AND THEY LYNCHED HIM ON A TREE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

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The end of the Civil War and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment freeing the slaves meant, at least in theory, that these newly freed individuals could begin to make the transition toward integration into American society as full citizens. White citizens opposed to the abolition of slavery were determined to assert their dominance and control and did so through a series of violent measures and discriminatory laws. Lynching was a primary way to demonstrate power and incite fear in Black communities. Anti-lynching campaigns supported by both Black and White citizens took root in response to the violence. While literary and visual protest art that protested lynching seemed to flourish, there were surprisingly few musical counterparts. Despite years of what seemed like no hope for the resolution of racial turmoil and no models on which to base such a piece, William Grant Still and Catharine Garrison Chapin broke new ground by creating *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*, the first piece of concert music that protests lynching.

This dramatic choral work for orchestra and racially divided choirs was well-received at its premiere, but the provocative title, intense subject matter, and atypical vocal forces have rendered it a less than desirable piece for performance. Its message is evermore resonant in today's sensitive climate of race relations, social injustice, and perceived police brutality. *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* deserves

to be performed not as a “token” work by an African American, but as a well-crafted American masterpiece and a plea for justice and peace. This study will present the historical and social context in which the work was composed; explore prominent artistic contributions to the anti-lynching campaign of the 1920s and 1930s; discuss the creative forces that merged to create this groundbreaking work; give a structural overview of the text and musical ideas; and provide suggestions that address some inherent performance and programming challenges.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who supported me throughout my education; those who fight for justice and equality; and my choral teachers, professors, and mentors who fueled my desire to learn and grow.

Dr. Chester Alwes
Ms. Kathy Dooley
Dr. Joe Grant
Rev. Dr. Orville B. Jones Jr.
Mr. Kevin McBeth
Dr. Doreen Rao
Dr. Marcie Ray
Dr. David Rayl
Dr. Jonathan Reed
Mr. Dan Sherman
Dr. Sandra Snow
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I am indebted to my teacher and mentor Dr. David Rayl for making me aware of this fascinating piece. His support and investment in my development have been unwavering. Thank you for helping me silence the doubt and stay the course with this topic. Dr. Marcie Ray has transformed the manner in which I listen to and analyze music. Thank you for equipping me with a critical lens to provide an adequate examination that this music deserves.

Dr. Reed reminds me of the power of human connection every time he leads an ensemble. Dr. Sly convinced me to shift from proving to convincing. Dr. Prouty helped me see the often-neglected side of the Blues. Molly Murdock is a dear friend and treasure whose time and expertise were beneficial and invaluable. I am grateful for Judith Anne Still who provided many words of encouragement and access to scores at a reasonable cost.

I extend my sincerest gratitude to all those involved in my conducting recital. Preparing and conducting this music created an opportunity to meld the practical and the theoretical.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

My experience with the music of William Grant Still began many years ago in an undergraduate music history course titled "What To Listen for In Music." Our textbook included vignettes—"Cultural Perspectives"— associated with the primary discussions. The authors define them as "text 'windows' that…delve into the cultures of African-Americans, Latin Americans, and Asian Americans, and into the musics of Canada and Mexico as well as those of Africa and the Far East."[1] In essence, those "windows" served as convenient boxes to contain "The Other." The "Cultural Perspectives" entry, which we were not required to read, following the chapter "Dvořák's Influences on African-American Art Music," briefly mentioned William Grant Still as "one who rose to Dvořák's challenge" to utilize folk music from America and the prominence of his *Afro-American Symphony*— my first knowledge of a symphonic work by an African-American composer.[2] Ten years later, a local classical music radio contest posed the question, "Which composer wrote the *Sahdji*, *Festive Overture*, *Sunday Symphony*, and *Afro-American Symphony*?" I reached the host after many calls and gave the correct answer. He was excited that I got through, frustrated with the numerous incorrect answers he received, and worried that there would not be a winner for the first week of February (Black History Month). Those experiences are indicative of the position William Grant Still holds within the art

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[1] Joseph Machlis and Kristine Forney, *The Enjoyment of Music*, 8th ed., shorter (New York: Norton & Company, 1999), xxi.

[2] Ibid., 318.

music canon: very few are familiar with his work other than *Afro-American Symphony*, and discussions of his life and music usually occur in February or are relegated to discussions that focus on his White contemporaries.

Some time later I discovered a compelling and controversial dramatic choral piece for racially divided choirs and orchestra titled *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*. Although it was well received at its premiere, the provocative title and intense subject matter have rendered it a less than desirable piece for performance. The message is also timely given the increased visibility of the racial tension throughout our country. Based on my study and performance of the work, I believe it deserves to be performed not as a "token" work by an African American for Black History Month, but as a well-crafted American masterpiece and a plea for justice and peace.

There is currently no literature that yields a detailed musical investigation of the score, specifically one directed at conductors considering its performance. I will present the historical and social context in which *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* was composed; explore prominent artistic contributions to the anti-lynching campaign of the 1920s and 1930s; discuss the creative forces that merged to create this groundbreaking work; give a structural overview of the text and musical ideas; and provide suggestions that address some inherent performance and programming challenges.

Historical and Social Context

The year 1865 marked an important turning point for African Americans. The end of the Civil War and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment freeing the slaves meant, at least in theory, that these newly freed individuals could begin to make the transition toward integration into American society as full citizens. Ex-slaves faced this transition amid overwhelming odds that continued through the period of Reconstruction ending in 1877. White citizens opposed to the abolition of slavery were determined to assert their dominance and control and did so through a series of violent measures and discriminatory laws. As legal recourse grew less effective as a means of oppression, organizations such as the Ku-Klux-Klan and other vigilante groups enacted rampant terror throughout Black communities. The country experienced a ruthless span of racial violence in the form of lynching that lasted from 1880 until 1940.[3] As Mark Twain remarked in an essay, welcome to the "United States of Lyncherdom."[4]

The definition of "lynching" has transformed throughout history. Christopher Waldrep asserts, "the word 'lynching' cannot be defined. That is its most important characteristic: it is a rhetorical dagger ready to be picked up and deployed by a host of actors in a variety of circumstances."[5] Lynching in America has roots in the

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[3] Anna Jo Paul, "Strange Fruit: An Examination and Comparison of Themes in the Anti-Lynching Dramas of Black and White Women Authors of the Early Twentieth-Century (1916-1936)" (PhD diss., University of Louisville, 2013), 6 , accessed September 18, 2014, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

[4] Mark Twain, "The United States of Lyncherdom," in *Europe and Elsewhere* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1923).

[5] Christopher Waldrep, *Lynching In America: A History In Documents* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), xvii.

American Revolution when Virginia "patriots" would hang or beat Tory loyalists.[6] Charles Lynch was a Virginia judge who led the charge in administering unauthorized punishment to Tories and criminals alike.[7] His actions came to be known as "lynch law." Lynching in the eighteenth century included hanging, beating, riding the rail, and tarring and feathering.[8] The scarcity and remoteness of law enforcement officials and courts fueled the development of a culture of people who felt it much more convenient to take the law into their own hands.[9]

Many people associate "lynching" with mob violence towards African Americans. Goldsby comments,

> The racialization of lynching—the near-exclusive targeting of African American people for punishment by white vigilante mobs—took clear shape during the era of Reconstruction. Marked by an 'increased harshness' that generally involved the killing of black people...Lynching's lethal turn made it an especially heinous tactic of social control at the end of the nineteenth century.[10]

Miller divides lynching into four categories: spectacle lynching, mob lynching, legal lynching, and domestic terrorism.[11] Mob lynchings, which are central to this document, were seemingly spontaneous events in which groups would invade

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[6] Christopher Waldrep, *African Americans Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 2.

[7] Jason W. Miller, *Langston Hughes and American Lynching Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 3.

[8] Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

[9] Waldrep, *African Americans Confront, 2*.

[10] Goldsby, 17.

