

CHICAGO A CAPPELLA

JONATHAN MILLER / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

BOUND FOR GLORY!

NEW SETTINGS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUALS

GOTHIC

introduction

Spirituals are one of those remarkable art forms that intersect the present moment with a larger reality and connect us to the wider human condition. Their great heart and powerful melodies cannot fail to leave us moved. In fact, I would suggest that this is precisely why we seek them out: to help us weep, and to help us to hope for a better day for ourselves as individuals and for our world.

Spirituals spring from the American national tragedy of the institution of slavery. We cannot forget that fact. They were originally sung solely within the community of slaves, never intended for white singers, let alone for “concert” use. The spiritual was created out of a need to express feelings of suffering—sorrow, grief, loss, loneliness—as well as hope for a better life hereafter.

The great collector of folk music, Alan Lomax, wrote in the 1940s that anyone who has heard spirituals sung in church “cannot fail to have been touched by the fire, the solemn dignity, the grand simplicity of the Negro spirituals. . . . All Americans are moved by these inspired and beautiful songs as by almost no other American music.” However, the songs did not start out being sung in the venues where they now appear.

While they began on the plantation and were forged, as it were, in the fire of oppression, spirituals have made, over several generations, a steady and remarkable journey. These songs have moved into the national and international musical language of choirs due to a number of events and trends. Starting in 1871, the Fisk Jubilee Singers sang spirituals in concert on their national fundraising tours, earning unexpected accolades from white northern liberal religious denominations such as the Congregationalists and Quakers. Word of mouth spread like wildfire, and the spiritual became both well known and beloved. The 1913 publication of Harry T. Burleigh’s *a cappella*



setting of *Deep River* was a smash hit among white American choirs. With Burleigh’s publication in 1916 of the version for solo voice and piano, the spiritual became part of the repertoire for voice recitals, first in the masterful hands of Burleigh himself and later Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, Marian Anderson, and others. With these songs in new forms and formats, the American musical landscape was permanently changed. Prominent arrangers such as Hall Johnson, Jester Hairston, and William Dawson gave the spiritual international exposure through recordings, concert tours, and broadcasts.

In the 1960s, another dimension of the spiritual developed: the spiritual as protest song. A white folksinger named Guy Carawan was doing research on the spiritual while he was involved in the struggle for civil rights and working with African-American community groups in the South. He encouraged subtle adaptations of the lyrics, so that the thrust of the songs turned from a sacred sentiment to a more overtly political one. For example, “Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on *Jesus*” became “Woke up this

morning with my mind stayed on *freedom*.” With this one alteration, the song became a protest vehicle. In this way, spirituals have become somewhat jumbled in the popular imagination: they are not only the authentic voice of the brutal slave experience, but in their reimagined forms they are also part the voice of the struggle for civil rights.

If the spiritual were merely beautiful, it would not have the impact on us that it so clearly does. There is more to the phenomenon. The lyrics’ deep compassion gives the songs a dimension unique in folk music. How does this happen?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s executive assistant, the Rev. Wyatt Walker, wrote in 1963:

One of the most outstanding characteristics of all the songs is that, free as the music is from cacophony and discord, just as remarkably free is its poetry from any word of bitterness, anger, or reproach. . . . Whatever the condition or circumstance, the . . . spiritual plumbs the depth of human experience.



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There is a two-way bargain here. While the spiritual allows for emotional release and the expression of deep pathos, it also requires us to meet it halfway *in our own hearts*. It takes an emotional commitment just to listen to spirituals. There is no passive washing-over us of spirituals, unless we ourselves are spiritually dead. This is why spirituals are agents of healing in a way that Muzak will never be.

The spiritual also requires—in its conception and in its performance—a quality called by some *the moan*, as was once explained to me by Professor William Dargan from North Carolina and echoed by African-American storytellers here in Chicago. The moan is a quality without which a spiritual cannot be fully alive. We know it instinctively, but I name it to bring it forward in our awareness.

