

THE SIX PIANO SUITES OF NATHANIEL DETT

A Dissertation

Submitted to

the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

by

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Diploma Date May 2014

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ABSTRACT

The six piano suites of R. Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) constitute a substantial body of piano music that illustrates the musical development of an important, but historically neglected American musician. Dett was a seminal figure in the preservation and study of spirituals, both as a writer and choral leader, and as a great teacher and inspirer of African-American musicians in the generations that followed him. Educated at Oberlin and Eastman, he was lauded as the first American composer to fuse Negro folk music with European art music tradition.

The writing of a series of like-genre works over a composer's lifetime, reflecting stylistic changes and a deepening world view, is a special event in the history of keyboard music. Unfortunately, Dett's piano music is rarely performed except for the second of the suites, *In the Bottoms*. Although his importance to African-American musical history is generally acknowledged by musicologists, his works for piano have remained largely unexplored by performers.

Dett's eclectic pursuits included poetry, the Rosicrucian Society, and religion. This study explores the connections between the suites and other musical styles and traditions, Dett's many extra-musical interests, and his performing life. It also offers some possible explanations for the relative lack of attention received by his piano music.

This study incorporates research from readily-available sources, as well as the Nathaniel Dett archives at the Niagara Falls New York Public Library and Hampton University. The first three chapters give an overview of Dett's style and influences, as well as a description of how his musical language developed from his first suite, *Magnolia* (1912), to his last, *Eight Bible Vignettes* (1941-43), written at the end of his life. Each suite is examined individually in detail in the following six chapters. It is hoped that this work will stimulate appreciation of Dett's piano

music and lead to more frequent performances. Its goal is to give to the reader the same sense of admiration and joy that the author's exploration of these works has given him.

DEDICATION

Robert Nathaniel Dett 1882-1943

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give the heartiest thanks to all my committee members, Drs. Lindorff, Dilworth, Abramovic and Folio for encouraging me through this project when I had doubts and the challenges seemed too great. Also I would like to express special gratitude to Dr. Joyce Lindorff for keeping me on track and for tireless help with research and writing. I am grateful to Donald Dumpson for introducing me to Nathaniel Dett's music many years ago. Finally, I will never forget the inspiration and passion of Alexander Fiorillo, who made it possible for me to come to Temple. Without him this project would not have happened. For me, music has been illuminated as never before through his spirit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Biographical Timeline	5
2. OVERVIEW OF THE SUITES	7
First Period – <i>Magnolia, In the Bottoms</i>	9
<i>Magnolia (1912)</i>	9
<i>In the Bottoms (1913)</i>	10
Second Period – <i>Enchantment, Cinnamon Grove</i>	12
<i>Enchantment (1922)</i>	13
<i>Cinnamon Grove (1928)</i>	17
Third Period – <i>Tropic Winter, Eight Bible Vignettes</i>	21
<i>Tropic Winter (1938)</i>	21
<i>Eight Bible Vignettes (1941-1943)</i>	22
3. STYLE AND INFLUENCES	26
Dett’s Personality and Teaching Style	26
Dett’s Performing Style	29
Musical Influences	32
<i>Mother, Early Life</i>	32
<i>Oberlin</i>	33

		viii
	<i>Forerunners</i>	34
	<i>Percy Grainger</i>	36
	<i>Russian Music</i>	37
	Dett's Mission	38
	Dett's Compositional Style	41
	Dett and the Rosicrucians	45
	Dett's Poetry	47
	<i>The Album of a Heart</i>	47
	<i>Song of Seven</i>	50
4.	MAGNOLIA	52
5.	IN THE BOTTOMS	65
6.	ENCHANTMENT	88
7.	CINNAMON GROVE	102
8.	TROPIC WINTER	115
9.	EIGHT BIBLE VIGNETTES	133
10.	CONCLUSION	175
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	182
	APPENDICES	
A.	“THE DREAM”	186
B.	<i>GITANJALI</i> (second poem)	187
C.	“EPIMETHEUS”	188
D.	DETT'S CONCERT REPERTOIRE	190
E.	GRAINGER'S CONCERT REPERTOIRE AT THE TIME OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH DETT ...	191
F.	PIANO WORK LISTING	192

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
FIGURE 1 – <i>Enchantment</i> Title Page – from an early edition	15
FIGURE 2 – Winged Solar Disk	16
FIGURE 3 – “De Winter’Il Soon be Ober”	19
FIGURE 4 – “Run to Jesus”	20
FIGURE 5 – “The Rubinstein Staccato Etude”	48
FIGURE 6 – “That’s So!”	49
FIGURE 7 – <i>Magnolia</i> Title Page	53
FIGURE 8 – “Magnolias” – Opening	55
FIGURE 9 – “Magnolias” – Imitative writing m. 17 – m. 20	55
FIGURE 10 – “Magnolias” – Triplets m. 33 – m. 36	56
FIGURE 11 – “The Deserted Cabin”	57
FIGURE 12 – “My Lady Love”	59
FIGURE 13 – “Mammy”	60
FIGURE 14 – “The Place Where the Rainbow Ends” – Paul Laurence Dunbar	62
FIGURE 15 – “Where the Rainbow Ends” – Main Section	63
FIGURE 16 – “Prelude – Night” – Opening	69
FIGURE 17 – “Prelude – Night” – Middle section	71
FIGURE 18 – “His Song” – Opening	73
FIGURE 19 – “Listen to the Lambs” – Soprano Solo	73
FIGURE 20 – “His Song” – m. 57 - m. 69 (climax)	74
FIGURE 21 – “A Negro Love Song” – Paul Laurence Dunbar	76
FIGURE 22 – “Honey” – Opening	78
FIGURE 23 – “Honey” – Recitative	79

	x
FIGURE 24 – “Barcarolle – Morning” – Opening	81
FIGURE 25 – “Barcarolle” – Second theme	82
FIGURE 26 – “Barcarolle” – mm. 71-75	83
FIGURE 27 – “Dance-Juba” – Opening	85
FIGURE 28 – “Incantation” – First theme	91
FIGURE 29 – “Incantation” – First section close	92
FIGURE 30 – “Incantation” – Second theme	93
FIGURE 31 – “Song of the Shrine”	94
FIGURE 32 – “Dance of Desire” – Transformation of “Incantation” theme	96
FIGURE 33 – “Dance of Desire” – Main theme	97
FIGURE 34 – “Dance of Desire” – Transformation of “Song of the Shrine” theme	98
FIGURE 35 – “Beyond the Dream” – Opening	99
FIGURE 36 – <i>Cinnamon Grove</i> Movement II	105
FIGURE 37 – <i>Cinnamon Grove</i> Movement III – Opening	109
FIGURE 38 – <i>Cinnamon Grove</i> Movement IV – Opening to m. 16	111
FIGURE 39 – <i>Cinnamon Grove</i> Movement IV – mm. 29-32	112
FIGURE 40 – <i>Cinnamon Grove</i> Movement IV – Quartal harmonies	112
FIGURE 41 – <i>Cinnamon Grove</i> Movement IV – Three-hand effect	113
FIGURE 42 – <i>Cinnamon Grove</i> Movement IV – Second theme	114
FIGURE 43 – “Daybreak Charioteer”	117
FIGURE 44 – “A Bayou Garden”	119
FIGURE 45 – “Pompons and Fans”	120
FIGURE 46 – “Legend of the Atoll” – Opening	122
FIGURE 47 – “Legend of the Atoll” mm. 15-18	123
FIGURE 48 – “To a Closed Casement”	125

	xi
FIGURE 49 – “Noon Siesta”	128
FIGURE 50 – “Parade of the Jasmine Banners” – Opening	130
FIGURE 51 – “Parade of the Jasmine Banners” – Second theme	131
FIGURE 52 – “Parade of the Jasmine Banners” – Recap with countermelody	132
FIGURE 53 – <i>Eight Bible Vignettes</i> Title Page	135
FIGURE 54 – “Father Abraham” spiritual	137
FIGURE 55 – “Leoni” melody	137
FIGURE 56 – “Father Abraham” – Opening	142
FIGURE 57 – “Father Abraham” Dett’s arrangement from <i>Negro Spirituals</i>	143
FIGURE 58 – “Desert Interlude”	146
FIGURE 59 – “As His Own Soul”	149
FIGURE 60 – “Barcarolle of Tears”	153
FIGURE 61 – “I am the True Vine” – Fugue subject	155
FIGURE 62 – “Martha Complained” – Opening	158
FIGURE 63 – “Martha Complained” mm. 25-26	159
FIGURE 64 – “Martha Complained” – Broken dish chord	159
FIGURE 65 – “Martha Complained” – Dett’s text setting	161
FIGURE 66 – “Other Sheep” – Dett’s text setting	163
FIGURE 67 – “Other Sheep” – Opening	165
FIGURE 68 – “Other Sheep” – Allegro	167
FIGURE 69 – Balfour Gardiner’s “Prelude de Profundis”	171
FIGURE 70 – “Madrigal Divine” page 1	172
FIGURE 71 – “Madrigal Divine” page 2	173
FIGURE 72 – “Madrigal Divine” page 3	174

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The obscurity that most of R. Nathaniel Dett's (1882-1943) piano music lies in today is not commensurate with the achievements of this great musician. *In the Bottoms* is the only one of his six suites for piano that is occasionally performed and taught by pianists. Most of Dett's piano works, comprising two hours of music, are out of print. His name is not well known outside of the African-American community. Except for *In the Bottoms*, few recordings exist of the suites; even that work is most often performed in the context of specialty "black composers" programs. However, during his lifetime, he was lauded as the first American composer to fuse Negro folk music with European art music tradition in a sophisticated way. As a seminal figure in the preservation and study of spirituals, both as a writer and choral leader, and as a great teacher and inspirer of African-American musicians in later generations, he was acknowledged to be one of the most important musicians in American history. Dett's creation of such a rich and varied body of piano music is a great gift to pianists, one that has been inexplicably underappreciated. In contrast, Dett's importance to African-American music is well acknowledged by musicologists.

This study incorporates research from readily-available sources, as well as the Nathaniel Dett archives at the Niagara Falls New York Public Library and Hampton University.¹ It explores the connections between the suites and other musical styles and traditions, Dett's many extra-musical interests, and his performing life. Its goal is to give the reader the same sense of admiration and joy that the author's exploration of these works has given him. Essentially, it is

¹ A typescript source came to the author's attention following this paper's completion, so was not consulted: Kay Robertine Pace, "Solo Piano Suites of Robert Nathaniel Dett" (1984), is held by the Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College, Chicago for reference only and is not available through interlibrary loan.

music that is meant to be heard, to be enjoyed, and to inspire, not just to be studied. It is hoped that it will be programmed and performed with much more frequency, and appreciated in a way that does it justice. The message of human oneness, expressed through this music, speaks to people now with the same meaning and urgency that it did in his time. Through the efforts of Nathaniel Dett, what he called "Negro folk music," is a gift to the world.

