

The Year of Jubilee

The Story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers

Harvey Brough

with words by Justin Butcher

University of Southampton Voices

Saturday May 3 7 30 pm
St Michael's, Bugle Street,
Southampton SO14 2AD

Soloists: Emily Dankworth
Melanie Marshall
Cleveland Watkiss
Austine Abiagam



Finn Peters - Flutes and Sax
Bryan Postlethwaite - Piano
Bastien Terraz - Bass
Theodore Carrasco - Drums

Special Guest:
Justin Butcher
as the Choirmaster
George White

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Music by Harvey Brough

with spoken slave testimonies taken from
American Slave Narratives: An Online Anthology
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/wpahome.html>

Directed by Harvey Brough

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1. Overture

Nobody Knows the Trouble I See

There Is a Balm in Gilead

In Bright Mansions Above

Dixieland

John Brown's Body

John Brown's Body (reprise)

Battle of the two tunes

2. The Fisk University

Woke Up this Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom

In that Great Gettin' Up Mornin'

Oh, I'm a going to sing

Lily of the Valley

Woke Up this Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom (reprise)

3. On the Road with the Gospel Train

The Gospel Train is coming

We Shall Walk Through the Valley

Roll, Jordan, Roll

Deep River

Steal Away

Swing Low

4. The Year of Jubilee

Go Down Moses (The Debt of Ham)

The Man of Sorrows

A king, they said, was coming today!

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Listen to the angels shouting!

Finale - John Brown's Body (the Marching song of the Union Army)

Freedom Chorus

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON VOICES

The University of Southampton Voices includes staff and students from across the University. Founded in 2013 by Harvey Brough, the Turner Sims Professor of Music, the Voices rehearse on Wednesday lunch times during term and ALL are welcome. Previous public performances include singing the Songs of Exile, supporting Clara Sanabras at the Turner Sims in December 2013. Come and join us for our next project!

See a blog about our last performance here:

<http://blog.soton.ac.uk/music/2013/12/11/uos-voices-sing/>

The Story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers

For tonight's concert, we are giving the second performance of a new work, 'The Year of Jubilee', created to tell the story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a choir of emancipated slaves from America. The Jubilee Singers began as a student choir formed to raise funds for Fisk University, founded in Tennessee for the education of freed slaves in 1866, just after the American Civil War. By 1871, Fisk University was overenrolled and in financial trouble. In a move of astonishing boldness and faith, the University formed a small gospel choir, gave it the contents of the University treasury for travel expenses, and sent it on tour to raise money: this "little company of emancipated slaves ... set out to secure, by their singing, the fabulous sum of \$20,000 for the impoverished and unknown school in which they were students."¹

For several months, eleven singers toured the United States with their choirmaster George White, following the route of the Underground Railroad to perform slave songs to small, mainly white audiences. They often spent the proceeds from one concert getting to the next, and throughout the tour they struggled to find hotels and restaurants willing to accept them. Their first reviews were poor, and listeners were sometimes hostile to these young black singers with their unfamiliar music, performing with a grace and dignity quite different from the (white) blackface minstrels of the day. Good reviews helped spread their reputation, and their songs of work, hardship, faith and longing drew larger audiences. Soon they were attracting national attention. Five months into their tour the Jubilee Singers sang at the White House for President Grant, and then performed for several successful weeks in New England and New York. The Jubilee Singers returned to Fisk University by first-class train carriage with the promised \$20,000, and promptly repeated the exercise to raise another \$20,000. By 1873, Fisk University was on sound financial footing and looking to expand. The Jubilee Singers toured England and Scotland to raise money for the University's first permanent building, Jubilee Hall. They arrived in London to much fanfare, thanks to the sponsorship of noted social reformer the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury. In their first few days they sang for Queen Victoria, religious leaders, and members of the House of Lords and Parliament. They then embarked upon a grueling fundraising tour, performing in churches and schools to keep costs down and often asking audience members for an additional £10 subscription to furnish a room in Jubilee Hall. Rather amazingly they came to Southampton on March 26th 1874, and performed at the Hartley Institute (forerunner of the University of Southampton), so tonight's performance marks the 140th Anniversary of this historic concert.

The Jubilee Singers returned to Fisk University several months later with \$50,000.

As in America, British audiences had never heard anything like these songs. As one singer explained, “the Jubilee music was more or less of a puzzle to the critics [who] could not understand the reason for enjoying so thoroughly, as almost every one did, these simple, unpretending songs.”² When they sang at the Hackney Juvenile Mission, a ‘Ragged School’ (a charitable school offering free basic education to destitute children), the manager of the mission was so affected that he formed what was perhaps the first gospel choir in England, the East London Jubilee Singers.³

The Fisk Jubilee Singers are still singing Negro spirituals around the world, and Jubilee Hall still stands as the first permanent building of Fisk University, declared a National Historic Landmark in 1974. But slavery, too, is a lasting legacy, and we are singing these slave songs tonight to help bring attention to this.

The modern-day slave trade is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, currently enslaving more than 30 million people. We are all complicit in modern-day slavery, as purchasers of cheap goods produced, processed or packaged under conditions of slavery, including clothes, food, even food grown and packaged here in the UK. Combating this 32 billion-dollar-a-year industry takes enormous effort and a large framework of diligent abolitionists.

Thank you for your support!

1 Marsh, JBT. **The Story of the Jubilee Singers, Including their Songs.**

London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903.

2 Marsh, **Jubilee Singers.**

3 See Broughton, V, **Too Close to Heaven: The Illustrated History of Gospel Music. London: Midnight Books, 1996** and D. Seroff, “**The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Spiritual Tradition,**”

WE THANK: Justin Butcher, Jeanice Brooks, Joe Beckhelling (assistant conductor), Adrian Dolby for his research and support, committee members: Rachel Cooper, Arvind Pandit, Elwyn Edwards, Kate Borthwick, Catherine Pope, Jackie Bridges, Bronagh Walsh: tickets and programme. Tim Daykin. Jean O’Reilly for her programme note. And John and Gillian at St Michaels for welcoming us tonight,

*John Brown’s body lies a mouldering in the grave,
John Brown’s body lies a mouldering in the grave,
John Brown’s body lies a mouldering in the grave,
His soul’s marching on.*

*Glory, glory, Hallelujah! Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, glory, Hallelujah! His soul’s marchin’ on.*

*He captured Harper’s Ferry with his nineteen men so true,
And he frightened old Virginia till she trembled through and through;
They hung him for a traitor, themselves the traitor crew,
His soul’s marchin’ on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!*

*John Brown died that the slave might be free,
John Brown died that the slave might be free,
John Brown died that the slave might be free,
His soul’s marchin’ on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!*

*Now has come the glorious Jubilee,
Now has come the glorious Jubilee,
Now has come the glorious Jubilee,
When all mankind are free.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!*