[11] Miller, 3-4.

homes or jails to collect their prey. It was common for victims to be humiliated, hanged, tortured, beaten, mutilated, dragged, burned, dismembered, castrated, shot, or silenced by having their throats cut. The corpses were often left hanging to incite fear and demonstrate White dominance. Photos of the dead bodies were routinely circulated and sold as postcards or published in newspapers. Scholars agree that from 1892 until 1930, lynch mobs were responsible for the deaths of approximately 3,220 African-Americans.[12]

African Americans fled the South where lynching was most common and headed north to large cities in search of safer living conditions and opportunities for more economic advancement. Historians call this the Great Migration. The large concentration of Black people in the Harlem area of Manhattan who arrived with the hope for a better life propelled a cultural, social, and artistic eruption called the Harlem Renaissance that lasted from the 1920s to the middle of the 1930s. Alain Locke, an important leader of the Harlem Renaissance, described its goal as the transition from "social disillusionment to race pride."[13] The movement cultivated a safe environment where Black artists could use their craft not only as a means to celebrate Black expression, but also to protest a plethora of social woes including lynching.

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[12] Goldsby, 15. At least one-quarter of people lynched from 1880 to World War II were not African Americans. See Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 117.

[13] Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 11.

Artistic Anti-lynching Efforts in the 1920s-1930s

Throughout history, authors, playwrights, and composers have used their craft as agents of social protest and criticism. Anti-lynching campaigns supported by both Black and White citizens took root in response to the violence targeted at the Black community.

Ida B. Wells (1862—1931) was an African-American suffragist, teacher, women's rights advocate, and journalist. She published anti-lynching pieces in magazines and authored several pamphlets that gave descriptive reports of lynchings.[14] Wells's work positioned her to be a prominent leader in the campaign against lynching, which in turn encouraged other Black women who would eventually write anti-lynching dramas.[15] Some of those prominent female playwrights include Angelina Weld Grimcké, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Mary Church Terrell, and Anna Julia Cooper. A lynching drama is defined as, "a play in which the threat or occurrence of a lynching, past or present, has major impact on the dramatic action."[16] Anti-lynching pieces thrived in magazines, which were a popular source of entertainment and information during the Harlem Renaissance. Stephens writes,

> During the 1920s lynching dramas appeared on Broadway (Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom* [1926]) as well as in community and educational theatre venues; they were printed

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[14] Paul, "Strange Fruit," 110.

[15] Ibid., 107.

[16] Judith L. Stephens, "Racial Violence and Representation: Performance Strategies in Lynching Dramas of the 1920's," *African American Review* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 656, accessed July 27, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901345.

> in pioneering black publications such as Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory's *Plays of Negro Life* (1927) and W.E.B. DuBois's *The Crisis*, as well as in obscure 'little magazines' of the Harlem Renaissance, such as the *Saturday Evening Quill*. These arenas of production and reception suggest the ubiquity of the genre and variety of its audiences.[17]

According to Paul, there are approximately one hundred extant anti-lynching dramas.[18] *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* can be seen as an extension of this genre.

Although racial tension pervaded the New York art world in the 1930s, with few galleries featuring works by Black artists, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and leftist members of the Artists' Union and other Communist-affiliated organizations held two prominent anti-lynching exhibitions in New York City in 1935.[19] Organizers hoped the exhibitions would bring awareness to the issue and move "viewers from empathy to active support for legislative remedies."[20] The NAACP exhibit, *An Art Commentary on Lynching*, took place just north of Midtown at the Arthur U. Newton Galleries and relied on "high cultural associations of art to draw attention to its legislative campaign."[21] *Struggle for Negro Rights,* associated with the Artists' Union and other groups, took place in the American Contemporary Art Gallery in Greenwich Village and offered an "alternative political analysis" and criticized the NAACP "for elitism and its failure to

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[17] Stephens, "Racial Violence," 657.

[18] Paul, 60.

[19] Helen Langa, "Two Antilynching Art Exhibitions: Politicized Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, Gendered Constraints," *American Art* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 17, accessed August 18, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109305.

[20] Ibid., 11.

[21] Ibid, 11-12.

offer a radical vision."[22] The shows ran consecutively for about two weeks each. Langa assesses,

> Both anti-lynching exhibitions were successful in stimulating attendance and gaining a degree of critical attention, although critics' perspectives were varied. Both shows offered a powerful visual stimulus to viewers to play a more active role demanding an end to lynch violence. Despite their political and polemical differences, both exhibitions also fulfilled an important task in urging artists to address a theme of profound emotional, social, and legal significance.[23]

While literary and visual protest art seemed to flourish, there was surprisingly little anti-lynching music during the time of the Harlem Renaissance. Most notable is Abel Meeropol's song "Strange Fruit," made famous by Billie Holiday in 1939. Irving Berlin's musical revue *As Thousands Cheer* (1933) features the song "Supper Time," which portrays a wife's emotional reaction to her husband's lynching. While produced with less frequency, it is important to recognize the ubiquity of lynching ballads. These songs constitute an important element of the "folk culture of lynching," meaning they contain "expressive texts broadly conceived in traditional forms which have as their subject a specific lynching or lynchings in general and which become traditional within a given group or region."[24] The Blues, a genre that is an extension of the narrative folk ballad, encompasses some of the better-known lynching ballads. Among them are Blind Lemon Jefferson's "Hangman

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[22] Langa, 12.

[23] Ibid., 36.

[24] Bruce E. Baker, *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 220.

Blues" (1928) and Robert Johnson's "Hellhound On My Trail" (1937). Visual art and literature are both "high culture" associations and generally have solitary modes of production. Music that needed to be produced in either a studio or concert hall had a much more difficult journey in a White dominated industry. The necessity of multiple people to produce commercial music may account for the scarcity of pieces about lynching, particularly in the realm of concert music where there were none prior to the creation of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*.

Support from the legislative-sphere was bleak despite all anti-lynching efforts. From 1882 until 1968, almost 200 anti-lynching bills were presented to Congress and only three passed the House of Representatives.[25] Seven presidents from 1890 to 1952 petitioned Congress to pass a federal law outlawing lynching.[26] One such bill, The Gavagan Anti-Lynching Bill, passed The House of Representatives in January of 1940 and reached the Senate during the production of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*.[27] The bill did not pass.

Despite years of what seemed like no hope for resolution and no models on which to base such a work, William Grant Still and Catharine Garrison Chapin broke new ground by creating the first piece of concert music that protests lynching.

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[25] "Senate Apologizes for Not Passing Anti-Lynching Laws," Fox News, June 13, 2005, accessed December 12, 2014, http://www.foxnews.com/story/2005/06/13/senate-apologizes-for-not-passing-anti-lynching-laws

[26] Ibid.

[27] Wayne D. Shirley, "William Grant Still's Choral Ballad And They Lynched Him On A Tree," *American Music* 12 no. 4 (1994), 435.

CHAPTER 2

Genesis and Initial Reception

The process of producing *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* would not have been possible without the vision and persistence of some primary players. An exploration of their lives will provide insight into the decisions that influenced the creation and production of this pioneering work.

William Grant Still was born in Mississippi in 1895 to parents who were both college graduates and teachers. His father died later that year and the family moved to Arkansas. Still's stepfather shared his great love for music by exposing the family to the best recordings and performances and filling their house with music and singing.[28] He attended Wilberforce University where he studied science to become a medical doctor.[29] While there he created a string quartet, joined the school's band, learned to play various wind and string instruments, and had his first experiences arranging, orchestrating, and composing.[30] Still left school and toured as a professional musician, ultimately working for the "Father of the Blues" W.C. Handy. A trust from Still's father allowed him the opportunity to study music theory and violin at Oberlin. Still's study was interrupted by his 1918 enlistment in the Navy

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[28] Robert Hass, *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in American Music* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 3-4.

[29] Hass, 4.

[30] Ibid., 4-5.

working as a mess hall attendant.[31] He briefly returned to Oberlin, but did not finish his degree. Still moved to New York City in 1919 to work in many capacities as a performer and arranger. He received a scholarship and studied with French modernist composer Edgard Varèse from 1923 to 1925.[32] Still received his first Guggenheim Fellowship and moved to California in 1934, which afforded him "the opportunity to do uninterrupted creative work."[33] He was quite fond of his time visiting California in 1930 where he met his second wife. Still remained there until his death in 1978. He was the recipient of two Guggenheim Fellowships and honorary degrees from nine academic institutions. William Grant Still was a pioneering musical figure. According to Griggs-Janower,

> [Still] was the first African-American composer in the United States to have a major symphony performed by a major orchestra…the first to conduct a major orchestra in a performance of his own works, the first to conduct a major orchestra in the deep South…the first to have an opera produced by a major company...the first to have an opera televised over a national network, and the first of his race to conduct a white radio orchestra in New York City.[34]

Still's oeuvre consists of over 150 works, which include nine operas, five symphonies, four ballets, and compositions for piano, voice, band, chorus, and various chamber ensembles.