Dett was a polymath. He wrote and published poetry, and won an important literary prize at Harvard University in 1920 for his essay, "The Emancipation of Negro Music." His talents as a composer were matched by his gifts as a pianist and choral leader. Philosophical inquiry, Rosicrucianism, as well as Christianity deeply attracted him. He was also interested in other cultures; ancient Hebrew legends, African chants, tropical images and Hindu poets all have a place in his music. Because Dett's music cannot be properly understood without knowing something of these other influences, this study will touch on these subjects.

Dett was an extremely hard working personality, always driven to improve his craft by further study. He was the first African-American to graduate from Oberlin College, one of the few unsegregated colleges at the time, with a double degree in piano and composition in 1908. Oberlin "regularly admitted African American students beginning in 1835, after trustee and abolitionist, the Rev. John Keep, cast the deciding vote to allow them entry."² Oberlin was also an important center of abolitionist and Underground Railroad activity, and was the site of one of the earliest visits of the Jubilee Singers in 1875.³

Even after being awarded honorary doctorates in music from Howard University in 1924 and Oberlin in 1926, he chose to enroll at the Eastman School of Music in 1931 to obtain a

² "Early History," Oberlin College and Conservatory, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://new.oberlin.edu/about/history.dot>.

³ The first Jubilee Singers, from Fisk University in Nashville, TN, embarked on an extremely successful tour performing Negro Spirituals. Queen Victoria was among their admirers. This group was responsible in large part for bringing Negro Spirituals to a worldwide audience.

master's degree. This constant striving could explain the changes in his compositional style, especially in the piano music. His life experiences ranged from bitter disappointments to great triumphs, all lived out within the segregated social environment of his time.

Dett's writing of a series of like-genre works over his lifetime, reflecting stylistic changes and a deepening world view, places him in a tradition followed by many composers in the history of keyboard music. The two volumes of the *Well Tempered Clavier* of Johann Sebastian Bach, the sonatas of Joseph Haydn and Ludwig van Beethoven, the *Années de Pèlerinage* of Franz Liszt, and the sonatas of Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Prokofiev are prominent examples of this tradition. He also followed the custom of composers' choice of keyboard instruments as the media for experimental and personal expressions. The communication of intimate and individual emotions in piano music, and later the presentation of national styles and images, became an important goal of composers. Character pieces, often combined in sets, were a predominant genre. Dett, in part because of his German-oriented training from his Oberlin professors, is an heir to that tradition. Because of that background, his experiences, thoughts, and ideas find a strong expression in the piano suites.

He grew up in Niagara Falls, Ontario and later on the New York side, places isolated from the centers of musical culture but important to black history because of the Underground Railroad. Dett was exposed to the piano at a very young age. His early musical experiences were mostly with the light salon music of the day, now mostly forgotten, mixed with a scattering of classics. His compositions as a teenager and young adult are in that style, reflecting the ragtime and dance music popular at the time. According to Dr. Dominique-René de Lerma, "Had he participated in the idioms which evolved during his youth, he might have turned to musical

theater, or created blues or ragtime pieces."⁴ Of hearing the Kneisel Quartet perform a slow movement by Antonín Dvořák (Dett does not mention the specific work but it was likely the "American" quartet, op. 96) at Oberlin, Dett writes:

Suddenly it seemed I heard again the frail voice of my long departed grandmother calling across the years; and in a rush of emotion which stirred my spirit to its very center, the meaning of the songs which had given her soul such peace was revealed to me.⁵

Possibly because of this event, he acquired a deeper mission to study and use spirituals as a basis for composition. De Lerma also suggests that the Afro-British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) was an important influence.⁶ The enormous success of Coleridge-Taylor's cantata, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, had begun in 1898. From then on, Dett composed music that used Negro folk idioms in a new way, striving for the highest goals of musical art. He railed against ragtime-influenced minstrel music, viewing it as a corruption of Negro folk music and a reinforcement of racial stereotypes. Dvořák's challenge for American composers to use their own folk materials for the basis of musical creation found a wonderful response in Nathaniel Dett's music.

His piano suites are a result of this effort, beginning in 1912 with *Magnolia*, four years after graduating from Oberlin, and ending in the last year of his life with the completion of *Eight Bible Vignettes*.

The following is a biographical timeline outlining significant events in Dett's life:

⁴ Dominique-René de Lerma, Program notes for R. Nathaniel Dett Piano Works, Denver Oldham, pianist. Recorded 1988, New World Records NW 367-2, 1988, CD.

⁵ Vivian Flagg McBrier, *R. Nathaniel Dett: His Life and Works, 1882-1943* (Washington, D. C.: Associated Publishers, 1977), 11.

⁶ Dominique-René de Lerma, Program notes.

Biographical Timeline

- Oct. 11, 1882 Born in Drummondville, Ontario (now Niagara Falls, Ontario)
Charlotte Johnson Dett, mother (1863-1937)
Robert Tue Dett, father (1849-1921)
Harriet Washington, maternal grandmother, possibly escaped slave
- 1893 Family moves to Niagara Falls, New York.
- 1901 Begins study at Halstead Conservatory, Lockport, New York.
- 1903 Begins study at Oberlin.
- 1908 Graduates from Oberlin, first African-American to obtain degree in piano and composition.
- 1908-1911 Joins faculty, Lane College, Jackson, Tennessee. Teaches piano, vocal music, directs Lane Choral Society; composes *Magnolia* and *In the Bottoms*.
- 1911-1913 Faculty, Lincoln Institute, Jefferson City, Missouri. *Magnolia* and *In the Bottoms* published.
- 1913 Begins teaching at Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia on recommendation of Azalia Hackley.
- 1915 Summer studies at Columbia University and American Conservatory in Chicago. Meets Percy Grainger.
- 1916 Marries Helen Elise Smith.
- 1919 Founds Musical Arts Society at Hampton, bringing in top guest artists. Founding member of National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM).
- 1920 Studies at Harvard University with Arthur Foote, wins Bowdoin Prize for his essay "The Emancipation of Negro Music" and Francis Boot Prize for choral motet "Don't Be Weary, Traveler."
- 1922 *Enchantment* published.
- 1924 Honorary Doctorate, Howard University.
- 1924-1926 Elected president of NANM.
- 1926 Directs Hampton Institute Choir at Library of Congress. Awarded honorary doctorate from Oberlin.

- 1927 Publishes *Religious Folk Songs of the Negro; as Sung at Hampton Institute*.
- 1928 *Cinnamon Grove* published. Directs Hampton Institute Choir at Carnegie Hall.
- 1929 Summer studies with Nadia Boulanger at Fountainebleau.
- 1930 Directs Hampton Institute Choir in European tour to England, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria.
- 1931 Asked to resign from Hampton Institute.
- 1931-1932 Studies at Eastman School of Music, with Howard Hanson among others, earns Master of Music in Composition. An oratorio, *The Ordering of Moses*, is his Masters thesis.
- 1932 Formal resignation from Hampton. Relocates to Rochester, New York. Opens teaching studio.
- 1934 Nathaniel Dett Choral Society formed in Washington, DC.
- 1937 Mother dies. *The Ordering of Moses* premiered at Cincinnati Music Festival. Begins teaching at Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina.
- 1938 *Tropic Winter* published.
- 1941-1943 *Eight Bible Vignettes* published individually.
- 1942 Returns to Rochester.
- 1943 Accepts position with USO (United Service Organizations) training WAC (Women's Army Corps) choruses.
- Oct. 2, 1943 Dies, Battle Creek, Michigan.

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF THE SUITES

In her introduction to the *Collected Piano Works*, Vivian McBrier writes:

In order fully to appreciate the piano music of R. Nathaniel Dett, it must be understood that he was a true Romanticist. Music to him was an expression of the human soul with all of its subjectivism. It was an expression of hope, love, despair; an instrument for his dreams and poetic longings; a vehicle for his racial messages and love for humanity. Dett was a Romantic in both ideological and technical character. All of his piano compositions are programmatic, expressing a racial trait, nature, or a philosophical idea.¹

McBrier continues by placing the six piano suites into three periods, each with two suites. The author is in agreement with this designation, which is adopted in this study.

For Dett, the idea of composing a series of piano suites was a very significant one.

Different types of character piece sets evolved during the nineteenth century. Examples of suites of descriptive musical pictures include Felix Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*, and Robert Schumann's *Waldszenen*. Schumann's *Kreisleriana* and *Carnaval* are examples of suites that follow a program or narrative. The expression of nationalistic musical styles is prominent in the music of Frederick Chopin and later in Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Edvard Grieg's sets of *Lyric Pieces*, and Dvořák's *Poetic Tone Pictures*. Isaac Albeniz's *Iberia* (1905-1908) and Enrique Granados's *Goyescas* (1911) are also outstanding examples of the representation of ethnic characteristics in piano music. However, it is a bit doubtful that Dett had any exposure to these last works because of their very recent composition at the time. Religious ideas and images are pervasive in the third year of *Années de Pèlerinage* of Franz Liszt. Dett, all in the context of African-American folk music, touches on each of these formats.

¹ Vivian Flagg McBrier, introduction to *The Collected Piano Works of R. Nathaniel Dett* (Evanston, IL: Summy-Birchard, 1973), 9.

Possibly the closest antecedents for Dett, at least in the first period of suites, are Edward MacDowell's *Sea Pieces*, op. 55 (1898), and the *African Suite*, op. 35 (1898) by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Dett performed *Sea Pieces* while a student at the Halstead Conservatory in 1903, before he began his studies at Oberlin. Dett was certainly familiar with the works of Coleridge-Taylor, who was the first composer of African descent to achieve worldwide fame. The latter composer's inclusion and arranging of African and African-American melodies in his works was a strong influence and inspiration for the next generation of composers of African heritage, including Dett. In his preface to *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*, op. 59 (1904), Booker T. Washington writes, "Mr. Coleridge-Taylor is himself an inspiration to the Negro, since he himself, the child of an African father, is an embodiment of what are the possibilities of the Negro under favorable environment."² Coleridge-Taylor's *African Suite*, op. 35 (1898), was very possibly a model for Dett's suites. Its second movement, "A Negro Love-Song," appears to be based on a poem of the same name by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906). Since Dunbar had traveled to England in 1897, the year before the Coleridge-Taylor work appeared,³ a connection is plausible. Dett also cites this poem as the basis for "Honey," the third movement of *In the Bottoms*.

² Booker T. Washington, Preface to *Twenty Four Negro Melodies*, by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (Boston: Ditson, 1905), ix.

³ Benjamin Brawley, *Paul Laurence Dunbar, Poet of his People* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 58.

First Period - *Magnolia, In the Bottoms*

Magnolia (1912) and *In the Bottoms* (1913) were written during Dett's first academic appointment at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee. They each have five movements.

