the soloist.

CHAPTER V

THE PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCE OF

THE CHARIOT JUBILEE

Introduction of Musical Forces

The Chariot Jubilee is well within the capabilities of various types of choral ensembles. The oratorio does not present any unusual problems in the choral parts. A conductor working with a choir that possesses good amateur musical abilities and a decent level of vocal facility should experience the same level of gratification as any professional group.

I am fortunate to presently have the Aeolians of Oakwood University under my leadership. It has made the presentation of this work and paper all the more special as I get to share the journey with my students. Other forces that came together are the instrumental accompanists and the tenor soloist.

The Aeolians of Oakwood University

The Aeolians of Oakwood University was organized in 1946 by the late Dr. Eva B. Dykes. Subsequent conductors have been Joni Pierre-Louis, Harold Anthony, Dr. Jon Robertson, Dr. Alma M. Blackmon, Dr. John Dennison, Dr. Ricky Little (a former Aeolian), Dr. Eurydice Osterman, Michele Cleveland, Dr. Lloyd Mallory, Dr. Julie Moore, Norman Crarey, Dr. Wayne Bucknor (a former Aeolian). The present conductor, Jason Max Ferdinand, is also a former Aeolian. Since its inception, the choir has traveled widely. It has touched the hearts of both young and old with its inspirational singing.

Each director has made considerable contributions over the years. Under the direction of Dr. John Dennison, the Aeolians performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, receiving flattering reviews. Under the direction of Dr. Alma M. Blackmon which began in 1973, the group was propelled into national and international prominence with the performance of over 200 concerts in the United States, Bermuda, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, and Canada. Performances at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) in Dallas, Texas (1980), led to an invitation from the Polish SDA Church in Warsaw, Poland to tour that country.

Motivated by the desire for international performances, the Aeolians competed successfully in a nationwide contest to become Friendship Ambassadors for the USA. Sponsored by the Friendship Ambassadors Foundation of New York City, the choir toured Romania (1981) and Great Britain (1983).

Aeolian concerts present a repertoire of choral music that ranges from the Baroque era to the twenty-first century. The Aeolians, moreover, are authoritative exponents of Negro spirituals and Work songs which express the yearnings of their forefathers to be free. This is demonstrated in their early album of Negro spirituals, "Oh Freedom" (1974), which sold over 10,000 copies on its release.

Under the direction of Jason Max Ferdinand and accompanied on the piano by Dr. Wayne Bucknor, Chairperson of the Music Department of Oakwood University, the choir has placed first two years in a row (2010 and 2011) in the iSing HBCU Challenge hosted by Reid Temple AME Church in Lanham, Maryland. In December 2011 and December 2012, it was presented with the keys to the City of Huntsville with December 3 and December 5 being days named in its honor.

In January 2012, as part of the Russia-US Bilateral Presidential Commission on development of cooperation between Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama, the Aeolians were invited to sing in Moscow, Russia at the Moscow International Performing Arts Center under the patronage of the US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul. Based on audience response and reviews it was obvious that the choir's performance was outstanding.

Topping off a stellar 2011 - 2012 performance season, the Aeolians competed at the 7th World Choir Games held in Cincinnati, OH, USA. On its first ever entrance to these competitions, it earned gold medals in all three categories of entrance and the overall championship for the Spiritual category.

In June 2014 at the third annual National HBCU Media Summit, the Aeolians received the "Best HBCU Choir" award, making it now the four-peat national HBCU choral champions. Also in 2014 the Aeolians appeared with the Alabama Symphony Orchestra in a presentation of Schönberg's Friede auf Erden to critical acclaim.

This season the choir has appeared with the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra (Verdi Requiem) and the Alabama Symphony Orchestra (The Chariot Jubilee, Lift Every Voice and Sing etc). This choir continues to maintain high standards of performance.¹¹

Instrumental Accompaniment

The instrumental parts that I have composed present more technical difficulties and call for a more capable group of players than the average. The formula, which blends together the collaborative efforts of an average choir and above average instrumentalists, can lead to an exhilarating performance of Dett's work. This is part of my fascination

¹¹ *Oakwood University Music Department Website.*

with *The Chariot Jubilee*. With choral and instrumental forces of the highest caliber this oratorio can be elevated to heights of choral excellence.