Katherine Garrison Chapin was a writer most known for her poetry. Born in

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[31] Verna Arvey, *In One Lifetime* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1984), 52.

[32] Arvey, *In One Lifetime*, 65.

[33] William Grant Still and Judith Anne Still, *My Life, My Words: The Autobiography of William Grant Still* (Flagstaff: The Master-Player Library, 2011), 225-26.

[34] David Griggs-Janower, "The Choral Works of William Grant Still," *The Choral Journal*, vol. 35 no. 10 (1995):41.

1890 in Connecticut, she was the third of four children whose father died when Katherine was six leaving her mother to raise the family. Chapin was described as a "frail and oversensitive child" who "withdrew into the retreat of her imagination."[35] Katherine attended private school but never attended college. Her older sister Marguerite was a singer and writer who married the composer Roffredo Caetani, who was also the Duke of Sermoneta.[36] Her younger sister Cornelia was a sculptor and her brother Paul was a financier and close friend to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Paul's son, Schuyler Garrison Chapin, later became the General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera, Cultural Arts Commissioner of New York City, and Dean of the School of the Arts at Columbia University. Katherine married Francis Biddle in 1918 and they had two children; the youngest of whom died at the age of six. Francis Biddle was a lawyer and judge who served as the Attorney General from 1941 until 1945 and the primary American judge for the Nuremburg trials (1945—1946). Katherine Garrison Chapin's writing includes poetry, essays, reviews, and translations found in publications such as *Harpers*, *Scribners*, and *Saturday Review*. She was an original Fellow in American Arts and Letters of the Library of Congress. *Lament for the Stolen* (1938) and the patriotic poem *Plainchant for America* (1941) are two of Chapin's poems also used for a musical setting. Chapin and Biddle were prominent patrons of the arts, evident through their correspondences and dinner parties with well-known artists. She died in Pennsylvania in 1977.

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[35] Francis Biddle, *A Casual Past* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 329.

[36] Ibid., 328.

Katherine and her sister Cornelia were friends and assistants to Charlotte Osgood Mason (1854—1946). Bernard describes Mason as,

> a wealthy Park Avenue widow who had an avid interest in Negroes, which grew out of her equally avid interest in Native Americans. In both cultures, she saw a spirit of primitivism, which she insisted her black protégés reproduce in their art. She depended upon Alain Locke, whose career she supported and whose informal role in her life was to introduce her to Black artists whose work he thought would please her…Mason was exacting and controlling; she was a patronizing patron.[37]

Charlotte Mason preferred anonymity and insisted that all the artists she supported call her "Godmother."[38] Very few first-hand accounts of her exist, securing her desire for anonymity. Her presence in scholarship is largely pieced together from correspondences, legal contracts, and social lore.[39] Charlotte Mason provided financial support for many key figures in the Harlem Renaissance including Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, Hall Johnson, Aaron Douglas, and Claude McKay.[40]

Letters between Locke, Mason, Chapin, and Still reveal the genesis of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*. Chapin's poem *Lament for the Stolen* (1938), set to music by Harl McDonald, is a piece for women's chorus and orchestra based on the

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[37] Emily Bernard, *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Portrait in Black and White* (Yale University Press, 2012), 51.

[38] Melinda Booth, "Charlotte Osgood Mason: Politics of Misrepresentation," Oakland University, Fall 2004, http://www2.oakland.edu/oujournal/files/10_mason.pdf.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Bernard, 52.

horrors of kidnapping (evoking the Lindbergh kidnapping of 1932).[41] Locke was displeased with the score and hoped for a project that would "come closer to his ideal of a choral work on a tragic subject."[42] Shirley concludes it was Mason who suggested that Chapin write a poem on lynching, while Locke proposed Still as the ideal composer.[43] William Grant Still lived in Los Angeles, California in August of 1939 when he received the invitation to create the score for the lynching poem.[44] Shirley observes that,

> … [Still] was finishing a set of seven piano preludes for Fischer—it was Chapin who suggested their final title, 'Seven Traceries.' He was revising his Symphony in G minor. He had just completed the music for the theme exhibit of the New York World's Fair, the "City of Tomorrow" in the Perisphere.[45]

Direct dialogue soon began between Still and Chapin, and he began composing the score on September 9, 1939.[46] *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* was completed in March of 1940 and premiered later that year on July 25th. The performance featured the New York Philharmonic conducted by Artur Rodzinski, Schola Cantorum as the White Chorus conducted by Hugh Ross, the Wendell Talbert Choir as the Black Chorus, James Dorsey, narrator, and Louise Burge, contralto. The cover of the piano vocal score of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* bears a dedication to Henry Allen

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[41] Shirley, "Choral Ballad," 425.

[42] Shirley, 426.

[43] Ibid., 427.

[44] Ibid., 426.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 432.

Moe. He was the administrator of the Julius Rosenwald Foundation whose financial support made it possible for the piece to be created without the need for additional commercial work to support his family.[47]

And They Lynched Him On A Tree was performed in the Lewisohn Stadium before an audience of thirteen thousand.[48] Notable music figures in attendance included Aaron Copland and Marc Blitzstein, both of whom expressed enthusiasm for the piece.[49] Reviews of the performance were positive. Alain Locke wrote the most in depth review in *Opportunity*, the official journal of the National Urban League. Locke shares:

> This significant work should become one of the permanently representative American classics… its beauty and originality transcend, verbally and musically, most of the chants for democracy that the [international] crisis has inspired… In the days of its youth, democracy needed, no doubt, the lusty praise and encomiums of a Walt Whitman; and many of the contemporary works on this theme [democracy] have obviously the Whitman flavor. But democracy today needs sober criticism, even courageous chastising, and… *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* gives our democracy in crisis just that much-needed heroic challenge and criticism. So doing, if universalizes its particular theme and expands a Negro tragedy into a purging and inspiring plea for justice and a fuller democracy. When, on occasion, art rises to this level, it fuses truth with beauty, and in addition to being a sword for the times it is likely to remain, as a thing of beauty, a joy forever…For the discriminating in poetic and musical taste, this is, for our decade thus far, *the* ballad of democracy.[50]

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[47] Shirley, 453.

[48] Ibid., 448.

[49] Ibid., 449.

[50] Ibid.

A music review in the *New Yorker* called it "the most ambitious effort yet heard from its skilled composer…[the work] developed logically and dramatically, with singularly persuasive solo moments."[51] A mention in the *New York Times* said the music was "written with utter simplicity and deep feeling" and that the mother had "poignant, searching music."[52] A column in the African-American newspaper *New York Amsterdam News* penned by W.E.B DuBois declares it was "the greatest event of the month."[53] Eleanor Roosevelt shared thoughts (on a special performance initiated by a rain delay) in her column "My Day." She offers, "Mr. Ross played a little of William Grant Still's music and Louise Burge sang the Negro mother's lament for her boy who had been lynched. It had all the simplicity of expression and all the depths of emotion so well expressed by the Negro voice."[54]

Some prominent performances of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* occurred after the premiere. It was performed at Howard University later in 1940, again at Lewisohn Stadium in 1941, broadcast on NBC in 1942 under the baton of Leopold Stokowski, and performed in Mexico City (sung in Spanish) under the direction of Carlos Chávez.[55] Shirley suggests that the United States entry into World War II played a large role in the decline of performances.[56] Still and Chapin were also busy promoting their next and final collaboration *Plain-Chant for America.* Of the William

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[51] Shirley, 450.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 451.

[56] Ibid.

Grant Still choral orchestral works that followed *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*, all of them were "less extensive" and none addressed the "painful side of African-American existence so directly."[57]

[57] Shirley, 451.

CHAPTER 3

Representing Two Groups

The salient musical features of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* serve to emphasize the imbalance of power and tension that existed between Whites and Blacks during this atrocious time in our history. An examination of those features will help conductors identify and augment the dramatic gestures present in the music.

And They Lynched Him On A Tree is scored for a White Chorus, Black Chorus, Contralto Solo (Mother), Narrator, and orchestra (two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, english horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, three horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings) with stage directions and off-stage sound effects. The White Chorus initially functions as a Lynch Mob and later as a chorus of White supporters standing in protest with the Black Chorus. I will make a distinction between the Lynch Mob and the White Chorus for the remainder of this document. The following scenario is provided in the score.