Magnolia's movements are grouped into two parts; three in the first part, two in the second.

Dett's love of nature, expressed in his poetic volume, *The Album of a Heart*, written a year before *Magnolias*, is most obvious in these two works. The movements are unified by either images of a geographical place or what Dett calls "racial peculiarities." In the case of the latter, at least for African-American cultural characteristics, this is an innovation in piano literature by Dett.

Magnolia (1912)

As McBrier relates,

Dett's first sojourn in the South was at Lane . . . It is obvious that he was greatly impressed by the beauty of this campus, which is located on a high hill in a little town in southern Tennessee. His first suite bears the title *Magnolia*, showing his love for the beautiful magnolia trees which may still be found on the campus.⁴

Magnolia's five movements, grouped into two parts, are:

Part I

- No. 1 "Magnolias"
- No. 2 "The Deserted Cabin"
- No. 3 "My Lady Love"

Part II

- No. 4 "Mammy"
- No. 5 "The Place Where The Rainbow Ends"

⁴ McBrier, introduction, *Collected Piano Works*, 10.

At the head of the first movement Dett writes these poetic lines:

"Gorgeous Magnolias,
Spotless in splendor,
Sad in their beauty,
Heavy with perfume."

The piano writing throughout is reminiscent of the Victorian style of MacDowell and Amy Cheney-Beach (1867-1944). The movements are two- and three-part song forms, except for the last movement, which is a rondo.

In The Bottoms (1913)

Dett writes extensive notes for *In the Bottoms*, the most well known of the suites.⁵ At the beginning of these notes is a quote from Beethoven in reference to his *Pastoral* Symphony: "More an expression than a painting."⁶ This tells us that Dett is not pursuing the impressionist idea of objective imagery, rather an emotional and psychological reaction to an image. As McBrier notes, Dett has his feet firmly in Romanticism.⁷

Following are Dett's notes on the suite as a whole:

In the Bottoms is a Suite of five numbers giving pictures of moods or scenes peculiar to Negro life in the river bottoms of the Southern sections of North America. It is similar in its expression, and in a way a continuation of the sentiments already set forth in the *Magnolia* Suite, but suggests ideas incidental to life in a more particular geographic territory. Neither Suite, like Dvořák's famous *New World Symphony* is dependent for its effect upon the introduction of folk songs, either in their natural, or in a highly developed form. As it is quite possible to describe the traits, habits and customs of a people without using the vernacular, so is it similarly possible to musically portray racial peculiarities without the use of national tunes or folk songs, *In the Bottoms* then, belongs to that class of music known as "Program music" or "music with a poetic basis." The source of the "program" or "poetic basis" has already been referred to, and

⁵ McBrier, on p. 22 of *Life and Works*, gives the date of the first performance as in 1913 by Fannie Bloomfield Zeisler in Music Hall, Chicago, Illinois, according to Dr. Glenn Dillard Gunn, music critic of *Washington Times-Herald*.

⁶ R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Collected Piano Works of R. Nathaniel Dett* (Evanston, IL: Summy-Birchard, 1973), 42.

⁷ McBrier, introduction, *Collected Piano Works*, 9.

the following notes are appended to show that its relation to the music is intimate.⁸

Dett's detailed notes on the movements are included in Chapter 5.

The movements are:

No. 1 "Prelude – Night"

No. 2 "His Song"

No. 3 "Honey"

No. 4 "Barcarolle – Morning"

No. 5 "Dance-Juba"

The final movement is by far Dett's most played piece and has been recorded many times.

⁸ Dett, *The Collected Piano Works*, 42.

Second Period – *Enchantment, Cinnamon Grove*

Enchantment (1922) and *Cinnamon Grove* (1928) were written during Dett's tenure at the Hampton Institute and after a year of study with Arthur Foote at Harvard, while on leave from Hampton⁹. Dett had won two prizes while at Harvard, one for his choral motet based on the spiritual, "Don't Be Weary, Traveler," and one for his essay, "The Emancipation of Negro Music."

An important influence on his piano music was his friendship with Percy Grainger (1882-1961), whom Dett had met while taking courses at the American Conservatory in Chicago during the summer of 1915. Dett described the meeting in a letter to Natalie Curtis-Burlin, dated October 15, 1915, as, "I greatly enjoyed Mr. Grainger. I think he is truly wonderful. Five minutes in his presence meant more than a month's teaching. I didn't know that I was so susceptible to atmosphere."¹⁰ Starting that same year, Grainger featured "Dance-Juba" on many of his programs, often closing with it, which suggests its appeal to audiences. While at Harvard, Dett attended Grainger's recitals in Boston and heard him perform recent European music of Cyril Scott (1879-1970) and Claude Debussy.

McBrier remarks that *Enchantment* and *Cinnamon Grove* "reflect little of the folk influence but are in true Romantic style."¹¹ They each have four movements with alternating fast and slow tempos, strongly reminiscent of sonata structures. According to several programs performed by Dett in 1924 and 1925,¹² he was including at least one movement of a Sonata in E minor, which was never published. The manuscript appears to be lost. The presence of

⁹ Anne Key Simpson, *Follow Me: The Life and Music of R. Nathaniel Dett* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993), 77-78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹ McBrier, *Life and Works*, 48.

¹² Concert programs from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library, cat. nos. I-117, I-82, I-301.

thematic transformation between *Enchantment's* movements also suggests that Dett was interested in sonata form and more formal structures at this time.

Both suites have extra-musical references that are connected with Dett's involvement with the Rosicrucians (see p. 44), and with Pan-Africanism. Interest in non-white cultures and the development of solidarity between African-Americans and other non-white people worldwide grew in the 1920's after the close of World War I. For example, African-American leader W.E.B. Du Bois called a Pan-African Congress in Paris in February 1919, parallel to the League of Nations.¹³ The 1920's also saw the growth of organizations such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association begun by the Jamaican Marcus Garvey.¹⁴ These social currents had an effect on Dett's music. Dett is known to have owned items such as an African chieftain's robe and matching slippers brought by a British West African student at Hampton, as well as Chinese and Japanese woodcuts.¹⁵

Twentieth century musical idioms such as parallel seventh and ninth chords, whole-tone scales, and quartal harmonies begin to appear, particularly in *Cinnamon Grove*. His piano writing, most strikingly in *Enchantment*, is more orchestral.

Enchantment (1922)

Enchantment is dedicated "to Percy Grainger in appreciation."¹⁶ "Grainger expressed his gratitude for the dedication of the work to himself as 'a great honor and kindness'."¹⁷ and "referred to the harmonic advance and greater resource of formal treatment." Grainger performed the work often, particularly the second movement; "Song of the Shrine." It has a unique formal structure which follows a program written by Dett.

¹³ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York: Knopf, seventh ed., 1994), 338-339.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 357.

¹⁵ Simpson, *Follow Me: The Life and Music of R. Nathaniel Dett*, 218.

¹⁶ Dett, *The Collected Piano Works of R. Nathaniel Dett*, 69 (*Enchantment* title page).

¹⁷ McBrier, *Life and Works*, 48.

Enchantment, A Romantic Suite for Piano on an Original Program

- I "Incantation"
- II "Song Of the Shrine"
- III "Dance Of Desire"
- IV "Beyond the Dream"¹⁸

(For program details see Chapter 6)

The title page of *Enchantment* features a framed picture of a possibly Greek temple and the Egyptian symbol known as the Winged Solar Disk (Fig. 1 and 2). Given the Rosicrucians' strong involvement with Egyptology, these symbols, as well as Dett's program, strongly suggest a Rosicrucian connection, probably an initiation.

The basing of a program on a Rosicrucian initiation rite, experimentation with early twentieth-century European harmony, and the concept of a suite of four interconnected and narrative pieces all show a new direction in Dett's music. It is also interesting to note that Dett is known to have performed the *Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother*, J. S. Bach's only programmatic keyboard piece, in his concerts.¹⁹

¹⁸ The various numbering systems of the suites are as originally published.

¹⁹ Concert programs from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library, cat. no. I-125-C1.



FIGURE 1 - *Enchantment* Title Page – from an early edition

Courtesy of Hampton University Archives



FIGURE 2 – Winged Solar Disk²⁰

²⁰ Richard Deurer, "Egypt Art, Symbols and Definitions," accessed November 3, 2013, www.egyptartsite.com/symlst.html.

Cinnamon Grove (1928)

The title communicates Dett's interest in non-white culture; the cinnamon tree is native to India and Sri Lanka. The first three movements are prefaced by poetic quotations. The fourth employs two spirituals as thematic material. Perhaps his idea is that the poets—Elizabethan English, Hindu, American, and the anonymous authors of the Negro spirituals—are like trees, crossing boundaries of time and culture, and now put together by Dett into a family, or grove. The combination of poems from the European world and the non-white world express Dett's concern with the reconciliation of humanity across different races.

Cinnamon Grove
A Suite for the Piano

- I Moderato molto grazioso
 on lines from "The Dream" by John Donne

- II Adagio cantabile
 on lines from "Gitanjali" by Rabindranath Tagore

- III Ritmo moderato e con sentimento
 Quasi Gavotte
 on lines from "Epimetheus" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- IV Allegretto
 on lines from a song in *Religious Folk Songs of the Negro*

This is the most sonata-like of the suites. The first movement is in sonata form, the second is slow and forms the emotional apex, the third is a dance form with trio, and the fourth is in a quick 2/4 meter. This is identical to many of the classical symphonies and sonatas of Haydn and Beethoven. In addition, alone among the suites, the first and last movements are in the same key.

The final movement contains two spirituals from Dett's 1927 volume, *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro as Sung at Hampton Institute*. Dett identifies the first one, "Oh, the winter'll

soon be over” (Fig. 3), but not the second, “Run to Jesus” (Fig. 4). Only the third phrase of “Run to Jesus” appears, sung to the words, “I don't expect to stay much longer here” (see Fig. 42).

The choice of this phrase is significant for two reasons. It is in the Dorian mode, rare and interesting in spirituals; and it could also be a reference to Dett's difficulties with his position at Hampton Institute, which culminated in his dismissal in 1931.

The combination of these two spirituals also suggests the Underground Railroad. “Oh, the winter'll soon be over” may refer to the increased Underground Railroad activity during the winter, taking advantage of increased cover of darkness and the north star's higher position in the sky; the north star was an important navigational aid. At the beginning of his setting of “Run to Jesus” in *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro*, Dett wrote that “This song was given to the Jubilee Singers by Hon. Frederick Douglass . . . with the interesting statement that it first suggested to him the thought of escaping from slavery.”²¹ The fact that Dett doesn't mention his use of the second spiritual could mean either that he didn't wish to communicate his troubles at Hampton, or significantly, that he was thinking more of hidden meanings, which are central to Negro spirituals.