The moan is not just for singers. It is for all of us, a necessary ingredient of compassion. If we are to carry this tradition of spirituals forward, whatever our backgrounds might be, we can't skip the moan. We don't get to skip the vegetables and just eat the dessert; we can't simply enjoy the beautiful harmonies and profound texts. There is a qualitative, inner experience of humanity to be shared here, without which the essence of the genre will be lost in future generations. The moan is part of what we have to bear together, and it can be a heavy load, but it must be this way.

If the spiritual teaches us anything, it is that we are not alone, even in our darkest moments and our times of deepest sorrow. Our connection to one another, tenuous as it may sometimes be, is ultimately the agent of our collective transformation. The fate of our planet depends on our ability to act in accordance with our gradual awakening to our beautiful, fragile, miraculous interdependence. Thank goodness for music that helps us remember that our individual and collective sorrows are meant to be shared.

I Want to be Ready (2001)

arr. Moses Hogan

Benjamin Rivera, bass

This is a strong, four-square setting of a hopeful tune. Like other arrangements by the late Moses Hogan, it features a strong rhythmic drive, fidelity to the original tune, and the back-and-forth nature of call-and-response verses.

Hear de lambs a-cryin' (2006)*

arr. Paul Carey

Kathryn Kamp, soprano

Trevor Mitchell, tenor

Hear de lambs a-cryin' puts the attention on the believers who are petitioning God for favor. The work is on the contemplative side, with strong imagery to make the song easy to remember and the message easy to absorb. Carey's setting features call-and-response style, with a constant refrain to "feed-a my sheep." The text also shares material with the well-known work by Nathaniel Dett, *Listen to the Lambs*.

Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? (2005)*

arr. Paul Crabtree

With a tempo marked "Hot!", Paul Crabtree puts us on notice that this setting is going to move. The rhythmic drive and overall intensity underscore the spiritual's hopeful message that freedom is something for everyone.



I Want Jesus To Walk With Me (2004)*

arr. Colin Lett

Joe Labozetta, baritone

Arranged by Baltimore-based Colin Lett, *I Want Jesus To Walk With Me* begins slowly and mournfully, with a heartfelt solo line. The song then creates a double-speed accompaniment in the choir, which is maintained throughout. The men's voices are split into four parts early on, making a low sort of walking rumble under the women's treatment of the tune; later on, the roles are switched, with four women's parts laid over the slower tune in the unison men's voices. The ending brings back a simpler texture for a powerful close.

Sistah Mary (2007)*

arr. Rollo Dilworth

(commissioned by Chicago a cappella)

In his arrangements, Rollo Dilworth is careful to research all available variants of the spiritual that he wants to set. Once he has settled upon a version of the text and melody, the arranging process begins. He enjoys arranging tunes that are not the best-known ones, such as this wonderful piece, *Sistah Mary*, which he arranged for *Chicago a cappella* in celebration of the ensemble's 15th anniversary.

Save Me, Lord! (2002)*

Robert L. Morris

Cari Plachy, soprano

"Save Me, Lord!" is an original composition by Robert Morris, who is based in the Twin Cities. While the piece draws on both the genres of spirituals and gospel music, Morris notes that it is technically neither. Like Moses Hogan, Morris draws the melody's rhythmic life into the other voice parts. The florid, virtuoso soprano



solo makes this work unusually vivid and plaintive, while the men sing in open harmonies to ground the mood in the earth. Morris is a master of the gospel-quartet style and of creating angular rhythms that propel the piece forward; he shows in this setting the same technical control of musical texture and harmony that he used when arranging for Duke Ellington.

Wayfarin' Stranger (2003)

arr. K. Lee Scott

Brian Stroom, bass

This spiritual appears in both African-American and white (Appalachian) folk spiritual traditions. Its first appearance in print was in 1816, when Bishop Richard Allen of the AME Church in Philadelphia published it in a hymnal. Because there are variants of the tune all over the American South, it seriously has been conjectured that the tune originated in an obscure mixed-race gypsy group known as the Melungeons. Regardless of its actual origin, the tune has been popular throughout the 20th century. Singers who have

recorded it range from Burl Ives (1944) to Pete Seeger and Joan Baez, from Johnny Cash to Eva Cassidy; even the early-music group Anonymous 4 did a version recently. K. Lee Scott's *a cappella* setting of *Wayfarin' Stranger* is unusually fine. The song goes into as many as seven parts, with carefully controlled "extra" notes merely providing beautiful harmonic color, never getting in the way of the song's basic intent. A wailing baritone solo appears in the middle, from which it gradually moves to a compelling close.