In 2012, the associate conductor of the Alabama Symphony, Roderick Cox, contacted me. That organization was informed of the accomplishments of the Aeolians at the World Choir Games (Cincinnati, 2012) and invited the choir to join forces in their annual Martin Luther King series. That relationship has been a very positive one that continues to grow. In 2013, thirty-six members of the Alabama Symphony made the two-hour drive from Birmingham, Alabama to Huntsville, Alabama to join forces in a live recording concert that has been published. This relationship made it easy to call on this group of players to make up the instrumental aggregation needed for the presentation of my setting of *The Chariot Jubilee*.

Tenor Soloist

The tenor solo in this piece is not difficult. However, the declamatory nature of the text and musical lines dictate the quality of the voice chosen. The soloist must not merely sing the notes but remain true to the message being presented. It was my aim to also find someone who was familiar with the inherent qualities of the Negro spiritual. These musical necessities pointed me to Dr. Roderick George who had performed *Messiah* with the Oakwood University Church Chorale under my direction.

An active performing artist on the operatic and concert stages, tenor Roderick George has garnered acclaim in performances throughout the United States, Spain, Russia, Austria, Ireland, France and the Grand Cayman Islands. As an advocate for the performance and preservation of the American Negro spiritual, George has recorded and toured extensively as a regular soloist with the internationally acclaimed American

Spiritual Ensemble. A champion of American art song, George's research explores the study and performance of song literature based on poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes. In 2012, he premiered Adolphus Hailstork's Four Romantic Love Songs for tenor and piano on poems of Dunbar at the African American Art Song Alliance Conference at the University of California-Irvine. In 2013, he premiered four art songs on poetry of African American poets, including two songs on texts by Dunbar and Hughes, composed by Birmingham composer Mary Jackson.

George is professor of music and head of the voice area at the University of Montevallo in Alabama, where he was named the recipient of the 2013-2014 College of Fine Arts Distinguished Teacher Award. Among his credentials are the Doctor of Music degree in voice performance from the Florida State University College of Music and the Master of Music degree in opera and musical theater from Southern Illinois University (Carbondale). He received advanced training in opera at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. An active member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, he was chosen for the prestigious NATS Teacher-Internship Program held at Colorado State University in 2004, where he studied vocal pedagogy under the tutelage of Clifton Ware. In competition, he was a regional finalist in the Metropolitan Opera auditions.¹²

With the Aeolians, the Alabama Symphony Orchestra members and soloist Dr. Roderick George all agreeing to join as collaborators, I then proceeded to construct a rehearsal plan that would bring the performance to fruition. The twelve-minute oratorio was programmed as part of the Aeolians' concert that was set for December 6, 2014.

¹² *University of Montevallo Music Department Website.*

Rehearsal

I planned to rehearse the oratorio using portions of nine of the Aeolians regular rehearsal sessions. Knowing the capabilities of my singers, I felt fairly confident that enough time was allocated. If this were successful, it would then show that the work is one that can be put together fairly quickly and successfully. It is not my goal to give a minute-by-minute rehearsal overview but simply to share highlights of our preparation process. In so doing, I will emphasize areas that proved noteworthy.

After my study of the piece I thought it important that the singers approach the rehearsal process as if the oratorio were unaccompanied. The true essence of the Negro spiritual has its origin in unaccompanied singing and so to be grounded in that tradition the oratorio was taught from this perspective. The instrumentation would then be woven in as filigree to the texture.

To make dynamic levels crystal clear, I used a system that allowed the singers to get an inner sense of what the various dynamics feel like in their voices. During every warm up period this exercise was done. With 1 being the softest and 10 the loudest, we sang on numbers from 1 through to 10. Initially, the choir had some difficulty in making this even. Further difficulty was found in doing the exercise backwards. However, once mastery of the up and down exercise was accomplished, I then called out the numbers randomly on which to sing and with muscle memory we established the various dynamic levels. I made reference to these dynamic levels by using numbers that were underlined and italicized. e.g. *8*, *6* and *1*.

The choral/piano score that I worked from did not contain measure numbers or rehearsal letters. In my edition measure numbers are included. Rehearsal letters were also

added. These rehearsal letters also served to divide the work into the various musical sections. The addition of measure numbers and rehearsal letters was particularly important in both the choral rehearsal as well as with the rehearsal of the tutti forces.

As in any good narrative, the introductory statement has to be clear. Dett is deliberate in having only one voice, be it in the tenor solo or the choir, carry the complete text at any one time. My creative imagination takes me to the cotton fields where one slave in a moment of profound downheartedness may start singing a melody and text. The other slaves in close proximity would then add support by adding the “call” to the “response”.