²¹ R. Nathaniel Dett, *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro as Sung at Hampton* (Hampton, VA: Alexander Street Press, and Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1927), 15.

Hymns of Consolation

De Winter'll Soon Be Ober

Allegrezza $\text{♩} = 104$

Refrain
Tutti win - ter, _____ de win - ter, _____

mp Oh, de win - ter, win - ter, de win - ter, win - ter, de win - ter'll soon be

cresc. win - ter, _____ de win - ter, _____

o - ber, chil - dren, De win - ter, win - ter, de win - ter, win - ter, de win - ter'll soon be

win - ter, _____ de win - ter, _____

o - ber, chil - dren, De win - ter, win - ter, de win - ter, win - ter, de

win - ter'll soon be o - ber, chil - dren, Yes, my Lord.

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It features a 2/2 time signature and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Allegrezza' with a quarter note equal to 104 beats per minute. The score is divided into four systems. The first system begins with a 'Refrain' section marked 'Tutti' and includes the lyrics 'win - ter, _____ de win - ter, _____'. The piano accompaniment starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking and includes the lyrics 'o - ber, chil - dren, De win - ter, win - ter, de win - ter, win - ter, de win - ter'll soon be'. The third system continues the piano accompaniment and includes the lyrics 'win - ter, _____ de win - ter, _____' and 'o - ber, chil - dren, De win - ter, win - ter, de win - ter, win - ter, de'. The fourth system concludes the piece with the lyrics 'win - ter'll soon be o - ber, chil - dren, Yes, my Lord.' and ends with a double bar line.

FIGURE 3 – “De Winter’ll Soon be Ober”

Hymns of Admonition

Run to Jesus

This song was given to the Jubilee Singers by Hon. Frederick Douglass, at Washington D.C., with the interesting statement that it first suggested to him the thought of escaping from slavery.

mf *poco rit.* *a tempo* *poco rit.* *a tempo*

Run to Je - sus, shun the dan - ger, I

Fine

don't ex - spect to stay much long - er here.

mp *mf cresc.*

He will be our dear - est friend, And will help us to the end, I

D.C.

don't ex - spect to stay much long - er here.

FIGURE 4 – “Run to Jesus”

Third Period – *Tropic Winter, Eight Bible Vignettes*

The ten eventful years separating *Cinnamon Grove* and *Tropic Winter* include: the epochal tour of the Hampton Choir through Europe in 1930; Dett's dismissal from Hampton immediately afterward; the death of his mother; and the completion of both his master's degree at Eastman and *The Ordering of Moses*, Dett's only oratorio, and by far his largest work. It contains much ambitious writing, including an extended four-voice fugue with a subject based on a spiritual. The final two suites employ more twentieth-century musical techniques: juxtaposition of unrelated chords; clusters; parallel fifths and fourths; augmented, ninth and other complex chords; quartal harmonies; whole-tone scales and harmonies based on them; and above all, more counterpoint, especially in *Eight Bible Vignettes*.

Tropic Winter (1938)

In 1942 Dett sent *Tropic Winter* to Grainger with a request for feedback:

"I am rather proud of this suite, as I think it represents an advance in musical thought for me, and I never play it over that I do not think of you, especially when I come to the last movement. The object of this letter is to ask you if you can possibly spare the time to play this suite through and then, if you will, let me know how you like it. I am sure it is not necessary for me to reiterate how I esteem your criticism and advice."²²

Dett returns to the concept of a suite unified by musical pictures, but, this time the images are of a non-white, more distant culture. It is hard to determine if Dett had any particular tropical place in mind; the Caribbean, Africa, or Southeast Asia are all plausible. Dett had written a short song, "Iorana, Tahitian Maiden's Love Song," in 1935. The style of this short song doesn't match the more modernist style of *Tropic Winter*, however. It includes a section

²² Simpson, 286-287.

marked *quasi havañera*.²³ Since *havañera* relates to Cuba, rather than Polynesia, perhaps Dett's idea of "tropic" is not specific.

Tropic Winter has seven movements. This may reflect an interest in numerology, which is also suggested by Dett's long poem, "Song of Seven," (see also "Dett's Poetry" in Chapter 3), as well as the eight movements of *Eight Bible Vignettes*. The symbolism of eight will be discussed in the following section.

"The Daybreak Charioteer"
 "Bayou Garden"
 "Pompons and Fans"
 "Legend of the Atoll"
 "To a Closed Casement"
 "Noon Siesta"
 "Parade of the Jasmine Banners"

Dett uses a great variety of pianistic textures, ranging from the thundering and orchestral "Daybreak Charioteer," (Dett's closest approach to pure noise), to the minimalist "Noon Siesta." White-key harmonies, hinted at in the last movement of *Cinnamon Grove*, are exploited, especially in "Noon Siesta." For 27 measures a right-hand parallel-fourth ostinato accompanies wisps of left-hand melody. Not a single black key is played.

Eight Bible Vignettes (1941-1943)

The *Eight Bible Vignettes* may be viewed as a culmination of Dett's style, outlook, philosophy, and indeed, his life. The number eight is significant in Biblical symbolism. Seven is associated with spiritual completion and rest. Eight "denotes that which is superabundant or satiating"²⁴ as well as new beginning: the completion of seven, plus one. Eight also has significance in other religious traditions, notably Hinduism and Buddhism. Olivier Messiaen's

²³ "*havañera*" is the term used by Dett. Presumably this is an alternative to "*habañera*" reflecting its Cuban origin. The rhythm in this section is identical to an *habañera*.

²⁴ Barnabus Ministries, The Bible Study Site, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/8.html>.

Quatour pour la Fin du Temps, written contemporaneously in 1942, is also essentially a suite of eight movements with religious meanings. Messiaen explains the meaning of eight movements as the perfect creation of seven, extended into the eternity of perfect light and peace.²⁵

Messiaen's style does not relate much to Dett's and it seems doubtful that they were aware of each other, but the relationship of these two works is fascinating nonetheless.

The movements of *Eight Bible Vignettes*:

1. "Father Abraham"
2. "Desert Interlude"
3. "As his own Soul"
4. "Barcarolle of Tears"
5. "I am the True Vine"
6. "Martha Complained"
7. "Other Sheep"
8. "Madrigal Divine"

The title is deceptive, as "vignettes" might imply light, inconsequential music. In fact, even though there are no discernible musical connections between the movements, their sequence and biblical associations deliver a compelling and powerful message about the unity of humanity. This suite is by far the longest, requiring between thirty-five and forty minutes to perform. It contains a tremendous variety of forms, techniques, and keyboard textures. These vary from the full layout of "Father Abraham," the opening of which is written on four staves, to unaccompanied melodies and recitatives. This diversity recalls the third year of Liszt's *Années de Pèlerinage*. The keyboard writing is often more severe than Dett's earlier keyboard works, with frequent octaves and doublings between the hands, a long way from the flowery, Romantic writing of *Magnolia*. Contrapuntal techniques, including fugal writing, canons and inversions, are common. Dett continues the use of parallel chords, whole-tone and quartal harmonies, and white-key diatonicism begun in *Tropic Winter*.

²⁵ Olivier Messiaen, preface to *Quatour pour la Fin du Temps* (Paris: Editions Durand & Cie, 1942), i.

Each movement (except for “Barcarolle of Tears”) is related to a specific Biblical quote or episode with carefully chosen texts. A prominent theme is the “other” — Biblical characters which are not central to its narratives, or who are rejected or supporting figures: Hagar, Jonathan, and Martha. In *Black Talk*, Geneva Smitherman lists the expression “Aunt Hagar’s Chillun” as an “older term for African-Americans,” referring to the lineage through Hagar’s son, Ishmael.²⁶

The suite could be divided into two parts; the first representing narratives from the Old Testament, the second representing the New. Each begins with a central character, Abraham (No. 1 – “Father Abraham”) and Jesus (No. 5 – “I am the True Vine”). These are the two movements with the most contrapuntal writing. “Father Abraham” combines the Negro spiritual, “Father Abraham,” with the Hebrew melody, “Leoni,” using inversions and canons. “I Am the True Vine” is a three-voice fugue with no episodes. The second piece in each part concerns female characters, Hagar and Martha. The third and fourth movements seem to be expressions of Dett's personal feelings of love and despair. They mirror the final two movements which express reconciliation through belonging.

The culmination is the final pair of movements, “Other Sheep” and “Madrigal Divine.” “Other Sheep” begins with a chant, sung to Dett by a native African student, followed by a set of variations. The text is from John 10:16 and concerns the bringing of “other sheep” into “one fold.” By expressing the idea of “other sheep” with an African chant, Dett points to the belonging of non-white people as one flock. The final piece, “Madrigal Divine,” is a setting of Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” The setting is serene and majestic, over a swaying ground bass, closing with a long series of diatonic “amens.” It might have been published also in a vocal

²⁶ Geneva Smitherman, *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 57.

version had Dett lived longer. "Madrigal Divine" is a magnificent close to a body of work that eloquently expresses a life's journey and hope for a better world.

CHAPTER 3

STYLE AND INFLUENCES

Dett's Personality and Teaching Style

"... study should lead us to a better understanding of mankind, not Neapolitan sixths"¹

The following are selected unattributed recollections from Arlene Gray's *Listen to the Lambs: A Source Book of the R. Nathaniel Dett Materials in the Niagara Falls Public Library Niagara Falls, NY*. They are reported to be by members of the choirs that Dett directed, and illuminate his character, showing humor, grace and dignity in the face of racial injustice, and great care for his students.

I recall a time between the years 1936-1941 [Dett's years at Bennett] we had to sing at an auditorium in Charlotte, N.C. The choir automatically went to the front door. We were told we had to use the rear door. Dr. Dett stood his ground and insisted that we would not perform. Hence we were admitted to the front door.²

We were singing in Rochester, N.Y., Dr. Dett's home city. He told us that we had to sing well because it was his home. With this statement we were frightened to petrification. When we got up to sing our first number we were really up tight. When we got up for the next number Dr. Dett took off his shoe. He had a hole in his sock where his big toe was. He wiggled it. We smiled and loosened up. We sang the rest of the program at ease and well.³

We were on our way to Scranton, PA. We were very hungry. We came upon a cafeteria in a very small town. We decided to stop and buy sandwiches. Since I was at the back of the bus I was near the end of the line to get to the cafeteria. When we got to the door the owner pulled a gun on us. We froze. Dr. Dett saw what happened, came to the front and quietly talked to the owner. We got what we wanted and left.⁴

He will always be remembered for his sincerity, humility, and modesty, his lofty ideals, his vision, his devotion to music and art, and his unfaltering belief in the

¹ Dominique-René de Lerma, *Reflections on Afro-American Music* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1973), 23.