> It is night. In a clearing by the roadside among the turpentine pines, lit by the headlights from parked cars, a Negro has just been lynched. The white crowd who hung him, and those who watched, are breaking up now, going home. They sing together, get into their cars and drive away. Darkness falls on the road and the woods. Then slowly the Negroes come out from hiding to find the body of their friend. Among them is the mother of the man who was hung. In darkness they grope for the tree; when they find it the mother sings her dirge. The Negro chorus joins her and they retell the story of the man's life and rehearse the tragedy. She is humble and broken but as they all sing together, the white voices joining the Negroes', the song becomes strong in its impartial protest against mob lawlessness and

> pleads for a new tolerance to wipe this shadow of injustice off the land.[58]

Still and Chapin's composition is a continuous work of approximately eighteen minutes divided into six sections.

And They Lynched Him On A Tree is often considered a choral ballad or cantata. Still completed his first opera, *Troubled Island*, just months before starting work on the lynching piece. Many of the compositional techniques used in that opera and his future operas are present in this music. These similarities suggest that *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* is conceived on a larger and more operatic scale.

Motivic writing is a distinctive feature in many of Still's compositions. According to Cutsforth-Huber, "William Grant Still made extensive use of recurring motives in his operas that serve, in essence, as the 'ties that bind.' Not only do they identify and link dramatic situations together, but they highlight connections between characters as well."[59] *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* is a drama about the struggle between two racial groups and Still, as in his operas, utilizes a motive to represent each choir, thereby creating a composition that is largely driven by motivic development. Still referred to the motive that represents the Lynch Mob as "The Wounding Power of Prejudice,"[60] always played by a brass instrument (fig. 1). Its range spans a tri-tone and contains three repeated pitches that suggest

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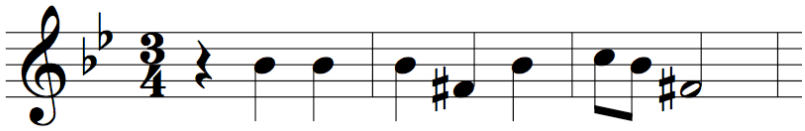
[58] William Grant Still, *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*, (New York: J. Fischer & Bro., 1940).

[59] Bonnie Cutsforth-Huber, "The Operas of William Grant Still" (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2004), 181, accessed July 2, 2015, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

[60] Shirley, 435.

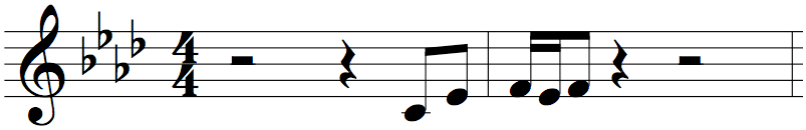
wounding, followed by two prominent descending diminished fourth leaps that could imply a potent force descending upon the weak.

Figure 1. Lynch Mob motive labeled “The Wounding Power of Prejudice.”



The slow ascending motive representing the Black Chorus spans a perfect fourth and contains a collection of pitches from the blues scale, outlined by an ascending minor third from the dominant then a whole step to tonic. The essence of this gesture is suggestive of sorrow and the Black struggle for equality (fig. 2).

Figure 2. Black Chorus motive.



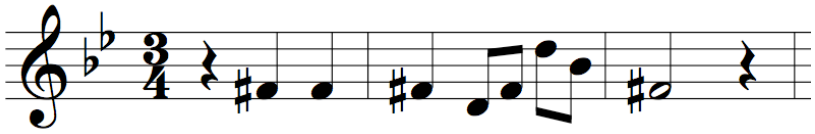
Still often created variations of his motives that are “based either on a recurring rhythmic pattern, a rhythmic pattern and melodic contour, or on a returning rhythmic pattern and interval that are integrated into a different melody.”[61] Variations such as those are utilized throughout *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*. For example, variation of the Lynch Mob motive is heard two times in the introduction (fig. 3). Both maintain the first three quarter notes followed by some rhythmic and melodic alteration. The first variation (fig. 3a) maintains the basic

[61] Cutsforth-Huber, 181.

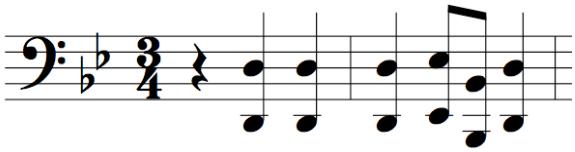
melodic contour with the signature descending diminished fourth and the second (fig. 3b) is truncated, but maintains the initial portion of the rhythmic material.

Figure 3. a) First variation of the "Prejudice" motive starting in m. 17 played by the horns and trumpets and b) Second variation of the "Prejudice" motive starting in m. 21 played by the celli and basses.

a)

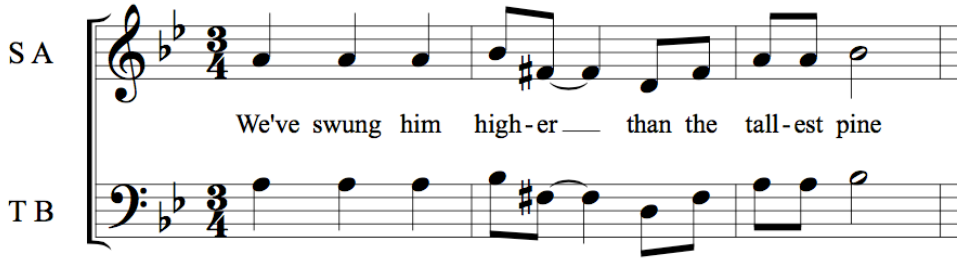


b)



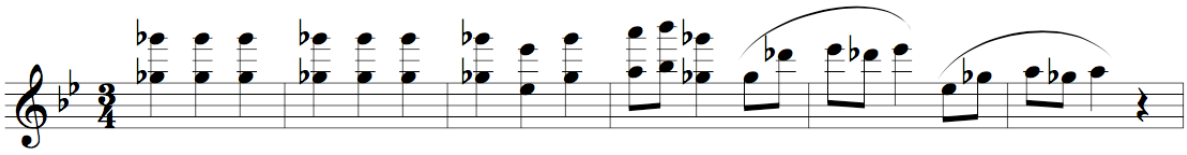
The Lynch Mob enters on a unison statement of their altered motive that maintains the three quarter notes and the descending diminished fourth interval with a varied rhythmic pattern (fig. 4).

Figure 4. Lynch Mob entrance in m. 29 of the "Prejudice" motive.



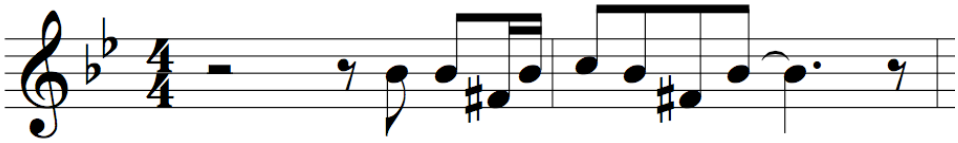
As the tension of the Lynch Mob music subsides and they exit the stage, Still dissolves yet another variant of the "Prejudice" motive into a variant of the Black Chorus motive, setting the stage for their mournful entrance (fig. 5).

Figure 5. m. 117- Transition from the "Prejudice" motive played by piccolo and flute to the Black Chorus motive marked by slurs played by flute and oboe.



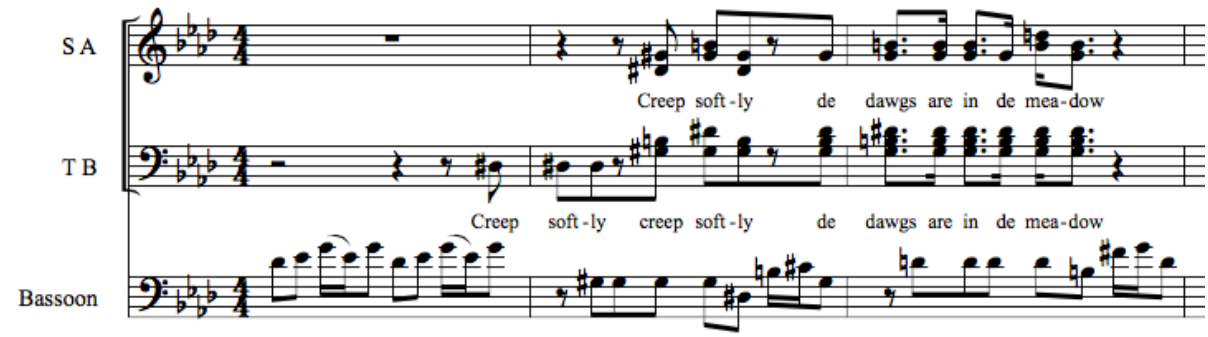
Elements of both motives are combined when, near the end of the piece, the White Chorus comments on the horrific exploits of the Lynch Mob and condemns their actions (fig. 6). Here we see elements of the initial rhythm from the Black Chorus motive with the melodic contour of the "Prejudice" motive. This combination makes sense dramatically because the victim is alive and the two "characters" are engaged in a physical struggle.