With that concept in mind the soprano entrance in measure 44 should be sung very plainly and with a soft dynamic. In a bid to keep the energy of the line, the sopranos were asked to sing at a forte dynamic a few times. Keeping that same energy they were then asked to package it in a piano dynamic. The articulation in measures 44-46 is to be legato. The sopranos were asked to sing on an “Oo” syllable to help establish this articulation. In measure 47, a sudden change in articulation should happen on the word “swinging”. A more detached approach brings out the word painting that Dett calls for.

The entrance of the choir in measure 51 proved no particular challenge. Dett in his score has no dynamic indication here. My edition indicates mezzo piano. In measure 58 an articulation of marcato helps to indicate the acceleration of the train. Between measures 59 and 62, rhythmic releases were rehearsed after the word “low”. Doing this adds to the vibrancy of the now moving train.

Finally at measure 63 the full chorus sings a complete textual phrase. The subito forte must not sound harsh or out of control. This can happen with an abrupt shift in

dynamics. The chorus was rehearsed to make the vowel tall and not go to the full extreme of the dynamic level. We made these four measures a 7 on our dynamic scale.

At measure 67 it is important that care is taken to bring out the principal voice. The original score has the male voices marked at mf, however, Dett does not indicate any dynamic marking for the ladies voices. The tenors and basses are assigned the melody of the Negro spiritual which makes them the principal voice. In my edition the women's voices have been assigned a dynamic of p. In my dynamic scale I made the women's voices a 3. In the early stages of rehearsal the men were asked to sing the text as the women sang on an "Oo". In so doing the singers became keenly aware of the balance that was needed to highlight the melody. At measure 75 the emphasis and rehearsal strategy were reversed as the women now served as principal voice.

At measure 75 Dett has asked that the articulation be marcato. To help increase the rhythmic precision of the phrase, the singers were asked to sing staccato. Initially, they tended to rush but with repetition that was fixed. After that was done, they were asked to mark the initial onset of each note with the marcato articulation but thereafter sustaining the vowels until the next onset. The lines then were very connected but very rhythmic.

After studying the passage that begins at measure 85, it was obvious that Dett wants the text to be clear and with impact. His marking of "recitando con moto" speaks to the art of rhetoric. Individual members of the choir were asked to recite the text in a persuasive and convincing manner. Attention was paid to words that were stressed. It was very interesting to hear the variations in delivery. After this short exercise, I highlighted which syllables and words would be stressed. We then collectively repeated

the text in a Shakespearean manner. The passage was then sung and it was evident that the exercise worked very well. The text popped out and had the dramatic intensity that was desired.

The next phrase, measures 94-121, serves as the developmental section of the oratorio. The individual lines are quite lyrical. The beauty of this passage is the overall effect that is created as a result of the individual lines. It was important to make sure that the individual parts were sung lyrically and beautifully. The singers were asked to fill the full values of the notes with tone. Not doing this caused the lines to be rushed. This passage was tackled mainly in sectional rehearsals so that each section could shape their parts as any fine soloist would.

In this texture it was important for the music to line up vertically and singers were asked to really study and listen to the other voice parts. To emphasize this, one section was asked to sing text as the other three sections sang on a neutral syllable. This helped to sensitize the singers to the contrapuntal weaving that Dett does so successfully.

The passage starting at measure 122 is not musically difficult. However, it serves a structural purpose as it follows the long developmental section that showcased many compositional tools. The simplicity of this passage allows the singers to display the joy of the text. Care must be taken to balance the female voices. Not only must numerical consideration be given, as that alone will not create balance. Thought must also be given to voice types in an effort to have balance in the voices. For example, having all coloratura soprano voices singing one part against more dramatic soprano voices on another may not be best. The part with the dramatic sopranos may then be more present than needed. A blending of the voice types to achieve uniformity and balance is an idea

that should be strongly considered. Moreover, the passage is one that should cause the singers and listeners to want to clap as would happen very naturally in an African-American church. That is the exuberance that the passage brings. Emphasis was placed also on bodily engagement of the singers. Faces must be engaged and bodily involvement tended to help the desired effect.

The next phrase posed no real difficulty. The tone here must be fuller without becoming unpleasant. At measure 151 we took some time to balance the duet in the soprano voices. I noticed that the basses were tending to sing the tonic and dominant pedals with a tone that resembled a tuba. I thought it best to have them think more lyrically and asked for them to think more like a French horn.