² Arlene E. Gray and Niagara Falls Public Library, *Listen to the Lambs : A Source Book of the R. Nathaniel Dett Materials in the Niagara Falls Public Library Niagara Falls, NY* (Crystal Beach, ON: A. E. Gray, 1984), 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Christian brotherhood of man. The terms teacher, artist, and friend were so intricately woven together as to make him a positive force for the good of both the Negro race and the nation.⁵

Simpson also quotes Dorothy Maynor's (one of Dett's outstanding vocal protégés) recollection that, although Dett was not born and raised in the South, he felt ". . . the strange magic of the South's contradictions . . . This black Canadian had a strange yearning to find out what went on in cotton fields and sugar bottoms. . ."6

Nathaniel Dett's life and music intersects in an intimate way with the history of African-Americans and their relationship with white America. Dett was born and grew up in an area that was a major route on the Underground Railroad for slaves escaping to Canada. Later, in 1905, it was important in the creation of the Niagara Movement, begun by W.E.B. Du Bois and Jewish liberals, which became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It was an environment of comparative racial tolerance and integration which fostered the support of Dett's education and development of his talent.

After the failure of the Reconstruction movement following the Civil War, education became a primary goal of African-Americans. Education became one of the few available vehicles for African-Americans in their resistance to white supremacy. Blacks were determined to demonstrate that they were capable of accomplishments in the arts and sciences that could be regarded as on a par with the rest of America, thereby appealing to whites to end their disenfranchisement. As early as 1791 Benjamin Banneker, Negro astronomer and creator of almanacs, wrote to Thomas Jefferson that this "train of absurd and false ideas and opinions which so generally prevails with respect to the Negro should now be eradicated."⁷ A memorial in Rochester signed by Frederick Douglass states, "no other race could have made more

⁵ Marguerite Pope, *A Brief Biography of Dr. Robert Nathaniel Dett*, quoted in Jackson, 24-25.

⁶ Simpson, 333.

⁷ Franklin, 95-97.

progress in the midst of such an universal and stringent disparagement. It would humble the proudest, crush the energies of the strongest, and retard the progress of the swiftest. In view of our circumstances, we can, without boasting, thank God, and take courage, having placed ourselves where we may fairly challenge comparison with more highly favored men."⁸

This desire to look to resources within the community was expressed by the Convention of the Colored People of North Carolina in 1865: "We have no desire to look abroad for protection and sympathy. We know we must find both at home, among the people of our own State, and merit them by our industry, sobriety and respectful demeanor, or suffer long and grievous evils."⁹ Even though they often disagreed, Booker T. Washington and Du Bois were both strong advocates of education. Dett saw himself strongly in this tradition, untiringly and relentlessly pursuing his education.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

Dett's Performing Style

Reviews of Dett's playing depict an elegant, suave, dignified, and somewhat reserved performing style. His playing was natural, unaffected and never exaggerated in its emotional expression. These descriptions are verified from his one available recorded performance, of the "Barcarolle" from *In the Bottoms*. He often spoke about the music as part of his performances.

As an interpreter of his own works Dr. Dett brings . . . the double elements of poet and musician, for he is both . . . To hear Dett play his own compositions is to get a new idea of the Negro race.

1925 from *Negro Poets and Their Poems* by Robert Kerlin¹⁰

His piano technique is smooth and interesting, his subtlety of touch being quite delightful in the lighter passages.

February 19, 1924 – *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, St. Paul, MN, unknown reviewer¹¹

The piano is an obstinate thing. It does not do its best for just anybody. It is reluctant to take in the inspirations of the composer. The composer has to be a real one to make this mechanical instrument forget its nature. And, be the composer ever so real, and the recreating artist ever so artistic, there is still bound to be some lost motion in the feeling-notation-player-instrument relay by way of which the pianistic art usually gets to the listener. This way was shortened Monday evening on the occasion of the recital of R. Nathaniel Dett. February 22, 1923 – *Buffalo American*, Buffalo, NY, George Pullen Jackson, of a recital at Fisk University, Nashville, TN¹²

He is simple, sincere. His style is clearcut and vital, yet warm and colorful. His manner is unostentatious.

April 7, 1925 – *Wichita Daily Eagle*, Wichita, KS, unknown reviewer¹³

. . . naturally warm emotionalism of the man often trickles through in fine expression in his piano music.

February 13, 1924 - *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, Winnipeg, MB, unknown reviewer¹⁴

¹⁰ Robert Kerlin, *Negro Poets and Their Poems*, quoted in Simpson, 356.

¹¹ R. Nathaniel Dett Collection at Niagara Falls New York Public Library, cat. no. I-417.

¹² *Ibid.*, cat. no. I-410.

¹³ *Ibid.*, cat. no. I-397.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, cat. no. I-425.

Artists usually bring to the concert stage two types of endeavor representing either a superficial scholarship or an unearthly technical and intellectual achievement. Mr. Dett is not primarily a technician, as fine and finished as is his playing. To him technique is a means not an end. He radiates inspiration. Under the spell of his playing one loses thought of the artist as spirit communicates with spirit. He is essentially a tone poet.
March, 1925, *Cheney Record*, Cheney, PA, A. H. Johnson (of recital on March 7)¹⁵

Playing with an easy, modest assurance that gives confidence to his audience, avoiding mannerisms or unnecessary display, he exhibits a technical equipment that is astonishing and apparently unlimited. He obtains sonority without a sledgehammer and he can caress the keys as a bit of plush drapery caresses a plate glass windowpane.
October 17, 1925, *Roanoke World-News*, Roanoke, VA, unknown reviewer¹⁶

In a pre-concert notice to the above recital the same newspaper prints the following: "A special section will be reserved for white people at the concert."¹⁷ Despite his stature (by this time he had an honorary doctorate, was president of the National Association of Negro Musicians, and had been awarded prizes from Harvard), there was no exception to Jim Crow.

As a pianist Dett ranks high, playing with ease, often with brilliance, and with a melting pianissimo which makes his heavier passages stand out boldly.
November 21, 1931, *PA Times*, Chester, PA, Edna Coates¹⁸

In his own writings, Dett makes the following important statements about the performance of spirituals. These attitudes and qualities should also apply to the performance of his piano music.

To be effective, it must be simple. When it is overadorned, it loses its natural appeal. Many of the spirituals are quaint, seemingly, to those who do not understand their origin, but they are always sincere expressions."¹⁹

"Man looketh on outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart." Folk songs are the records of the very heart throbs of man, which to read aright

¹⁵ R. Nathaniel Dett Collection at Niagara Falls New York Public Library, cat. no. I-299.

¹⁶ Ibid., cat. no. I-431.

¹⁷ Ibid., cat. no. I-192.

¹⁸ R. Nathaniel Dett, *Collected Works*, 9.

¹⁹ R. Nathaniel Dett, "From Bell Stand to Throne Room" in *The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader: Essays on Black Sacred Music*, ed. Jon Michael Spencer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 99.

requires an almost divine insight. Such insight is dependent above all else on one quality absolutely essential to the true interpreter - Sincerity.²⁰

²⁰ R. Nathaniel Dett, "Understanding the Negro Spiritual" in *The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader: Essays on Black Sacred Music*, ed. Jon Michael Spencer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 106.

Musical Influences

Raymond Jackson explains that the piano was an important instrument for African-Americans from the Civil War onward. He describes the many outstanding African-American pianists that appeared quickly after Emancipation. Black families purchased small organs if there were not funds available for the purchase of a piano. Even if there was little money for material possessions, a keyboard instrument was a prized possession and a symbol of independence.²¹ Dett learned to play the piano at a very young age, and he was an excellent improviser. "I played the piano ever since I can remember. No one taught me, I just "picked it up." . . . I never would play anything as it was written. I was always changing a composition and playing it in a way that I thought "sounded better."²² This got him into some trouble as a youngster but showed his great gift for music. Writing for the piano was central to Dett throughout his life and became the vehicle for his most personal expressions. Dett's piano writing is masterful. Many beautiful voicings, extremely varied textures (particularly in the later works), and a keen ear for sonority make Dett's piano music rewarding to play.

Mother, Early Life

The major influence in Dett's life was his mother, a gracious yet commanding lady of forceful personality and strong character. She had high ideals and constantly encouraged her sons to be industrious and to strive for perfection in whatever they pursued.²³

²¹ Raymond Jackson, "The piano music of twentieth-century Black Americans as illustrated mainly in the works of three composers" (DMA thesis, The Juilliard School, 1973), 2.

²² R. Nathaniel Dett, "Helping to Lay the Foundation for Negro Music of the Future," in *The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader: Essays on Black Sacred Music*, ed. Jon Michael Spencer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 21-22.

²³ McBrier, *Life and Works*, 3.

Many years later, after the triumphant premiere of the *Ordering of Moses* in 1937, Dett remarked "My mother would have said, 'twas good but you can do better.'"²⁴ This attitude might explain Dett's unceasing quest for additional education and improvement of his craft throughout his life.

The idea of using Negro melodies did not initially appeal to Dett as a child. In his autobiographical "From Bell Stand to Throne Room," Dett describes the visit to Niagara Falls of a German professor from Berlin, one Dr. Hoppe, who told Dett of Dvořák's visit to America and his "experiment with the . . . songs of my own people."²⁵ Dett did not initially take this idea up, later observing that "discussion of spirituals or other Negro folk music was embarrassing to Black people as the general public attitude toward such music was unappreciative or even mildly contemptuous."²⁶

Dett's early piano pieces, "After the Cakewalk," "Cave of the Winds," and the "Inspiration Waltzes," all composed before his studies at Oberlin, contain mostly uninteresting parlor music. There is little originality here, although skill is evident. If Dett had continued on that direction he likely would have had success as a published popular composer, but would be forgotten today.

Oberlin

Dett's study at Oberlin was evidently a life-changing experience. Oberlin, having a strong history in the Abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad, was one of the few colleges that admitted African-Americans at that time.²⁷ Howard Handel Carter (1855-1930) and George Carl Hastings (1877-1925) were Dett's professors in piano, George Whitefield Andrews

²⁴ Ibid., 50.

²⁵ Dett, "From Bell Stand to Throne Room," 94.

²⁶ McBrier, *Life and Works*, 7.

²⁷ Ibid., 9.

(1861-1932), a favorite of Dett, was his teacher in organ and composition. Hastings was the dedicatee of one of Dett's poems and possibly "As His Own Soul" from the *Eight Bible Vignettes*, Dett's choral motet, "Go Not Far From Me, O God," was dedicated to Andrews in 1933. Dett later recalled Andrews' statement that "Nothing is good that can be made better."²⁸ These teachers gave Dett a steady diet of German musical discipline, especially the music of J. S. Bach.²⁹ All had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory. Founded 1843 by Mendelssohn, later faculty included Robert Schumann and Max Reger.³⁰ Dett's interest in counterpoint continued and increased throughout his career.