Figure 6. mm. 290- Combination of the "Prejudice" motive and the Black Chorus motive played by the bassoons and horns.



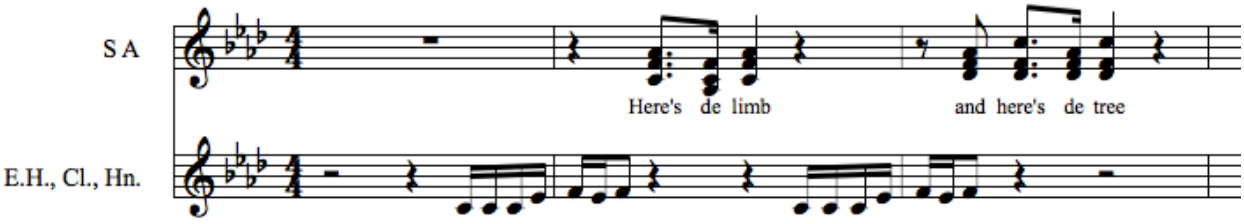
Still displays his mastery of writing for the theater by using motives to foreshadow events and characters and reinforce dynamics of power. The example in figure 5 is heard just before the Black Chorus emerges from hiding. As the chorus tentatively proceeds, they warn each other to "Creep softly, de dawgs [Lynch Mob] are in de meadow." Still inserts the "Prejudice" motive just before we hear their warning. This is a particularly striking choice because an ostinato of the Black Chorus motive had previously dominated the texture (fig. 7).

Figure 7. m. 138- Foreshadowing of the “Prejudice” motive.



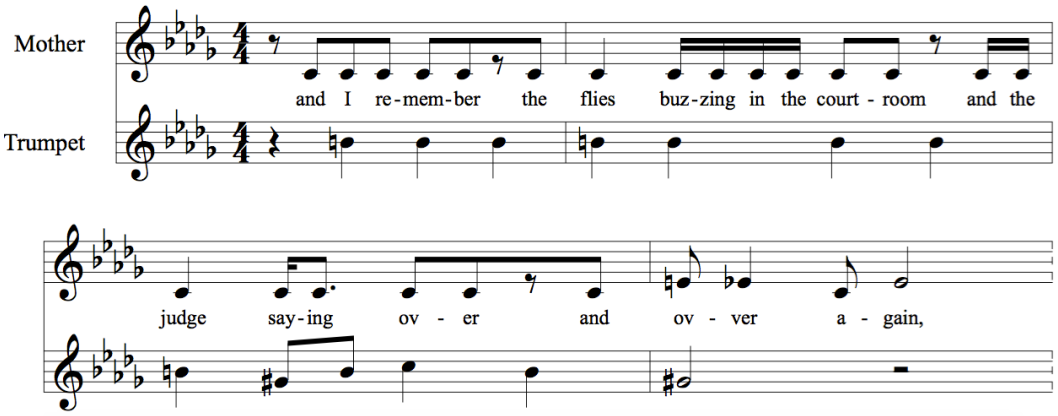
Likewise, we hear a different quality of the Black Chorus motive just before they discover the tree and corpse of the deceased (fig. 8).

Figure 8. m. 145- Foreshadowing of the Black Chorus motive.



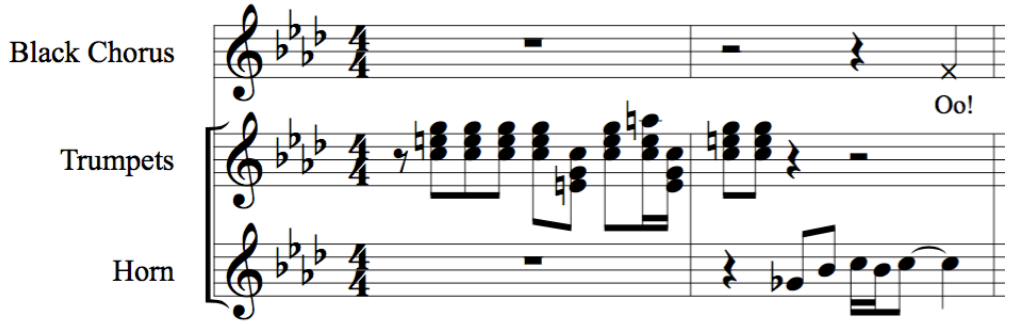
The victim’s mother emerges from the crowd and sings an ABA lament that reveals more of his troubled life experiences. In the B section of her aria, she comments on the day her son was given a life sentence. Still foreshadows and underscores her words with the “Prejudice” motive heard with a muted trumpet (fig. 9).

Figure 9. m. 181- Foreshadowing of the "Prejudice" motive played by a muted trumpet.



The inclusion of that motive also reinforces the dynamic of power between the White-dominated legal system and her Black son. Elements of power are also highlighted when Still juxtaposes the two motives. We hear a harmonized "Prejudice" motive with muted trumpets, followed by a stark shift of texture to the unison Black Chorus motive heard in the horns (fig. 10). This gesture occurs as the Black Chorus gasps and notices "a shadow" in the distance. The harmonization and range of these motives act as an aural signifier of dominance and remind the audience that a Black man was killed by the Lynch Mob (the Black Chorus does not know at this point).

Figure 10. m. 132- Juxtaposition of the "Prejudice" and Black Chorus motives.



A similar instrumental configuration is used as the narrator remarks that, "justice was a slow thing to be waiting for! He was a man." A martial-like trumpet figure of the "Prejudice" motive supports the reference to the Lynch Mob followed by an oboe, bassoon, and horn statement of the Black Chorus motive (fig. 11). The audience is reminded of the victim's murder and humanity.

Figure 11. m. 269- Juxtaposition of the "Prejudice" and Black Chorus motives.

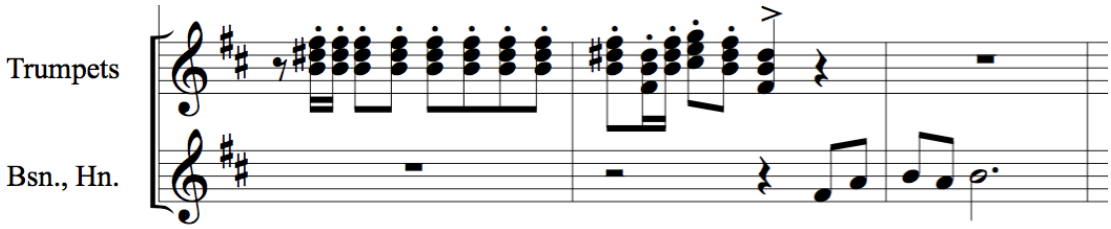
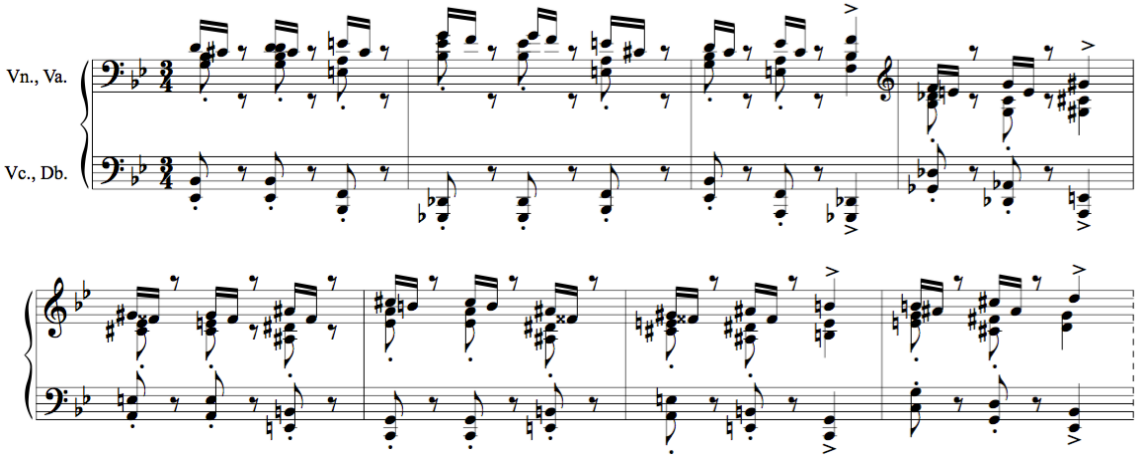


Figure 12. mm. 1-8- The opening "Excitement" material played by the strings.