Go Down 'n the Valley and Pray! (2007)
arr. André Thomas

Dr. André Thomas is an internationally acclaimed composer, arranger, conductor, clinician, performer, and scholar whose publications are considered definitive resources for the history and performance practice of the spiritual. It has been suggested that this song springs from the slaves' communal experience in the "brush arbor," or a secluded spot on the plantation away from the eyes of an overseer. It was here that some of the essential rituals of the slave experience took place, such as the ring shout. Also part of this group gathering was a confessional, where one would ask another, his "brother," if the latter was ready to confess his shortcomings: "Brother, didn't conscience come and tell you to go down in the valley and pray?" The proper response is that "No, I ain't ashamed to honor my Lord." In the variant of the text used by Thomas, the image of Noah and the flood also appears; the implication is that Noah is not ashamed either, and that one should follow Noah's example of being openly willing to be cleansed from sin and be saved.

Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen (2011)*
arr. Joseph Jennings
Joe Labozetta, baritone
(commissioned by Chicago a cappella)

With his unusually adept mastery of very slow tempi, Jennings has created here a superb work that

captures the spirit of a troubled soul. The tempo follows the mood of the words; the men and women alternate telling the story, with the other half of the choir responding, "Oh yes, Lord." The powerful ending chorus features a baritone soloist, grounded harmonically by the alto/tenor/bass, while a three-part gospel-style women's chorus cascades down with a repeated recalling of "Nobody," leading to the final majestic—yet still poignant—"Glory Hallelujah."

Wade in the Water (1997)
arr. Moses Hogan
Susan Schober, mezzo

Wade in the Water contrasts a quick-pulsed, almost liquid choral accompaniment with a smoother, slower melody, taken here by a mezzo-soprano. Hogan also makes a specific instruction about dialect, namely that the choir should articulate the "t" in the word "water," evidently for purposes of rhythmic propulsion, while the soloist should sing the word more fluidly, with a "d" instead of the "t". As with most of Hogan's charts, the setting mostly repeats the same material for each

verse chorus, then takes off with a flourish at the end.