Dett's piano repertoire and abilities grew, culminating in graduating performances of a Beethoven Sonata, Chopin Ballade and Etudes, and Schumann's *Carnaval*. His increasing technique was shown with performances of etudes of Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894) and Moritz Moszkowski (1854-1925) as well as Andrei Schulz-Evler's (1852-1905) "Concert Arabesques" on themes from Johann Strauss's "Blue Danube Waltz."

By the time of the composition of *Magnolia* in 1912, Dett's sophistication as a composer had advanced considerably. There were several composers that may have provided models.

Forerunners

Edward MacDowell's *Sea Pieces*, op. 55 was in Dett's repertoire. There are some stylistic similarities with Dett's earlier piano suites, notably Scotch snap rhythms, and tonal ambiguity between I and vi. vi-I cadences are common. There are also poetic quotes in *Sea*

²⁸ Simpson, 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

³⁰ Hochschule für Musik und Theater "Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy" Leipzig, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.hmt-leipzig.de/home/hochschule/profil>

Pieces, similar to Dett's *Cinnamon Grove*. Dett referred to MacDowell as "America's greatest composer."³¹

Harry Burleigh (1866-1949), the African-American musician who introduced Dvořák to Negro spirituals, composed a piano suite called *From the Southland*, in 1909. Dett knew Burleigh well and participated in concert programs with him. The first movement of this work, "Through the Moanin' Pines," begins in F# minor but ends in A major, an example of vi-I tonal ambiguity. The fifth and last movement, "A New Hiding-Place," is a setting of the spiritual, "Oh Lord, What a Mornin'." Burleigh, a prominent singer, made many concert arrangements of spirituals.

For Dett, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was perhaps more of an inspiration than a musical influence. His piano suites — *African Suite*, op. 35 (1898), *Forest Scenes*, op. 66 (1907) and *Three Fours*, op. 71 (1909) — are possible models. The second movement of *African Suite*, "A Negro Love Song," as earlier noted, is likely based on the same Paul Laurence Dunbar poem that inspired "Honey" from *In the Bottoms*. Coleridge-Taylor's music is in a Victorian style, similar to Edward Elgar (1857-1934) and Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) and does not integrate folk idioms to the extent of Dett's. Since Coleridge-Taylor was not a pianist, his piano works lack the coloristic sophistication of Dett's mature piano writing. However, as noted above, Coleridge-Taylor, as the first composer of African descent to achieve an international reputation, was an inspiring figure for non-white composers who followed.

In the last sentence of his program notes to the Hampton Choir's 1928 Carnegie Hall performance, Dett makes an interesting statement:

Thus did Haydn pass on to Liszt through Mozart and Beethoven and the hosts of others who intervened, the spirit of the song of the people enabling man in his

³¹ Jackson, 22.

endless struggle toward the ultimate to make a more courageous step into the future, having kept faith with the past.³²

The mention of Liszt as being in the same class as Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven may strike us as strange today, but Liszt's stature in the early twentieth century was higher than it is now. Dett was evidently an admirer of Liszt's music, perhaps also of Liszt's working of ethnic Hungarian material into large works. The religious ideas of the *Eight Bible Vignettes* have few, if any, parallels in piano music, other than the late works of Liszt, until Messiaen.

Percy Grainger

Enchantment's dedicatee, Percy Grainger, was primarily responsible for the popularity of "Dance-Juba," often performing it as an encore. While studying at Harvard, Dett attended several of Grainger's performances in Boston, at which he performed the "Dance-Juba." Also on these programs were Grainger's own arrangements of English folk songs, as well as works by Balfour Gardiner (1877-1950) and Cyril Scott. Gardiner and Scott were British composers who had studied with Grainger in Frankfurt, and who, along with Norman O'Neill (1875-1934), and Roger Quilter (1877-1953), formed the "Frankfurt Group." The two Gardiner works were "Prelude (de Profundis)" and "Humoresque." Dett's interest in parallel chords, particularly in his last two piano suites, can possibly be traced to his familiarity with these works through Grainger's performances. Gardiner's "Prelude," in particular, has a striking resemblance to Dett's last piano work, "Madrigal Divine," with the use of a perfect-fifth ground bass and parallel diatonic-chord planing.

³² Dett, "Notes to the Hampton Choir at Carnegie Hall," in *The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader: Essays on Black Sacred Music*, ed. Jon Michael Spencer, 74.

Grainger was a valuable promoter of Dett's music. But the relationship was not always smooth, probably owing to Grainger's mercurial personality. After Dett sent *Tropic Winter* to Grainger, expressing pride in his progressing style (see Chapter 8), Grainger replied:

"I not only loathe piano music but all the other compromise instruments that foreran the piano (lute, guitar, harpsichord, etc.) in which one player (for convenience as a conductor, or for accompaniment purposes) sums up the whole harmonic texture that was conceived as polyphonic melody...Why geniuses like you, Bach, Grieg can be willing to compose for keyboard instruments I shall never understand. ...I played "Juba Dance" because I sensed it would become a best seller and because I thought it always rare that a real genius like you are able to write a best seller - when it happens, one should (if one can) help the composer to "cash in" on it."³³

One can only imagine Dett's hurt at his piano music being dismissed by his primary promoter. Dett's mission was much loftier than "cashing in;" otherwise he would have been better served by more compositions like "After the Cakewalk."

Russian Music

Dett's choirs at Hampton often performed Russian choral works. Their programs included works of Konstantin Schwedoff (1886-1954), Grigory Lvovsky (1830-1894), and the *Creation Hymn* of Sergei Rachmaninoff (1872-1943). "After the Negro folk music itself, Russian music is easily the most beloved of all music at Hampton Institute."³⁴ "Dett suggested that a kinship of mutual oppression between the Russian and the Negro could be best expressed through pervading pathos in vocal music, citing in particular certain rhythms, scale formations, and cadences."³⁵ This influence is more evident in Dett's choral works although some of his later piano music, most notably "As His Own Soul," has touches of Rachmaninoff.

³³ Percy Grainger, letter to Dett, quoted in Simpson, 286-287.

³⁴ Dett, "Notes to the Hampton Choir at Carnegie Hall," 71.

³⁵ Simpson, 155, 166, 148-149.

Dett's Mission

As noted in Chapter 1, Dett's hearing of the Kneisel Quartet at Oberlin seems to have been a life-changing experience. He began the development of his mission, well described by McBrier:

Dett's choral works continued to be a symbol of his belief in music as a means of communications, the belief that, through the development of the Negro folk song into art forms, racial pride and personal dignity could be inspired.³⁶

Dett was acutely aware of the low status that spirituals had among African-Americans. In Dett's own words:

The Negro people as a whole cannot be looked to as a very great aid in the work of conserving their folk music. At the present time they are inclined to regard it as a vestige of the slavery they are trying to put behind them and to be ashamed of it. Moreover, the prevailing manner of presenting Negro music to the public - "coon" song of vaudeville or the minstrel show - has not tended to increase appreciation of it, either among the Negro or white races.³⁷

It occurred to the writer that if a form of song were evolved which contained all the acceptable characteristics of Negro folk music and yet would compare favorably in poetic sentiment and musical expression with the best class of church music, it would be a means of solving this peculiar problem, for, being created out of native material, it would save to the Negro and his music all the peculiar and precious idioms, and as work of art would summon to its interpretation the best of his intellectual and emotional efforts.³⁸

As he wrote in the opening sentence of "Helping to Lay Foundation for Negro Music of the Future:"

To those of us who believe with Dvořák that "the future music of this country must be founded on what is called Negro melodies" it is gratifying to see the large number of composers who have recently turned to the use of Indian and Negro folk tunes . . .³⁹

³⁶ McBrier, *Life and Works*, 47.

³⁷ Dett, "Helping to Lay the Foundation," 20.

³⁸ R. Nathaniel Dett, "The Development of Negro Religious Music," in *The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader: Essays on Black Sacred Music*, ed. Jon Michael Spencer, 36.

³⁹ Dett, "Helping to Lay the Foundation," 20.

It is clear that Dett consciously followed Dvořák's direction, and that it became his central mission to develop and uplift this body of music. "It remained for an outsider, a Bohemian — the famous Dvořák — to show America and the world something of what is possible in the larger forms of musical composition by using the Negro and Indian folk tunes . . ."⁴⁰

Almost from the outset, however, Dett ran into resistance. After a concert at Hampton on April 22, 1915, which consisted entirely of religious choral works based on Negro spirituals, including "Listen to the Lambs," there was much criticism from listeners who expected this music to remain in its "primitively pure, unadulterated, and natural state."⁴¹ This was the beginning of a long conflict between Dett's mission and the attitudes of patrons and some in Hampton's mostly white administration. The conflict culminated with Dett's dismissal in 1931.

Dett's answer to the preservationist attitude is best expressed in his own eloquent words:

. . . it should be stated that controversies arising...as to whether or not one ought to try "to improve" the folk song are absurd. One might as well talk of "improving" a full grown tree or a rose blossom. We try to preserve the tree or the rose because of its beauty and worth. Either one through the skill of man, may be made presently to reappear in other creations of beauty and utility. Even so the folk song is rich in elements which may be the inspiration of new creations resembling the original as a desk resembles a tree - only in the nature of its material.⁴²

Dett was also sensitive to the cultural inferiority complex that many Americans had at that time (and sometimes still do). ". . . there is a still great need for doing away with the slavish admiration in which the average American musician has held all things European."⁴³ Even

⁴⁰ R. Nathaniel Dett, "Negro Music of the Present," in *The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader: Essays on Black Sacred Music*, ed. Jon Michael Spencer Dett, 43.

⁴¹ Dett, "The Development of Negro Religious Music," 37-38.

⁴² Dett, "Notes to the Hampton Choir at Carnegie Hall," 74.

⁴³ Dett, "Helping to Lay the Foundation," 21.

though he himself was trained with European models, his mission was not only to demonstrate the musical abilities of African-Americans to the rest of America, but to also prove that American music could stand with the finest examples of European art music

Dett's Compositional Style

An excellent way to appreciate Dett's compositional style is to read his own words. The following are from an interview in the *Wichita Daily Eagle*:⁴⁴

Perhaps I have achieved something unique in rhythm in my works. A great many critics declared that I have; they even profess to see cross-rhythms in some of my compositions. But if I have, it has been without conscious effort on my part. Rhythm is the heart of music; but none of the larger compositions has a simple rhythm, like the beat of the drum...a boy came to us at Hampton institute from Africa, who danced in twos and patted in sevens. He said all his people did the same.

My rhythm always comes with the melody, but I don't always recognize it. Many times I cannot find it myself, but have to turn to my wife, who is an excellent musician, and ask 'What the dickens is this?'

I can never include in my music all the beauty I hear in my mind...Bach achieved the most in this direction, in getting all possible beauties into a composition.