In this section the complete spiritual melody is harmonized. It is important to rehearse this passage early in the learning process. The goal is to establish the germinal idea upon which the whole work is based. The first measure of this section, measure 157, we spent a few moments in establishing the right color of sound that would best serve the musical passage. We did not want it to get overly dark, as choirs tend to do with such excerpts. We equated it to the singing of a Brahms motet and wanted to go for a very lyrical, clean and passionate sound.

In measure 158, Dett has an interesting breath mark that one must contend with. I decided that it must be approached as a lift that has an anticipatory character. During the silence a great sense of wanting to re-enter must be expressed. To do that, one has to think of the music going forward notwithstanding the silence. Four fermatas are used in measure 158. Dett dictates that a break must happen after the first fermata. With Dett being so intentional about the breath mark after the first fermata, it seemed to me that the

following fermatas were to be done without a break in the line. After further thought I decided that the third fermata on the word “carry” should be held a little longer than the others.

In measures 159-160, the lower voices were isolated to quickly correct and solidify pitches. On the third beat of measure 160, Dett goes to an E minor chord, which is deceptive to the ear. He then works his way to an A⁷/C# chord at measure 162. That progression took a few repetitions to solidify.

This section has 3 measures for the choir. The initial entrance at measure 165, I had decided during my score study that I wanted the choir to just gently enter the texture that was set up in the previous measure. I found it challenging to execute an even crescendo and decrescendo in measures 166 and 167. I was determined to perfect it as this would make for a beautiful conclusion to the phrase. The initial C major chord sung by the choir, comes after a B minor/D chord, which at first read was a little problematic. Dett here is moving his way to the V chord at the conclusion of measure 167. All of measure 166 and the beginning of measure 167 the tenors are holding a G natural. They had to be reminded to make the note blossom as well as to sing true to the function of the note and to the relative chord changes. The D dominant 7th chord that ends the phrase must be balanced. The basses must be more present in the sound as they are on the tonic (D). The fifth of the chord should be next in prominence and this is in the soprano voice. What I found helpful was to remind the tenors that the F sharp here is the third of the chord and they need not be too loud.

Dett sets this section as if it were the tolling of bells in a festive occasion. The singers were asked to speak the text in rhythm using clear articulations. The text

underlay of the various parts created a stretto effect that I think was very intentional on Dett's part. At a tempo of half note = 88, the singers had little issue with the notes on the first read. It quickly became evident that we needed to sing the quarter notes with a marcato articulation to create the desired effect of bells. This was especially so in the women's voices. I have observed that my female singers tend to sing in a more legato style than the males. At measure 188, the singers, altos in particular, readily responded to my going into a four pattern to create the ritard that sets up the ending. The tempo gradually was increased, as we got closer to performance time.

The dress rehearsal for the performance occurred three hours before the concert. This was dictated by the fact that the instrumentalists were based two hours away in Birmingham, AL. They had the music with accompanying notes two weeks prior to the concert.

The performing space and the nature of the piece posed some challenges. With the help of an audio engineer I thought it best to make the following decisions. An electronic piano was used as opposed to the acoustic piano. This allowed me to have the keyboard in the midst of the other instruments to create a more intimate chamber setting. Secondly, the instruments, with the exception of the organ, were placed in one curved line in the center of the stage. The organ remained in its usual position slightly to the right of the stage. The tenor soloist was positioned to the left of the conductor. The choir sang from the built-in loft. This stage plot gave every person ample space.

Being a purist, I would have preferred not to use any amplification but this situation dictated the use of some electronic help. The Oakwood University church is an enormous edifice and has a seating capacity of 3000. The heavy carpeting dampens the

natural reverberations of the space. Without amplification, the sound would barely leave the stage. The wind and string instruments were miked separately. Overhead microphones were used on all of the instruments with the exception of the cello. The microphone for the cello was placed on the floor. This allowed for the engineer to control volumes as needed - especially against bigger forces of the organ, piano and choir. To also better control volumes, the keyboard and organ were captured with a direct line to the mixing board. This allowed for better control of overall dynamics.

I started the dress rehearsal by running the piece in its entirety. This was done without any major breakdowns. However, there were some issues of balance that had to be remedied. This was the case mainly when the organist opened up the instrument to louder dynamics. The organist was asked to scale down all the dynamic levels to create balance. The string players in certain passages were asked to play with more bow and to keep in mind that it was just a string quartet and not a full complement of strings.