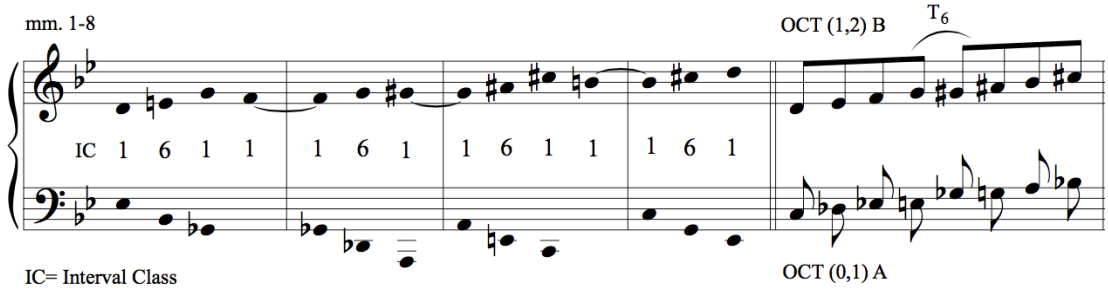
Still further represents the two groups through his use of harmonic language. The initial music depicting the angst of the Lynch Mob is agitated and angular in triple meter, a texture Still called "Excitement."[62] It consists of a driving rhythm in the strings adorned with menacing chromatic figures in the violins (fig. 12).

[62] Shirley, 435.

Excitement is achieved through harmonic instability and dissonance. The key signature of two flats and the root position G minor chord in the upper strings suggests G minor as tonic. However, the addition of the E♭-B♭ dyad in the bass creates an E♭M^7 chord. The sixteenth-note figures obscure initial harmonic expectation by providing rapid oscillation between an E♭M^7 chord and an E♭ dominant seventh sonority. The tri-tone, known as "the devil in music," holds a widely accepted association with representing evil. It is also an integral feature of the octatonic scale (an eight note scale with alternating half and whole steps), in that the two tetrachords are related by tri-tone transposition.

Still favored the octatonic scale as a source of pitch material for many of his operas.[63] Two different versions of the octatonic scale are prominent in the opening "Excitement" material (fig. 13).

Figure 13. Reduction of material from the first eight measures with the corresponding octatonic scales.



The material in the first four measures repeats a tri-tone higher in accordance with the tri-tone transposition of the second tetrachord. Diminished chords are outlined by the root of the dyads in the lower strings, which encompass the second form of

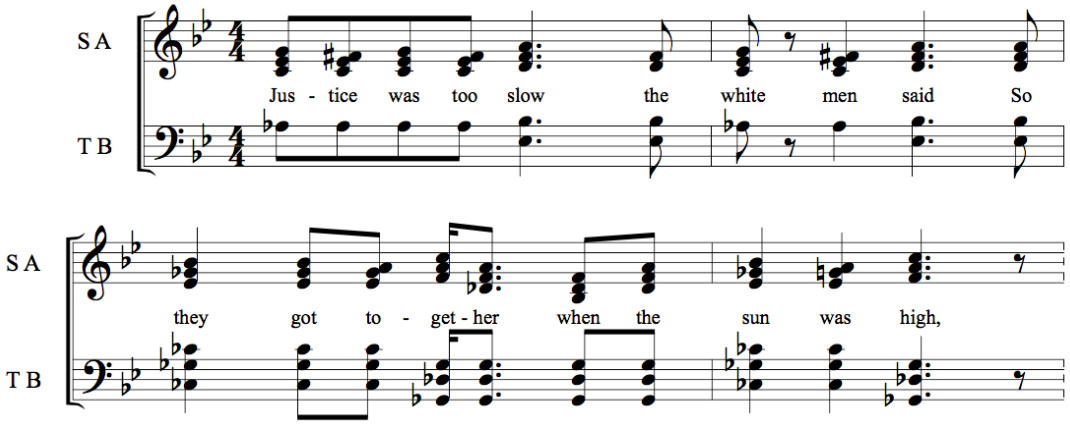
[63] Cutsforth-Huber, 297.

the octatonic scale. An examination of the interval class between the highest and lowest pitches reveals a succession of minor seconds (interval class 1) and tri-tones (interval class 6).

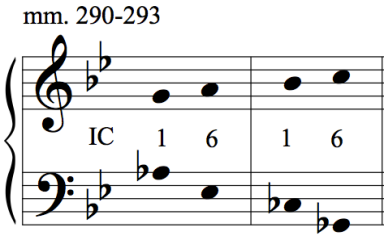
Music that follows a similar compositional structure returns as the White Chorus recounts the details of the Lynch Mob's barbaric acts that occurred just before the lynching (fig. 14).

Figure 14. mm. 290-293- a) Second entrance of the White Chorus and
b) a reduction that demonstrates the replicated interval class.

a)



b)

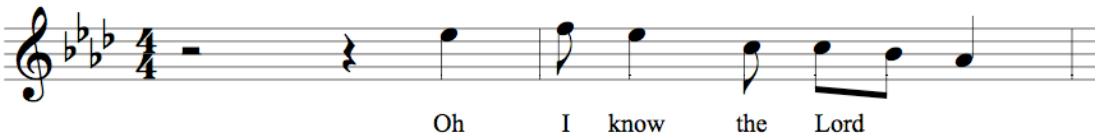


Still reserves traditionally Black musical idioms for all Black Chorus material. This includes, but is not limited to the quotation of a spiritual, the use of blues and

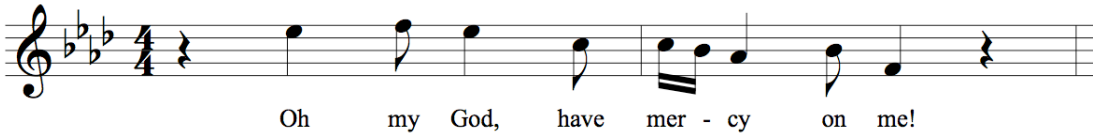
pentatonic scales, and the use of swing rhythms. The choir sings melodic material in the final line of "Look dere!" that is mostly identical to the spiritual "I Know de Lawd done Laid Hiss Han's on Me"[64] (fig. 15).

Figure 15. mm. 148-149- Comparison of a) the tune "I Know de Lawd done Laid Hiss Han's on Me" and b) the Black Chorus material.

a)



b)



"He Was Her Baby" is in E minor, but Still utilizes B♭ to create a blues scale that may further demonstrate the mother's despair. The following section, "He Was a Man," features the Black Chorus as they remember the victim's life and death. Here, swing rhythms appear for the first time in the piece to portray the exuberance of his better days.

Both choruses sing text in the final section that was quite controversial as it originally read:

> "They left him hanging for the world to pass by,
> But a bloody sun will rise in a bloody sky,
> A bloody sun will shine across this sand,

[64] Ralph R. Simpson, "William Grant Still: The Man and His Music" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1964), 219.

> And a long dark shadow will fall on this land,
> will fall on the land.

There was great fear during World War II that *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* would be perceived as propaganda. Rodzinski, the conductor of the premiere, was excited about the possibility of a performance, but worried that the text might cause "unnecessary excitements."[65] Shirley notes that Rodzinski worried that being part of the project with the current text might jeopardize any hope of his sister-in-law and niece receiving visas to come to the United States.[66] Chapin consulted with Still, created an optimistic version of the text for the printed program, and enlisted the help of her husband and Solicitor General, Francis Biddle, to assuage Rodzinki's fears.[67] The altered text reads:

> "They left him hanging for the world to pass by,
> But another sun will rise in a clearer sky,
> Another sun will shine across this sand,
> And a new day of justice will dawn on the land,
> will dawn on the land.

