

# Notes on the music for Sunday services on June 16, 2024, in honor of Juneteenth

## Holy Eucharist: Rite Two, 10 a.m.

Two hymns from our Hymnal and the postlude in today's 10 a.m. service have been especially selected in honor of Juneteenth.

The text of the hymn **“There is a balm in Gilead”** is one of many spirituals in which the chorus is based on a specific scriptural passage. It responds to a question asked in Jeremiah 8:22 (“Is there no balm in Gilead?”) and answered by a command in Jeremiah 46:11 (“Go up to Gilead, and take balm!”). The singers represent those who have benefited from the balm (salvation) through having been made whole (finding the strength to endure enslavement).

The tune of **“In Christ there is no East or West,”** *McKee*, also has ties to the spiritual tradition. The version in *The Hymnal 1982*, the hymnal we use at St. Stephen's each Sunday, was adapted and arranged by the celebrated Black American composer and songwriter, Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949). The hymn's words, written by John Oxenham, emphasize the message of Christian unity and the “great fellowship of love... whate'er your race may be.”

Mark Miller received a bachelor's degree in music from Yale University and a master's degree in organ performance from Julliard. He is currently director of music for the Drew University Theological School (Madison, N.J.) and director of music for Chatham United Methodist Church (Chatham, N.J.). He also teaches service playing at the Institute of Sacred Music of Yale University, where his many students have included Brent te Velde and Diana Chou. His rousing **Toccata on “Lift every voice and sing”** is an appropriately festive setting of Hymn 599, considered by many to be the African American national anthem.

## Celtic Evensong and Communion, 5:30 p.m.

In recognition of Juneteenth, today's Celtic service celebrates Black excellence in music, featuring a number of selections by Black composers and several arrangements of traditional spirituals.

Composer and baritone **Harry Thacker Burleigh** (1866–1949) played a significant role in the development of American art song—composing over 200 works in the genre—and was the first Black composer acclaimed for his concert songs as well as for his adaptations of spirituals. Burleigh enjoyed a close professional relationship with Czech composer Antonín Dvořák during the latter's three-year stay in the United States and integrally influenced the composition of Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9* (“From the New World”). **“Through moanin' pines”** is the first movement of Burleigh's *From the Southland*, a suite of short pieces inspired by the American South; the work draws influence from Black music and culture and

stands as an example of the uniquely “American” musical sound that Burleigh helped to pioneer.

Often deemed the “Dean of Afro-American composers,” Oberlin Conservatory graduate **William Grant Still** (1895–1978) was an important musical and cultural luminary of the Harlem Renaissance. Still’s musical suite, *Three Visions*, was originally written for his wife and musical collaborator, the pianist Verna Arvey. The work’s second movement, “**Summerland**,” depicts a vision of the heavenly afterlife. Still’s daughter, Judith Anne Still, explains: “The three segments of the suite...tell the story of the human soul after death: the body expires, and the soul goes on to an apocalyptic judgment. If it is seen that the past life has been a good one, the soul may enter ‘heaven,’ or ‘Summerland.’”

A native of Arkansas, **Florence Price** (1887–1953) trained at New England Conservatory, graduating with a Bachelor of Music in organ and piano at age 19. Based in Chicago for most of her career, Price was a trailblazer in music composition; her *Symphony in E minor*—premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra—was the first work by a Black woman to be performed by a major orchestra. In recent years, Price’s music has enjoyed a well-deserved and overdue resurgence in interest. Her setting of the spiritual “**Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen**” was originally written for solo piano but has been arranged for oboe and piano in the June 16 service.

A student of Charles Villiers Stanford, Black English composer **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor** (1875-1912) enjoyed a successful career as a conductor; undertaking several U.S. concert tours at the turn of the century; he was nicknamed the “African Mahler” in New York musical circles. Coleridge-Taylor’s setting of the spiritual “**Sometimes I feel like a motherless child**” comes from his collection *24 Negro Melodies*, which includes arrangements of African folk tunes as well as American spirituals. In Coleridge-Taylor’s Foreword to the published score, he writes: “What Brahms has done for the Hungarian folk music, Dvořák for the Bohemian and Grieg for the Norwegian, I have tried to do for these Negro melodies.”

Black Canadian-American composer and keyboardist **Robert Nathaniel Dett** (1882–1943) was a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music. *Cinnamon Grove*, written in 1928, was one of Dett’s later works for piano; the suite’s meditative second movement draws upon verses from Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* (“Song offering”):

When thou commandest me to sing  
it seems that my heart would break  
with pride; and I look to thy face,  
and tears come to my eyes.

Composer and social justice activist **Margaret Bonds** (1913–1972) was among the first Black woman composers to be nationally recognized for her work. A student of Florence Price, Bonds was also a highly accomplished pianist, becoming the first Black soloist to perform with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at age 20. Bonds arranged a number of

spirituals for solo piano and voice and piano, including **“This little light of mine,”** a notable tune that took on new life in the 1960s as a well-known and beloved anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. As Freedom Singer Rutha Mae Harris [explained to NPR](#), singing the song’s joyful words and music gave her and her fellow activists comfort and courage in the face of danger, steadying their nerves: “Music was an anchor. It kept us from being afraid... It played a very important role in the movement.”

—Notes by Brent te Velde and Diana Chou  
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