Modern music, it seems to me, is over-colored. In some cases composers sacrifice form for color; and form is the foundation, while color is merely the frills. I myself am somewhat of a formalist. I believe that the human mind demands a certain amount of form.

I am a slow worker...I never hurry myself; I wait for the inspiration.

Dett wrote in the *Norfolk Journal*, speaking of his own compositions:

[They] are not in any sense arrangements. The folk character is gained in some instances from only a line of folk song serving merely as a theme upon which an entirely new composition is created. All the material used in the development of the folk song composition is, as far as possible, drawn from folk song sources or very closely imitates folk song style.⁴⁵

Unsurprisingly, besides the tradition of Romantic-era piano music, the most important element in Dett's style is Negro folk music. Therefore it is important to understand something of this extraordinarily rich body of music. The following statement by Dett is central: "The most

⁴⁴ R. Nathaniel Dett Collection at Niagara Falls New York Public Library, cat. no. I-448.

⁴⁵ R. Nathaniel Dett, interview in *Norfolk Journal*, quoted in Jackson, 22.

vital element in music is rhythm . . ."⁴⁶ Body movement is an essential part of the singing of spirituals and influences its rhythmic character. According to John Wesley Work, "Rhythm arouses emotion and emotion arouses motion."⁴⁷ Movement is part of the performance, not something that one does as a result of it or as an accessory to it. There are not many movements in the suites that do not have an underlying rhythmic movement or figure. It is very important for the interpretation of his music to get a feel for what this movement is. Sometimes the rhythmic structure is very evident, such as in "Dance-Juba," sometimes less so.

It is also important for the performer of Dett's music to keep in mind that "His lyrical melodies reflect his deep interest in the voice."⁴⁸ Melodic expression is almost always paramount in interpreting his works.

In "The Authenticity of the Spiritual," Dett describes the scales, or "ancient modes" that occur in spirituals as: Pentatonic, Old Folk-Song Scale, Byzantine, Hungarian Gypsy, Mixolydian, Dorian, and Aeolian. The pentatonic is the most common, as it is in much folk music worldwide. The flattened seventh, or mixolydian, is prominent in spirituals such as "Roll, Jordan, Roll." The Byzantine and Hungarian Gypsy scales are related since each is formed by two tetrachords containing a half-step, minor-third (augmented-second), half-step sequence. Dett mentions their use in *Marche Slav* by Tchaikovsky, as well as the spiritual "Father Abraham." These scales occur also in Dett's piano music.

The pentatonic scale may define two tonalities simultaneously, a minor third apart. Classical harmony defines this relationship as relative major and minor. Dett, among other American composers, exploits this relationship by fluidly moving between the two, without

⁴⁶ R. Nathaniel Dett, "The Authenticity of the Spiritual," in *The R. Nathaniel Dett Reader: Essays on Black Sacred Music*, ed. Jon Michael Spencer Dett, 109.

⁴⁷ John Wesley Work, *Folk Song of the American Negro* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969; 1915), 38.

⁴⁸ McBrier, introduction, *Collected Piano Works*, 11.

defining either for some time. This also manifests as movement and cadences between vi and I. The intersection of these two is a minor seventh chord, a sonority that Dett often uses in both his choral and piano music. The final chord of his arrangement of "Hew Down the Tree" is a colorful example in the choral music; examples in the piano music will be discussed in the following sections. Nowhere in Dett's music is this polarity, as well as the Russian style, as pronounced as in "O Holy Lord" for eight-part chorus. The piece begins in G major but keeps moving toward E minor, which is the actual key of the work — the two keys alternate so that for much of the piece the listener is not really aware of being in either key. Much parallel voice leading in low voices and full diatonic chords are in Russian style.

Another of Dett's favorite sonorities is the augmented-sixth chord. This chord became almost ubiquitous, and one of the few instances of chromatic harmony, in popular ragtime and march pieces. The difference between its use as a decoration and Dett's use, is that Dett uses it as a color, often at structurally important points. At measure 39 in "Don't Be Weary, Traveler," a tenor solo enters with the first instance of "with thy burden" on an F over a G major chord held in the chorus. The key at that point is B minor. The sound is held with a fermata before resolving, and marks a transition between sections. The climax of "His Song" from *In the Bottoms* is on a long-held augmented-sixth chord. Perhaps the performance style of the mournful type of spiritual, such as "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," in which fifths, as well as thirds, are bent downward, created an attraction to flatted-fifth sonorities like the augmented sixth. In the case of "His Song," this augmented-sixth chord is also at the point in the piece corresponding with the golden mean.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Many composers, including J. S. Bach and Bartok, structured their pieces this way. This is the point which divides a piece into two sections so that the ratio of the larger to the smaller is the same as the ratio of the entire piece to the larger section.

Following his study at Oberlin, Dett showed an increasing interest in counterpoint. Even in his earlier, Romantic-influenced works, imitation is common, and, in his later suites canons and inversions are used more frequently. *Eight Bible Vignettes* contains a three-voice fugue. *The Ordering of Moses* contains a long fugue using the spiritual “Go Down Moses” as a subject.

Certain traits stand out in his piano works. Melodies formed from whole-tone scales and chords based on them, such as French sixths and augmented chords are common from *Enchantment* onward. There is also a short example of this in the “Barcarolle” from *In the Bottoms*. Pan-diatonicism, particularly on white keys, occurs from the last movement of *Cinnamon Grove* onward. A favorite device is the use of bass fifths, either as a drone, ground bass, or in drumming patterns. Examples are the middle section of “Prelude-Night” from *In the Bottoms* (drone), “Dance of Desire” from *Enchantment* (drums), and “Madrigal Divine” from *Eight Bible Vignettes* (ground bass).

Dett and the Rosicrucians

The Rosicrucian movement, of which the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, is the most prominent modern representative, has its roots in the mystery traditions, philosophy, and myths of ancient Egypt dating back to approximately 1500 B.C. In antiquity the word "mystery" referred to a special gnosis, a secret wisdom. Thousands of years ago in ancient Egypt select bodies or schools were formed to explore the mysteries of life and learn the secrets of this hidden wisdom. Only sincere students, displaying a desire for knowledge and meeting certain tests were considered worthy of being inducted into these mysteries. Over the course of centuries these mystery schools added an initiatory dimension to the knowledge they transmitted.⁵⁰

It is not known when or how Dett became involved with the Rosicrucian order. Both Dett's mother Charlotte and brother Samuel were involved with the Masons; Samuel was an honorary thirty-third degree Mason.⁵¹ Black masonic lodges existed in the nineteenth century and were important institutions in the struggle of African-Americans to become socially self-sufficient.⁵² Both the Rosicrucians and Masons are initiatory societies with roots in the middle ages. According to McBrier, "Dett was greatly influenced by Rosicrucian philosophy. He was an active and enthusiastic supporter of the Rochester chapter of AMORC (Ancient, Mystical Order Rosae Crucis)."⁵³ Dett relocated to Rochester in 1931, therefore, he was probably involved by that time, and likely by the time of the writing of *Enchantment* in 1922.

In 1957 Arthur C. Piepenbrink, Extension Director of the Rosicrucian Society, wrote:

The Rosicrucian philosophy which was so much a part of Dr. Dett's life is unique in the field of classical study today. Free from dogmas, and religious and political alliances, the Rosicrucian Order AMORC instills in its members a sensitivity to their own divine heritage. It helps the individual to help himself - to discover a philosophy of life suitable to his needs and understanding based on a thorough knowledge of the universe in which he lives. It is one of the truly

⁵⁰ Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.rosicrucian.org/about/mastery/mastery08history.html>.

⁵¹ Simpson, 5.

⁵² Franklin, 286.

⁵³ McBrier, *Life and Works*, 87.

great international organizations working for the betterment of humanity without respect to race or creed.⁵⁴

Sensitivity to one's 'own divine heritage' was expressed by Dett...he loved nature and never ceased marveling at its beauty.⁵⁵

It is further traditionally related that the Order's first member-students met in secluded chambers in magnificent old temples, where, as candidates, they were initiated into the great mysteries. Their mystical studies then assumed a more closed character and were held exclusively in temples which had been built for that purpose. Rosicrucian tradition relates that the great pyramids of Giza were most sacred in the eyes of initiates. Contrary to what historians affirm, our tradition relates that the Giza pyramids were not built to be the tombs of pharaohs, but were actually places of study and mystical initiation. The mystery schools, over centuries of time, gradually evolved into great centers of learning, attracting students from throughout the known world.⁵⁶ "In ancient times, if you wished to study the great mysteries, you would travel to a temple and petition for admittance as a student."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Arthur C. Piepenbrink , letter from Rosicrucian Order, February 1957, quoted in McBrier, *Life and Works*, 87.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁶ Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.rosicrucian.org/about/mastery/mastery08history.html>.

⁵⁷ Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.rosicrucian.org/about/mastery/mastery06home.html>.

Dett's Poetry

The Album of a Heart

Dett was taught to recite poetry of Shakespeare and Tennyson by memory from a young age by his mother, Charlotte.⁵⁸ Poetry was very important to Dett. In 1911, while at Lane in Tennessee, he published a book of poems, *The Album of a Heart*. The volume comprises twenty-nine poems in Romantic style, ranging from the two-line "Bagatelle" to the final eleven-page "The Gossip or The Old Maid's Story." Nature scenes tinged with loneliness are represented in poems such "At Niagara," "To the Sea," "After," and "The Mountain." Another nature poem, "Oh, Whisp'ring Tree," was set to music by Dett. Night is a common theme, represented in "Au Soir," "Twilight," "Berceuse," and "The Traumerei." Young love is another subject, rounding out Dett's survey of Romantic themes. The feeling in most of these poems is youthful and optimistic.

Music figures in one remarkable and delightfully humorous poem, "The Rubinstein Staccato Etude" (Fig. 5), which was reprinted in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, edited by James Weldon Johnson.⁵⁹ Dett studied and performed this etude at Oberlin during his student days there. Dedicated to one of his piano professors, George Carl Hastings (1877-1925), the poem seems to begin with the teacher exhorting his student to a better performance: *Staccato! Staccato! Leggier agitato!* A parenthetical "Alas!" seems to commiserate with the student's (perhaps Dett's?) endless practicing to master the etude's difficulties. Dett's affectionate dedication might offer a clue that the mysterious inscription, "to the memory of Carl," thirty

⁵⁸ Simpson, 8.

⁵⁹ James Weldon Johnson, and Alexander Street Press, *The Book of American Negro Poetry: Chosen and Edited, with an Essay on the Negro's Creative Genius* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co, 1922), 196.

years later on "As His Own Soul" from the *Eight Bible Vignettes*, might be to George Carl Hastings.

"The Rubinstein Staccato Etude"⁶⁰

Staccato! Staccato!

Leggier agitato!

In and out does the melody twist -

Unique proposition

Is this composition.

(Alas! for the player who hasn't the wrist!)

