

Music Notes for September 14th

Prelude: Edward Elgar: *Chanson de nuit*

Introit: *Plenty Good Room* (Spiritual, arr. J. Maggs)

Anthem: *Ride the Chariot* (Spiritual, arr. William Henry Smith)

Offertory: *Ride on, King Jesus* (Spiritual, arr. L. Harris)

Benediction Response: *I'll Fly Away* (Spiritual, arr. T. Dawkins)

Postlude: Edward Elgar: *Chanson de matin*

This September has been designated Gospel Music Heritage Month by the United States House of Representatives and Senate, "honoring a true American art form for its vast contributions to our culture, bringing a message of hope and inspiration to people of all racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds," according to the Gospel Music Channel. In this spirit, the first choir Sunday of this season salutes this tradition.

I call this program "Goin' Places," since many spirituals involve journeys or travel, including three of the ones sung today. Travel is not only used as a metaphor for life's journey, or the trip to the beyond when we die, but as a means of communication between people who had to do so in covert ways. In many old slave songs and field calls, the words included references to natural landmarks and celestial objects that were in fact directions on how to escape to freedom in the north.

The first selection is *Plenty Good Room*, a call that there is room for all in the Kingdom of Heaven, and all we have to do is "choose your seat and sit down." The anthem is a longer piece arranged by William Henry Smith, one of the first arrangers to help mass-market spirituals. *Ride the Chariot* contains some call-and-response singing that is also very typical of the gospel style. A soloist asks "are you ready my brother?" and the choir responds "oh yeah!" Elements of this still survive in many southern churches.

Ride on, King Jesus was one of the pieces recorded by Marian Anderson fairly early in the 20th century and has since become a general hymn of praise and hope. In a different vein is a song from the hills, *I'll Fly Away* which many of you may remember being used in the movie *O Brother Where art Thou?* where it was given a very "down home" treatment, or from this spring's youth-led service where it was sung with banjo. I have opted instead to arrange it for three-part women's voices recalling another scene in *O Brother Where art Thou?* where three women sing a hill song representing the three Sirens of Classical mythology.

On this date in 1901 (and completely unrelated to gospel music), Sir Edward Elgar premiered his short pieces *Chanson de nuit* and *Chanson de matin*. Simply "Song of the night" and "Song of the morning," they are pleasant salon pieces originally for chamber orchestra, later transcribed for the keyboard, which is how I will play them for you today.

We also begin a new tradition today with the choral Amen sung after the prayers for others. A new set of amens has been written for this church by myself and a couple of my composer friends. I hope that you will enjoy the variety of new music both today and throughout the year.

Thomas Dawkins, organist/choir director