An accompanying ostinato bass pattern provides a funeral march-like foundation coupled with harmony in the winds and strings derived from pentatonic pitch collections (fig. 16).

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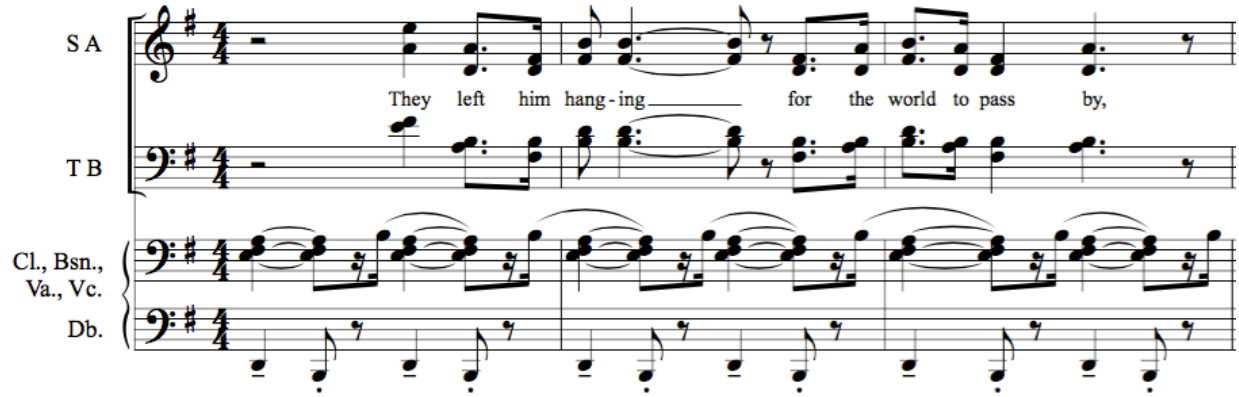
[65] Shirley, 441.

[66] Ibid, 442.

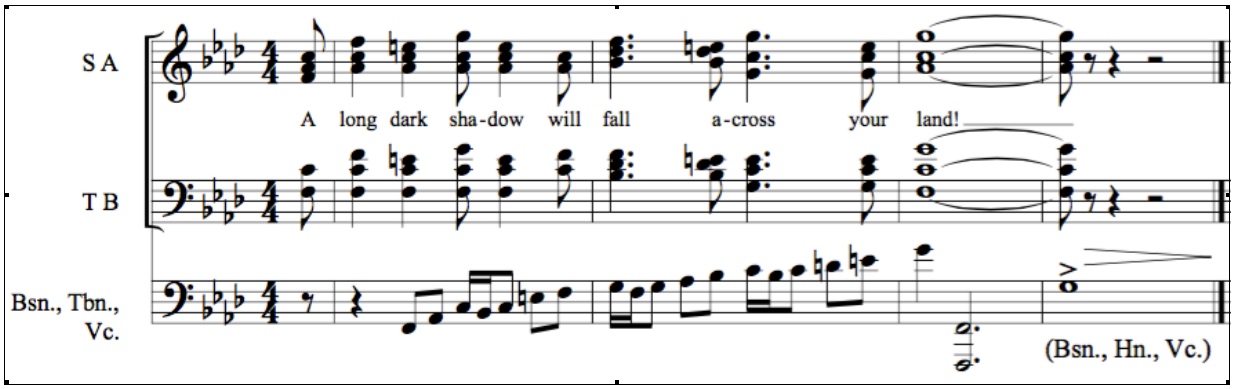
[67] Ibid., 443-444.

Figure 16. mm. 319-321- Entrance of the combined choirs.



The closing sonority in the final measure is an Fm^{9} that releases while the G is left to decay (fig. 17).

Figure 17. The final four measures of the piece.



This lack of resolution leaves a sense of longing and desire for completion. The G natural is preceded by a prominent two-octave ascent of the Black Chorus motive that surpasses tonic—a gesture that could symbolize the completed and subsequent work necessary to achieve justice and equality in our country.[68]

[68] Shirley, 438.

Still believed American opera should "speak directly to American people and in dramatic situations to which they could relate."[69] *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* is a choral orchestral work conceived on an operatic scale that addresses the lynch mob violence that plagued our country. An understanding of some key compositional features can aid conductors in making musical choices that will amplify the connections between musical gesture and dramatic intent.

[69] Cutsforth-Huber, 41-42.

CHAPTER 4

Performance Considerations and Suggestions

Those involved in the creation of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* were well aware of the potential performance limitations posed by the title, subject matter, and required performance forces. Locke observes, "Only the heavy requirements of full orchestra and two large choruses can stand between it and frequent performance."[70] Still wrote to Chapin, " I…pray that it will outlast the purpose for which it was written."[71] Still's wife believed "…he [Still] has avoided the obvious, and has produced something that should have value as music whether the lynching bill is passed or not passed."[72] The title alone can be perceived as passé and offensive and Shirley suggests muting its affect by using "Choral Ballad: *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*."[73] The title is a vital part of the impact and, as is, sets the stage for what Locke called "sober criticism" and "courageous chastisement" for our democracy. Regardless of intent, the reality of audience and patron perception is an influential force that must be evaluated. Those who choose to perform this work must consider 1) how they will handle the divided choirs 2) if they will use the sound effects and stage directions in the score 3) special or atypical requirements for the orchestra 4) the clarity of the score and parts and which version of the text will be used in the final section and 5) how the work could be programmed with other literature.

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[70] Shirley, 450.

[71] Ibid., 435.

[72] Ibid., 452.

[73] Ibid.

The most important and obvious decision a conductor must make is the inclusion of racially distinct choirs. This can be problematic for monetary reasons, or if the required people are simply not present in your geographical area or institution. Still writes, "In the event that it is not possible to secure both a White chorus and a Negro chorus, the composer suggests that the available chorus be divided, one half representing the White people and the other half representing the Negro people."[74] Two separate choirs have traditionally served as the model for performance. Masks, lighting, or two colors of clothing could also help achieve the desired affect. Neither Still nor Chapin suggest that a single choir perform the entire work, but the use of projected images make it possible while maintaining the dramatic intent of two racially divided groups. In this context, the images serve as the actors and the singers give them voice. James Allen's *Without Sanctuary* was a helpful source for lynching photographs.[75] Projections were effective for my performance situation because I did not have access to enough local African-American singers to form a large enough choir, and the amount of music for each chorus (one-third for the White Chorus and two-thirds for the Black chorus) is disproportionate. I wanted everyone to experience performing all the material. The projected images created racial contrast, solved my personnel issue, and helped alleviate any angst the all White choir experienced in anticipation of singing violent text such as, "We've cut his throat so he ain't goin'ter whine." The images also served another level of "chastisement" by forcing the audience to grapple, not only with the

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[74] Still, *And They Lynched Him*.

[75] James Allen et al, *Without Sanctuary* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000).

text, but also with images of lynchings that took place in America within the first four decades of the twentieth century.

The images I displayed during the introduction of my program were portions of pictures that only revealed members of various lynch mobs. These innocuous pictures of White adults and children established the opening ensemble as the White Chorus and provided context for the more graphic images that followed. Full images that showed mobs posed with Black corpses were revealed as the Lynch Mob rejoiced in their murder. Historical images of protest filled the screen when both choirs combine in the final section. I interpret the musical gesture in the final four measures as a representation of Black struggle for equality and the continued work necessary to affect change. This idea is even more relevant amid increasing racial tension in the United States and served as an opportunity to highlight parallels with specific current events. With that in mind, I displayed images of the corpses and funerals of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, all of whom are from a growing list of Black men who met their fate at the hands of White men and police officers in what many believe to be racially driven police brutality. Trayvon Martin's case in particular is a frightening reminder of the past in that his killer, George Zimmerman, was a civilian pursuing vigilante justice much like the Lynch Mob represented in *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*. The conductor or producer must be well aware of the purpose of the performance and the community and audience who will receive the message and consider what will work best in his or her setting.

The theatrical nature of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* is enhanced by the following three stage directions:[76]

> "Exeunt white chorus [sic]. At intervals the sounds of starting motors and of occasional auto horns are heard off stage, never loud enough to interfere with the music, and growing steadily fainter up to the measure before No. 15, at which point they cease."
>
> "A quiet moaning begins. The Negros come out from hiding and gather one by one, feeling their way in the darkness."
>
> "During the narrator's lines the White Chorus has reentered very unobtrusively. They stand now back of the Negro Chorus."