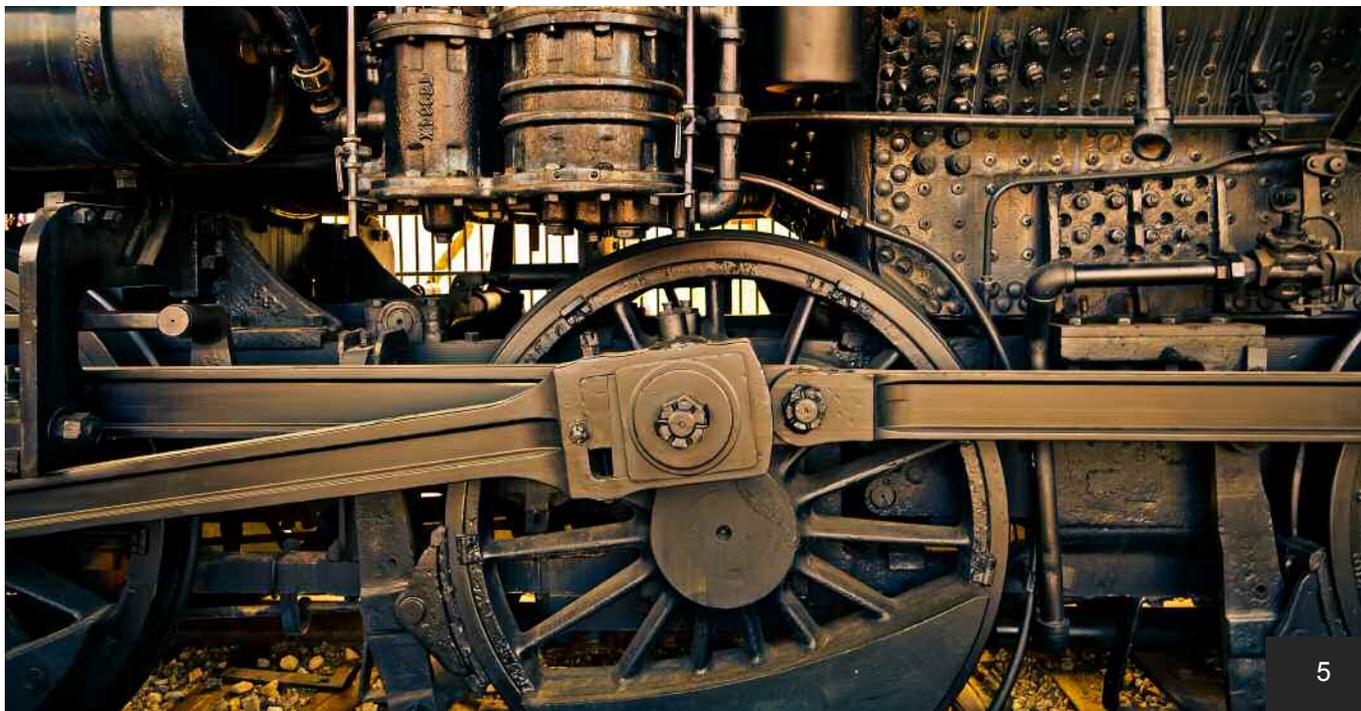
This Train (1997)
Gwyneth Walker

This work was composed for the 1998 All-OMEA (Oklahoma Music Educators' Association) high-school chorus. Walker takes on with vigor the challenge of setting this spiritual in a way that brings images in the text to life. In addition to playing with the "sssss" sound at the end of the word "this," she uses words like "stop," "joker," and "weary" as springboards for word-painting. The composer has also added a few new verses, noting:

Additional lyrics have been added for contemporary relevance ("This train will stop at the ghetto...and at the factory door"). And new musical sections ("If you reach up, reach up to the sky...") have been inserted to broaden the formal structure.

Unusual musical devices used here include borrowings from traditional spirituals and the flashier-sounding settings by arrangers like Dawson and Hogan.

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Old Testament Spirituals

arr. Jonathan Miller

(commissioned by Chicago a cappella)

For this commission, Miller chose spirituals about characters of the Old Testament: King David, Daniel, Moses, and Joshua. The cycle is in two movements. The first, short movement is “Little David, Play On Your Harp”; the much longer second movement is a layered combination of “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel”; “Go Down, Moses”; and “Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho.”

Little David, Play On Your Harp (2011)*

arr. Jonathan Miller

Elizabeth Grizzell, mezzo

The pentatonic refrain of “Little David,” as found in Burleigh’s setting for solo voice and piano, is almost an exact duplicate of an old shape-note tune. “Old Ship of Zion” is believed to have originated in the great evangelical camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening. “Little David” could have originated in a camp-meeting setting – or slaves might have heard whites singing “Old Ship of Zion” and adapted the refrain for their own singing purposes. “Little David” may have been a slave song first, then transmitted orally into the camp meetings. Admittedly, this choral setting is obsessively faithful to the pentatonic melody: *the entire piece*, including all four voice parts and solos, is composed only using the five pitches of the melody’s own scale.

Daniel, Moses, Joshua (2011)*

arr. Jonathan Miller

Cari Plachy, soprano

Trevor Mitchell, tenor

This arrangement of three spirituals—“Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,” “Go Down, Moses,” and “Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho”—begins with a direction that by design is not obvious at first, but rather emerges from a more atmospheric opening. Once the characters are introduced a little more fully, then the melodies

start to take more shape as well. Not only are the “Daniel” and “Joshua” texts similar, but the melodies at the corresponding places in the refrains are almost identical, with the figure of a falling-down scale. The words “an’-a why not every man?” are overlapped with “an’ de walls come tumblin’ down” at the very point where the piece shifts from “Daniel” into “Joshua.” The latter tune is set with all the verses and a majestic tenor solo (along with a reference to the traditional Rosh Hashanah shofar-blast pattern in the men’s voices) to conclude the movement.

