

Denise Ward-Brown: *Homegoing*

Home Going honors the legacy and rich traditions of the African-American church with a variety of traditional funeral musical selections; both mournful reverie and joyous celebration of life.

Negro Spirituals are songs that are rooted in the black experience of slavery and have passed along through an oral tradition. They were sung sometimes as work songs; to keep pace with strenuous labor and also as messages of encouragement. The author or origins of these songs often cannot be traced.

Moving into the 20th century, **Gospel music** is rooted particularly within the black experience of urbanization. Thomas Dorsey (1899-1993), considered the ‘father of gospel music’ challenged the narrowness of what was considered sacred musicality. He fostered making “a joyful noise” with any instrument, employing any rhythm and with any tempo.

Black gospel music profoundly influenced the 1960s Civil Rights movement, and fundamentally shaped its most salient aspects. The sit-ins were soothed by hymns, the freedom marches powered by spirited cadences. Today, the legacy holds strong.

Contemporary gospel music carries forward the primary characteristic of ‘improvisation performance.’ It is up to the singers to dramatize lyrics and invest them with significance for the audience. Often referred to as ‘call and response’, the emotional connection and reciprocated enthusiasm are vitally important to the total gospel experience. In many ways, black Christian spirituality is based on themes of collective deliverance and freedom. Singers and congregations use the call-and-response structure to ‘make the journey toward freedom as one body.’

The African American religious traditions remain in many ways viable and popular because they open opportunities for certain types of change even as there’s a certain level of continuity.

—Denise Ward Brown, 2017

Order of Songs:

1. “Angels Watching Over Me”

Traditional Negro Spiritual
Singers: The Samaritan United Methodist Church Men’s Choir:
Sherwin Reed
Raymond Alexander
Terrell Walker
Preston Bosley
Pianist: Maude Neal

2. “Precious Lord”

Composer: Rev. Thomas A. Dorsey, 1932
Singer: Zella Jackson
Pianist: Michael Johnson

3. “Nearer, My God, to Thee”

19th-century Christian hymn by Sarah Flower Adams
Singers:
Anita Jackson
Rochelle Walker
Adrienne Felton-King
Curtis Jay Conrod
Pianist: Mo Egeston

4. “Total Praise”

Contemporary Gospel by Richard Smallwood, 1995
Singer: Nya Brown

5. “Walk in Jerusalem”

Traditional Negro Spiritual
Singers: The Samaritan United Methodist Church Men’s Choir:
Sherwin Reed
Raymond Alexander
Terrell Walker
Preston Bosley
Pianist: Maude Neal

6. “I Bowed on my Knees and Cried Holy (A City Called Glory)”

Lyricist Nettie Dudley Washington & Composer E. M. Dudley Cantwell, 1923
Singer: Zella Jackson
Pianist: Michael Johnson

7. “Every Day Will be Sunday Bye and Bye (When I Reach That Home Beyond the Sky)”

Traditional Negro Spiritual
Singers:
Anita Jackson
Rochelle Walker
Adrienne Felton-King
Curtis Jay Conrod
Pianist: Mo Egeston

8. “His Eye is on the Sparrow”

Lyricist Civilla D. Martin & Composer Charles H. Gabriel, 1905
Singer: Nya Brown
Pianist: Mo Egeston

Film Credits:

Denise Ward-Brown - Director and Producer
Michael D. Francis – Producer
Janiene Winborne – Assistant Director
Ryan Smyth “OnSiteAudio St. Louis” - Audio
Denise Ward-Brown - Editor

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The concert was filmed at Asbury United Methodist Church
Pastor: Ivan Cecil James III