These directions are not crucial for a successful performance, but do serve to augment the story. A thorough examination of the performance venue and concert logistics will determine if sound effects and movement are feasible. The Black Chorus in the 1942 NBC broadcast, conducted by Stokowski, corporately moaned with excessive vibrato on beats two through four of m.125 to m. 127 and m. 129 to m. 130. The result is ineffective and detracts from the fear this group experienced while hiding from the Lynch Mob. Any vocalism employed in this section should be something unmetered and respectfully reflective of the situation.

The orchestration for *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* encompasses that of a standard nineteenth-century orchestra, but incorporates the use of mutes for brass instruments, a technique commonly used with the big bands of the 1920s and 30s. Still requires straight, cup, or soft hat mutes throughout for the trumpets, trombones, and horns. While straight mutes are fairly common, cup and hat mutes

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[76] Still, *And They Lynched Him*.

are less common for concert works. Conductors should highlight this necessity, lest the players not own the required mutes. An alternate orchestration is available for chorus, piano, and woodwind quintet (flute, oboe, english horn, clarinet, french horn, bassoon).

Choral scores and orchestra parts are available exclusively from William Grant Still Music. The copied hand-written conductor's score contains some awkward spaces that can be difficult to decipher. Also, the typewriter text underlay is crowded at times and impossible to read with the corresponding pitches. Likewise, the notation font or reproduction quality of the violin parts may be difficult to read. Look through the individual parts and locate anything that could be unclear to enhance rehearsal efficiency. The choral octavos include an unnecessary quarter rest in m. 161 of the Mother's aria. Be sure the rhythm in that measure matches that of m. 153. The conductor's score contains the original text for the final section, but the "optimistic" version of the text is used in choral octavos. Decide which you will use and plan accordingly to make the necessary changes. Rhythmic alteration will not be necessary, as both sets of text match syllabically.

The performance length of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* is not long enough to fill an entire concert and barely enough for half of a program. Furthermore, the grim ending and final text, "but a long dark shadow will fall across your land," might not create the appropriate atmosphere in which the audience would feel comfortable applauding. Consider following the performance with a moment of silence followed by a piece that continues the theme and provides a more uplifting outlook and an ending with more finality.

There are several choral/orchestral pieces that would pair well with *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* and could provide enough material to form half of a program (fig. 19). An obvious source for additional literature would be William Grant Still's vast catalogue of works. *Plain-Chant for America* is the other Still and Chapin collaboration from the WWII era with text that highlights universal freedom. The orchestration is similar to *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* and features a prominent baritone solo. Still's *Rising Tide*, also known as *Victory Tide*, is an adaptation of a larger work written for the 1939 New York World's Fair. Albert Stillman's text is an optimistic extension of the lynching poem that speaks of brotherhood. The final lines of the poem, "For we're starting today, hand in hand, side-by-side, and tomorrow and forever comes a great rising tide!," also capture the spirit of the two racially distinct choirs united for change.

Figure 18. Lists of literature that would compliment *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*

Option 1
And They Lynched Him On A Tree- 18 min.
Lift Every Voice and Sing- 7 min.
(J. Rosamond Johnson/arr. Roland Carter)

Option 2
And They Lynched Him On A Tree- 18 min.
Like A Mighty Stream- 4 min.
(Moses Hogan/orch. David Gill)

Option 3
And They Lynched Him On A Tree- 18 min.
Plain-Chant for America- 10 min.
(William Grant Still/Katharine Chapin)

Option 4
And They Lynched Him On A Tree- 18 min.
Adagio for Strings- 8 min.
(Samuel Barber w/Dr. King's speech)

Option 5
And They Lynched Him On A Tree- 18 min.
We Shall Overcome- 6 min.
(Seeger et al/arr. Roy Ringwald)

Option 6
And They Lynched Him On A Tree- 18 min.
"Agnus Dei" from *Gospel Mass*- 5 min.
(Robert Ray)

Option 7
And They Lynched Him On A Tree- 18 min.
Rising Tide- 3 min.
(William Grant Still/Albert Stillman)

Conductors who would like to continue the theme of justice as it relates to the Black experience could consider Roland Carter's arrangement of "Lift Every Voice and Sing". The text, written by James Weldon Johnson, began as a speech and was later developed into a poem about the struggles, courage, and survival of African-Americans through years of slavery. John Rosamond Johnson, James's brother, later created a musical setting of the poem. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) adopted "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as the "Negro National Anthem." Carter's arrangement is dedicated to the choirs of the Hampton Institute, an institution whose musical heritage was influential to Katherine Garrison Chapin and the reason she insisted there be a Black chorus for the premiere of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*.[77] The orchestration is similar and parts and choral octavos can be purchased or rented through Mar-Vel Music Company. "We Shall Overcome" is a popular protest song associated with the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Roy Ringwald's arrangement increases in intensity with half step modulations before each of the four verses. The first verse is sung in unison, which presents the option for audience participation. Choral scores and parts can be purchased from Shawnee Press.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech is a pivotal moment in American history that parallels the desired outcome of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*. The text for "Like a Mighty Stream" by Moses Hogan and John Jacobsen is based on the excerpt of King's speech that reads, " We will not be

[77] Shirley, 445.

satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." The piece is written in a call-and-response gospel style making it accessible and a strong ending of a program. Choral scores are available through Hal Leonard and a special piano and strings orchestration was created for the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. This arrangement is unavailable, but a conductor may opt for a similar arrangement. Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* is widely considered one of the most popular pieces for string orchestra. The Philadelphia Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and St. Louis Symphony Orchestra have all launched successful performances of *Adagio for Strings* that underscores an entire reading of Dr. King's "I Have A Dream" speech. The ending is subdued musically, but a skilled orator can deliver the speech in a powerful manner and remind us of Dr. King's dream, one that many would argue is yet to be realized.

"Agnus Dei" from Robert Ray's *Gospel Mass* is a plea for peace and mercy that closes with a cascading "amen" which means, "so be it." This sentiment is an apt ending and another expression of Still and Chapin's goal. Scores and parts are available through Hal Leonard.

As previously stated, the suspended G of the final tonic F that concludes *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* can symbolize the unresolved tension surrounding race relations. This could play out harmonically, in that the G serves as a tonal anchor into the next piece. *Plain-Chant for America*, *Rising Tide*, and *Lift Every Voice and Sing* all begin in G. For those who desire a broader sense of tonal completion, *Plain-Chant for America* ends in F and *Like A Mighty Stream* is set entirely in F.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

A study of this kind helps us learn from our sordid past and reflect on the present. I was honored to prepare and conduct *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* on my doctoral recital as a celebration of its 75th anniversary. The recent high-profile police shooting deaths of unarmed Black males have fueled a revival of readings of anti-lynching plays that were written in the early 1900s. An actor in one such play commented, "I think the revival of these plays that happen a long time ago give us enough distance to say, 'Oh! That's awful! Oh, wait a minute! That looks a lot like what's happening right now'."[78] Like those plays, the message of *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* is evermore resonant in today's sensitive climate of race relations, social injustice and perceived police brutality. The civil rights lessons and reminders that can be gleaned from the horror of lynching violence extend to other areas of society. Johnson and Ingram, for example, argue that recent hate crimes directed at Latina/os are similar to the lynching terror endured by African Americans, in that the violence serves to "maintain racial hegemony in times of change and ferment."[79]

The final line of the work reads, "Cut him down! Talk of justice and take a stand or a long dark shadow will fall across your land." It seems as though the

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[78] Hansi Lo Wang, "Deaths Of Unarmed Black Men Revive 'Anti-Lynching Plays'," NPR: Code Switch, April 17, 2015, accessed April 17, 2015, http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/04/17/399604918/deaths-of-unarmed-black-men-revive-anti-lynching-plays

[79] Kevin R. Johnson and Joanna Cuevas Ingram. "Anatomy of a Modern Day Lynching: The Relationship Between Hate Crimes Against Latina/os and the Debate over Immigration Reform," University of California Davis Legal Studies Research Paper No. 311 (October 25, 2012): 3. Accessed October 19, 2015. http://ssrn.com/abstract=2167051

shadow still lingers. *And They Lynched Him On A Tree* is a compelling composition worthy of a place within the choral/orchestral canon. In a time when racial tension seems to have reached a boiling point, this work reminds us there is still work to do, and most importantly, that progress and change are necessary and possible.

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