Go Down, Moses (1988)

arr. Robert A. Harris

Kathryn Kamp, soprano

Klaus Georg, tenor

Professor emeritus and former director of choral activities at Northwestern University, Dr. Harris has created here a dramatic, intense setting of the familiar tune. The soprano solo is plaintive and searching, while the choral parts pull and tug with their own life. Harris shows his mastery of counterpoint throughout.

Roll, Jordan, Roll! (2007)*

arr. Rollo Dilworth

(commissioned by Chicago a cappella)

This joyful arrangement takes full advantage of the ensemble’s range and flexibility. There are inflections of gospel style in some of the chords, richly voiced, and a playful back-and-forth between groupings of voices. The piece starts with a rolling line in the basses that makes it feel like the Jordan River is rumbling nearby.

Give me Jesus (2001)

arr. Lela Anderson

Elizabeth Grizzell, mezzo

Anderson’s delicate yet well-grounded setting moves in the direction of complex harmonies, with particularly evocative word-painting during the verses. The song’s dramatic climax frames death not as a dull

event to which one should be resigned, but rather a reunion with “my sweet Jesus.”

Way Over in Beulah-ian’ (2001)*

arr. Joseph Jennings

Elizabeth Grizzell, mezzo

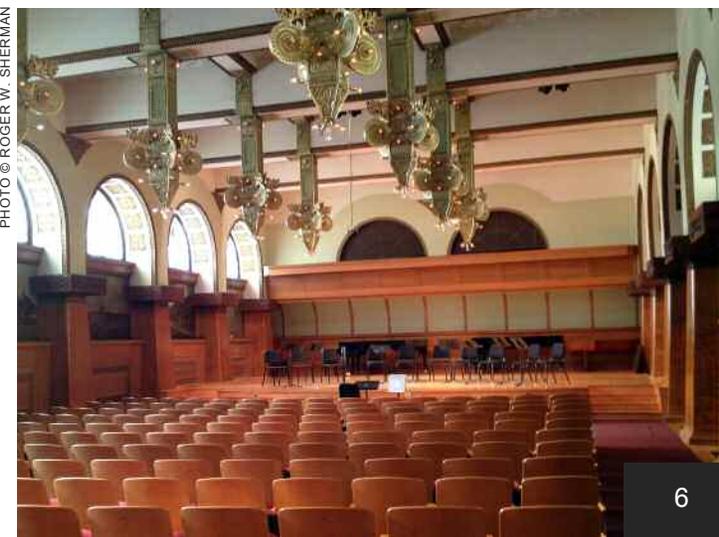
Benjamin Rivera, bass

The rather obscure word “Beulah” in Hebrew translates to “married.” The basic idea for this lyric comes from Isaiah 62:4. One English translation from around the year 1900 reads: *Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah; for Jehovah delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.* Therefore “Beulah-land” is a land that has been symbolically wedded to God. While the age-old metaphor is a little on the heady side, the spiritual, and especially Jennings’s setting of it, are much more fun! This high-energy arrangement was created for his residency in Estonia. The leader sings that “we gonna break of the Hembly [heavenly] bread” and “we gonna drink of the Holy wine.” Jennings pours an intensity of focus and drive into the work, making subtle alterations and blues notes here and there as the piece progresses.

—JONATHAN MILLER

*Premiere recording

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the artists

An ensemble of professional singers founded in 1993 by Jonathan Miller, *Chicago a cappella* has long been recognized for vocal virtuosity, innovative programming, and leadership in the choral field.

With more than 350 performances to its credit, *Chicago a cappella* has produced more than 200 concerts on its Chicago-based series. On tour, the group has appeared in 13 American states and in Mexico. The ensemble has been heard frequently on WFMT radio and through broadcasts distributed by American Public Media, including the highly-regarded *Performance Today*. The ensemble has produced eight previous CD recordings of music ranging from Renaissance masses to contemporary works.

From its inception, *Chicago a cappella* has been a champion of living composers. Since 1993 the group has presented more than 100 works in their world, national, or local premiere. *Chicago a cappella* has commissioned new music from composers such as Joseph Jennings, Chen Yi, Stacy Garrop, Rollo Dilworth, Tania León, and Ezequiel Viñao.

