

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

By Marques L. A. Garrett

R. Nathaniel Dett (1882–1943) was a Black nationalistic composer, arranger, educator, conductor, pianist, essayist, and poet who transformed impressions of Black music during the early twentieth century. His most notable work is “Listen to the Lambs,” based on the Negro spiritual of the same name. The oratorio *The Ordering of Moses*, using the melody from “Go Down, Moses” as a fugal theme, is considered to be his magnum opus. Dett is celebrated for his use of Black folk melodies in choral music, and his stunning piano works and vocal solos rival some of the best classical compositions of the time.

Dett intentionally used Black folk music as source material for anthems and motets with the intention of preserving the music while creating songs for use in worship services. These songs remain true to the character of the folk songs through repeated use of the melodies, motivic development based on the rhythms and melodic contour, added polyphony, or characteristic idioms such as call and response, syncopation, and pentatonic scales. Dett’s unique use of spirituals places most of his choral music in a different category than the traditional folk song arrangements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

“Deep River” was originally published in *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals*. This collection contains spirituals set as anthems, motets, and chorales, and was among the last few uses of existing melodies in his published choral music. Dett arranged “Deep River” as “a motet especially for this book.” The unaltered soprano melody appears with each iteration of the refrain. When analyzing Dett’s catalog, one notices that the motets are more polyphonic than the anthems. Accompanying voices are imitative with an ascending melody, representing the singer’s journey to heaven (“home over Jordan”).

DEEP RIVER

for S.A.T.B. voices, a cappella*

Traditional Spiritual
 Arranged by R. NATHANIEL DETT
 Edited by MARQUES L. A. GARRETT

Andante molto tranquillo (♩ = ca. 60-66)

mp

SOPRANO
 Deep _____ riv - er, my _____

ALTO
mp
 Deep, _____ deep _____ riv er, my _____

TENOR
mp
 Deep, _____ deep _____

BASS

Andante molto tranquillo (♩ = ca. 60-66)

PIANO
 (for rehearsal only)
mp

* Visit alfred.com for digital scores and audio.

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home is o - ver Jor - dan.

home is o - ver Jor - dan.

8 riv - er, my home is o - ver

mp Deep, deep riv - er, my

Deep riv - er, Lord, I

Deep, deep riv - er, Lord, I

8 Jor - dan. O, deep riv - er, I

home is o - ver Jor - dan, Lord, I

7 *decesc.*
 want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground.
decesc.
 want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground.
decesc.
 want to cross in - to camp - ground.
decesc.
 want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground.

9 SOLO
mf *espressivo*

O, deep
 * *mp* Deep riv - er, my
 * *mp* Deep, deep riv - er, my
 * *mp* Deep, deep

* Perform with similar dynamic shading as before.

riv - er, Lord, I want to cross
 home is o - ver Jor - dan.
 home is o - ver Jor - dan.
 riv - er, my home is o - ver.
 *mp Deep, deep riv er my

o - ver in - to camp - ground O, deep riv - er, Lord,
 Deep riv - er, Lord, I
 Deep, deep riv - er, Lord, I
 Jor - dan. O, deep riv - er, I
 home is o - ver Jor - dan, Lord, I

15 *decesc.* (end solo)

I want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground.

want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground. *mf* O,

want to cross o - ver in - to camp-ground, in - to camp - ground.

want to cross in - to camp-ground, in - to camp - ground.

want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground.

decesc.

17 **Poco più mosso** (♩ = ca. 72)

don't you want to go to that gos - pel feast, that

mf Don't you want to go to that gos - pel feast, that

Don't you want to *mf*

O,

Poco più mosso (♩ = ca. 72)

mf

19 *decresc.*

prom - ised land where all is peace?

decresc.

prom - ised land where all is peace?

decresc.

go to that gos - pel feast?

don't you want to, don't you want to, don't you want to go? Lord, I

21 *mf* *cresc.*

Want to cross o - ver in - to

mf *cresc.*

Want to cross o - ver in - to

mf *cresc.*

Want to cross o - ver in - to

want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground! Lord, I

23

f

camp - ground! Want to cross o - ver in - to

f

camp - ground! Want to cross o - ver in - to

f

camp - ground! Want to cross o - ver in - to

want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground! Lord, I

25

molto rit. *mf*

camp - ground! O, Lord!

molto rit. *mf*

camp - ground! O, Lord!

molto rit. *mf*

camp - ground! O, Lord!

molto rit. *mf*

want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground! _____

molto rit. *mf*

27

Tempo I (♩ = ca. 60-66)
SOLO

**mf* *espressivo*

Deep _____

**mp* Deep _____ riv - er, my

**mp* Deep, _____ deep _____ riv - er, my

**mp* Deep, _____ deep _____

Tempo I (♩ = ca. 60-66)
mp

29

riv - er, _____ Lord, _____ want _____ to cross

home is o - ver Jor - dan.

home is o - ver Jor - dan.

riv er, _____ my _____ home _____ is o - ver _____

**mp* Deep, _____ deep _____ riv - er, _____ my _____

* Perform with similar dynamic shading as before.

o - ver in - to camp - ground. O, deep riv - er, Lord,

Deep _____ riv - er, Lord, I

Deep, _____ deep _____ riv - er, Lord, _____

Jor - dan. O, deep riv - er, _____

home is _____ o - ver _____ Jor - dan, Lord, I

rit. decresc.
I want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground.

rit. e decresc.
want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground.

rit. e decresc.
want to cross o - ver in - to camp-ground, in - to camp - ground.

rit. e decresc.
want to cross in - to camp-ground, in - to camp - ground.

rit. e decresc.
want to cross o - ver in - to camp - ground.

rit. e decresc.