The choir, having now to adjust to singing with the full instrumental accompaniment, was asked to increase the diction quotient, to fill the bigger performing space and to relax. It was apparent that the choristers were very excited and they were tending to rush. I was very pleased that they were well prepared and had the score memorized. That allowed me to pay greater attention to the instrumentalists.

We spent some time rehearsing specific sections. It was key that the instruments played similar articulations to the choir when it was needed. The instrumentalists seemed very eager to ensure that they were playing exactly what was needed of them. The time spent on making sure that the score was clear was very well spent. It made for a rehearsal that went smoothly.

During the ten-minute break in the rehearsal the audio engineer had me listen to portions of the rehearsal thus far. The overall initial balance seemed good. The microphones were adjusted slightly to further amplify the string quartet.

We rehearsed the piece in its entirety again. The instrumentalists at this point seemed to be really enjoying the music and were not as cautious as they were on the first reading. Dr. Roderick George has a brilliant lyrical voice and really was very impressive. It was a fulfilling moment to finally hear the work and to know that it was ready for performance after the many months of putting it together.

The Performance

The rehearsal described above prepared the Aeolians of Oakwood University, the instrumentalists from the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and Dr. Roderick George from University of Montevallo to present this newly re-constructed instrumentation of *The Chariot Jubilee*. The performance was at the annual Aeolian Fall concert on December 6, 2014. The performance received sustained applause and a standing ovation, both of which have been captured in the attached DVD (see Appendix).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Chariot Jubilee caused much excitement and received great reviews immediately following its premiere in 1921. Hence, it is disheartening to observe its relative obscurity among staples in the choral repertory.

At least three reasons for its early successes can easily be identified. First, the perfect blend that is found between the Scriptural portion of the text and that which is based on folklore and spirituals makes for an uplifting narrative. Second, *The Chariot Jubilee* would have been aesthetically pleasing to the ear based on its level of difficulty. The lovely lines, harmonies and rhythms are all intertwined in the making of this choral work. Lastly, Dett's ethnic background heightened the appeal of his oratorio. African-Americans saw in Robert Nathaniel Dett the epitome of excellence, both in his music and literary contributions. Through his work, African-Americans recognized a man from similar backgrounds as themselves, who was successful in a dominantly Caucasian society.

Despite revitalization efforts, *The Chariot Jubilee* is still underperformed. I posit the following reasons for the lack of performance. First, much of the standard choral repertory today was created in countries on the European mainland such as Austria, France, Germany and Italy. Works including Verdi's *Requiem*, Brahms' *Requiem*, Mozart's *Requiem* and Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* are just a few examples that frequent concert programs. Second, choral conductors are prone to program compositions that are familiar to their audiences. Nathaniel Dett and his music are generally unknown to contemporary concertgoers. His *Listen to the Lambs* is perhaps the

best known of his choral compositions. Programming *The Chariot Jubilee* may appear risky, at best, for a governing board unused to adventurous programming.

Third, the disappearance of the original orchestral parts lessened the appeal of the work. Even with the Hale Smith version of the orchestration some may be inclined to challenge the authenticity of the work. Lastly, the theme of the oratorio does not hold as strong a popular appeal as it did in 1921, when it was premiered.

Notwithstanding these observations, Nathaniel Dett's oratorio can yet prove to be a choral work of choice for conductors. The choral parts remain accessible and charming; the choral score is now in the public domain and easily obtained; the story of the text is timeless in its content, for all can relate to a message of hope and desire for a better tomorrow. With the creation of the instrumentation presented in this dissertation, choral conductors will now have access to an accompaniment that utilizes a smaller cadre of instruments, thus making the costs associated with its performance more affordable. From my preparation of the piece and as demonstrated in the accompanying DVD, the instrumentation does indeed complement the choral score.

The Chariot Jubilee presented itself very well in 1921. Despite all the adverse occurrences of the intervening years, it still possesses the same charm that incited such great reviews. This dissertation provides reduced orchestration for the performance of this oratorio. Thus conductors serving in high schools, community colleges, four-year universities, churches and leading amateur choirs alike will find in Robert Nathaniel Dett's *The Chariot Jubilee* music that their singers and audiences will enjoy. This will breathe new life into a rarely sung treasure of the choral repertoire.

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APPENDIX

PERFORMANCE OF *THE CHARIOT JUBILEE*
December 6, 2014
Oakwood University Church, Huntsville, AL