SOPRANO

Kathryn Kamp
Cari Plachy

MEZZO-SOPRANO

Elizabeth Grizzell
Susan Schober

TENOR

Klaus Georg
Trevor Mitchell

BASS

Matthew Greenberg (tracks 1, 2, 3, 17)
Joe Labozetta
Benjamin Rivera
Brian Strem (tracks 4-16, 18)

PHOTO BY JENNIFER GIRARD



CHICAGO A CAPPELLA • Jonathan Miller, Founder and Artistic Director
Front (left to right): Elizabeth Grizzell, Brian Strem, Cari Plachy, Kathryn Kamp
Rear: Trevor Mitchell, Klaus Georg, Susan Schober, Joe Labozetta, Benjamin Rivera



MILLER

PHOTO BY JENNIFER GIRARD

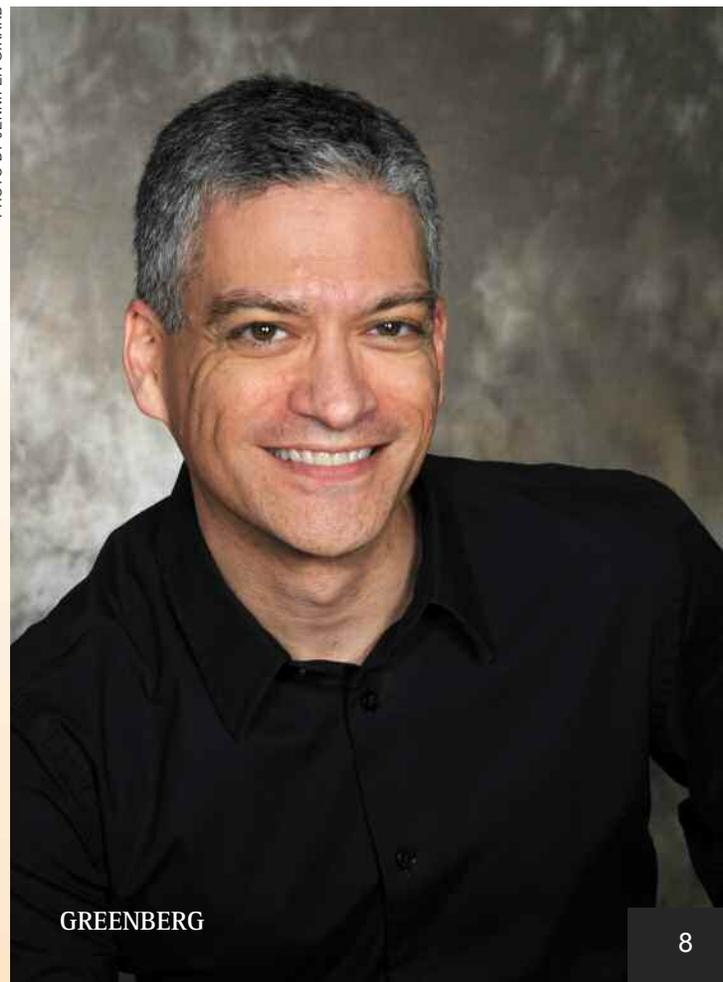
Since founding Chicago *a cappella* in 1993, **Jonathan Miller** has guided the ensemble as its Artistic Director. He is known for his passion about repertoire and about having singers communicate vividly and memorably with audiences. His honors for contributions to the choral field include the 2008 Louis Botto Award from Chorus America and the 2013 Perelmutter Award from KAM Isaiah Israel Congregation in Chicago. A boy chorister in the Chicago Children's Choir and an active professional singer from the age of seventeen, he was bass soloist for ten years with the Harwood Early Music Ensemble, section leader at Holy Name Cathedral under the late Richard Proulx's direction, and the founding low bass of Chicago *a cappella*. He has composed more than seventy

choral works in a variety of genres, from neo-Renaissance to funk, setting the poetry of the Bible, Gwendolyn Brooks, Rumi, Shakespeare, Mark Jarman, Peter Watson Jenkins, and Leonard Cohen. His music has been sung at venues including St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and the Pentagon. He has served for many years as guest faculty at the North American Jewish Choral Festival in upstate New York and has taken a growing leadership role in Chicago-area Jewish music, including his current roles as high-holiday cantor at Congregation Rodfei Zedek in Hyde Park and principal guest conductor of Kol Zimrah, the Jewish Community Chorus of Metro Chicago. He holds as a great honor his role as publisher of the late Max Janowski's catalogue.



A founding ensemble member of Chicago *a cappella*, **Matthew Greenberg** has served as the organization's Executive Director since 1995. Combining a career in arts management with that of a professional singer, he has been an active member of the Chicago arts community for over 25 years. Under his leadership, Chicago *a cappella* has grown from a founder-based startup to a well-recognized and widely-respected organization with broad community support, educational outreach programs, strategic plans, growing audiences, and a solid infrastructure. In addition to singing over 200 performances with Chicago *a cappella*, he has also performed with many of Chicago's other leading ensembles, including the Chicago Symphony Chorus, Music of the Baroque, William Ferris Chorale, and the Grant Park Chorus.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER GIRARD



GREENBERG

BOUND FOR GLORY: NEW SETTINGS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUALS

CHICAGO A CAPPELLA

JONATHAN MILLER, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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Chicago *a cappella* Executive Director: Matthew Greenberg
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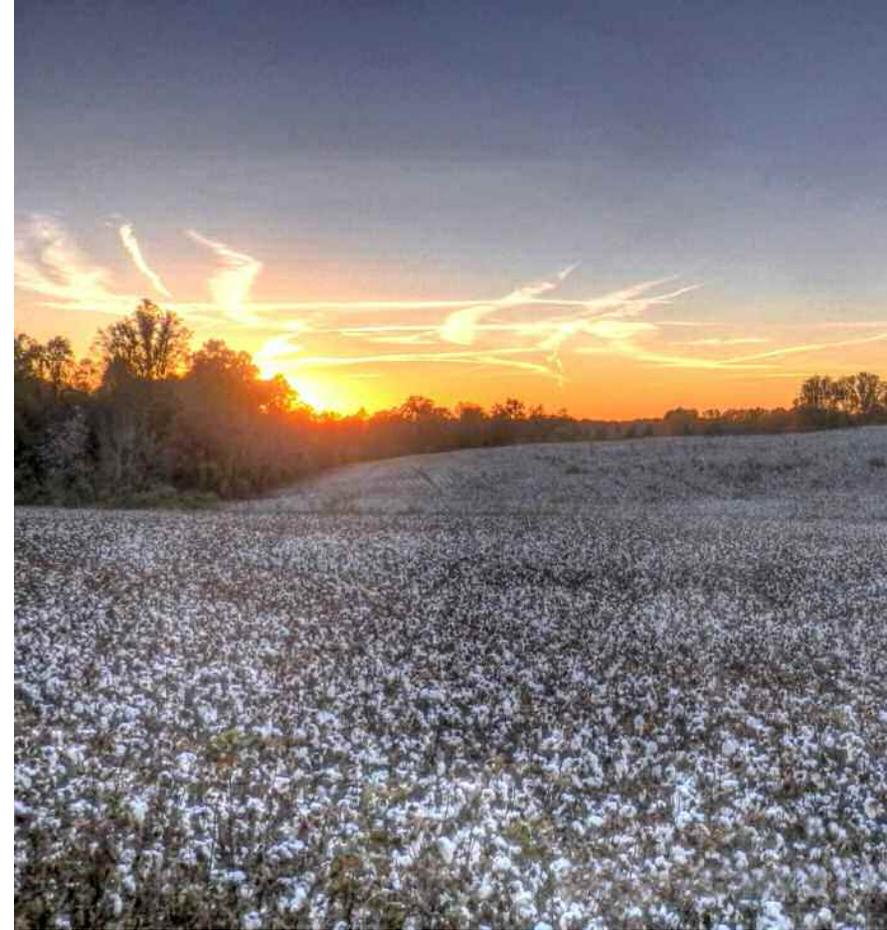


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