Now in the dominant

Theme ringing prominent,

Bass still repeating its one monotone,

Double notes crying,

Up keyboard go flying,

The change to the minor comes in like a groan.

Without a cessation

A chaste modulation

Hastens adown to subdominant key,

Where melody mellow-like

Singing so 'cello-like

Rising and falling in wild ecstasy.

Scarce is this finished

When chords all diminished

Break loose in a patter that comes down like rain,

A pedal-point wonder

Rivaling thunder.

Now all is mad agitation again.

Like laughter jolly

Begins the *finale*;

Again does the 'cello its tones seem to lend

Diminuendo ad molto crescendo.

Ah! Rubinstein only could make such an end!

FIGURE 5 - "The Rubinstein Staccato Etude"

Two poems from *The Album of a Heart* stand out as prophetic to Dett's life to come.

"That's So!" (Fig. 6) expresses a stoicism in Dett's character that must have helped him to overcome the bitterness of his termination at Hampton twenty years later.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Nathaniel Dett, *The Album of a Heart* (Jackson, TN: Mocowat-Mercer, 1911), 22-23.

“That’s So!”⁶²

There'd be no Pleasure were there no Pain;
 E'en Sunshine would pall were there no Rain:
 We could not smile, if in all the years
 We'd never shed a few sad tears.
 What need of ambition if all were gain?
 There'd be no Pleasure were there no Pain.

FIGURE 6 - "That’s So!"

Music is again referenced in the striking “A Romance Sonata.” It is the most innovative of the volume and expresses a darkness not present in most of the rest of this set. Each section has a rhythm and rhyme scheme different from the others. This structure points to its being a kind of study for Dett's epic poem, *Song of Seven*, written in his last years at Hampton. The seven "movements" to this sonata/poem each have an Italian musical description:

- I. *Andante Teneramente*
- II. *Arietta.*
- III. *Cadenza Inganno*
- IV. *Nocturne*
- V. *Recitative*
- VI. *Largo Con Tristezza*
- VII. *Finale - Fuoco di Molto*

It is a narrative of broken love, beginning with the same kind of blissful, romantic musings present in some of the other poems, ending with despair and rage in the final section. Dett uses the image of a mockingbird, commonly associated with fate in Romantic poetry, as the turning point in the narrative in the third section. The ending features a tempestuous vision of an angry sea (which appears again in *Song of Seven*), augmenting it and turning it into a nightmare. The choice of the number seven for the movements is surely significant, connecting “A Romance Sonata” with the later epic and suggesting that Dett's interest in mysticism has

⁶¹ Simpson, 209.

⁶² Dett, *The Album of a Heart*, 11.

begun. His interpretation of the number seven seems to be in line with its darker associations in mythology such as The Seven Evil Spirits of Babylonia⁶³ (which Prokofiev dealt with in the cantata *Seven, They are Seven*) rather than with its meaning in Christianity.

Song of Seven

Dett completed *Song of Seven* in the late 1930's and wrote a preface in 1928, while still at Hampton,⁶⁴ explaining that he is using a stock poetic subject, that of "one who by suicide succumbs to a ravaging despair," in a new way. He speaks about the oneness of the arts but remarks that in music, "the rules governing the use of rhythm have been more liberally applied apparently than in the art of literature."⁶⁵ In his opinion, movements are created in musical compositions to create variety in pulse and rhythm. In literature, however, one style or meter is used and developed for an entire work. Dett uses Shakespeare, Tagore, Beowulf, David, and Milton as examples. His aim is to create a poetic work that exploits different metrical schemes in different sections (or "cantos" as he calls them), as was foreshadowed in "A Romance Sonata" and in keeping with his belief in rhythm as the most important element in music.

Like "A Romance Sonata," *Song of Seven* is constructed in seven sections of increasing length, each with its own strict rhythm and rhyme scheme. Alliteration is used obsessively, and Dett uses onomatopoeia occasionally. Images of a raging sea, waves, a turion (shoot of an aquatic plant) dripping with tears, gull cries, and an evil seductress paint a nightmarish, over-the-top picture of despair and terror. It is hard to know whether this is an expression of some dark corner of Dett's psyche or whether it is more tongue-in-cheek. Certainly the image of the

⁶³ R. C. Thompson, translator, "The Seven Evil Spirits [The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia]," accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/seven.htm>.

⁶⁴ Simpson, p. 623.

⁶⁵ R. Nathaniel Dett, preface to "Song of Seven."

sea as a sort of dark monster contrasts ironically with “Hampton, My Home by Sea,” the song Dett composed for Hampton University.

CHAPTER 4

MAGNOLIA

Magnolia (Title page – Fig. 7) and *In the Bottoms* were both written at Lane College one year apart from each other and share many attributes in style. They are effectively written for the piano, melodic, and show the influence of the late-Romantic style.

On June 3, 1914, Dett performed *Magnolia* and *In the Bottoms* in Chicago at Symphony Hall as part of an "All Colored Composers Concert." This concert was very important in bringing Dett's compositions and playing in front of a wider audience. Dett's performances were given the following notices:

By far the most significant contribution to the evening was the playing by Mr. Dett of his two suites for piano [*Magnolia* and *In the Bottoms*]. Mr. Dett is a pianist of distinct quality and his music had an individual note of charm. It was not pretentious, did not seek to carry any deep message, nor make a propaganda, but was content to express with simplicity and intuitive feeling something of the Southland. It was not so folksonglike as we had expected, with little attempt for racial tone color, but the reflex of an individual to whom the things had personal meaning. There was melodic feeling, graceful rhythmic form, played with an appreciation that made them delightful.¹

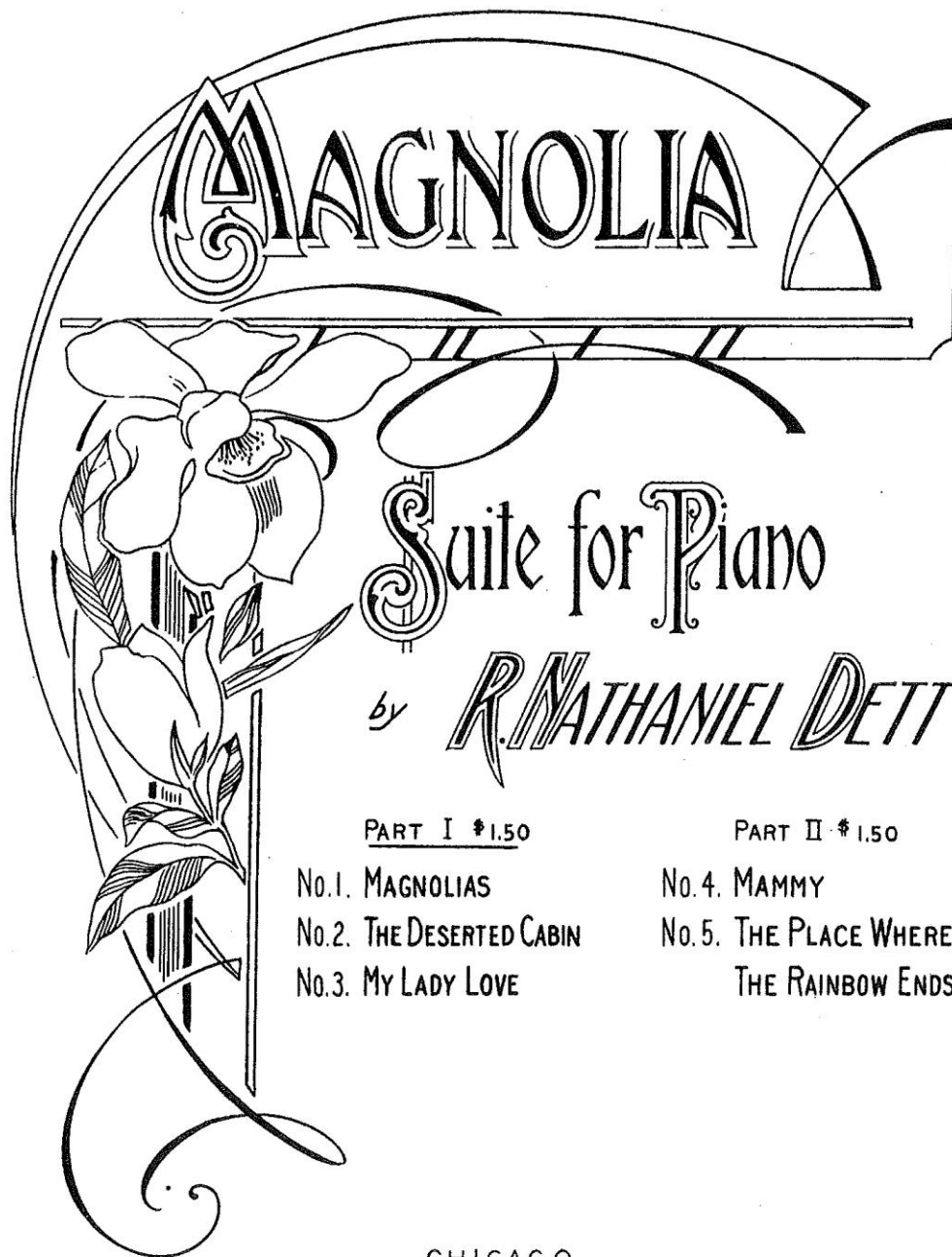
Chicago Evening Post, Karleton Hackett

It remained for the pianist of the evening [Dett] to show how the characteristic accents of Negro music may be developed into genuine art forms without resorting to imitation of the white man's music.²

Chicago Daily Tribune, Glenn Dillard Gunn

¹ quoted in Simpson, 48.

² quoted in Simpson, 49.



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FIGURE 7 - *Magnolia* Title Page

Magnolias owes a bit more to the salon music of Dett's time than *In the Bottoms*, which could be expected for Dett's first large composition. A writer for the *Daily Oklahoman* in 1924 describes it as "more poetic than deep, but it pictured the South faithfully in 'The Deserted Cabin' and 'My Lady Love.'"³ McBrier calls it "descriptive music which portrays pictures associated with the life of the Negro in the South."⁴

No. 1 "Magnolias"
moderato molto cantabile
 D major

McBrier describes this piece, inspired by the great magnolia trees on the campus of Lane, Dett's first academic position, as the outstanding one of the suite:

In evaluating "Magnolias," one finds the melody to be poetic, spontaneous, graceful, and sufficient to itself. The harmonic sequences are conventional, and the original color is derived from figuration which is contrapuntal. The sum total is a charming early Romantic piano composition.⁵

The phrases are regular and somewhat predictable but tuneful and sweetly attractive (Fig. 8). The left hand is expertly crafted with steady eighth notes in widely-spaced arpeggios. This accompaniment includes some melting chromaticisms, a bit hackneyed, but effective nonetheless. A contrasting section, in B minor, features canonic writing between soprano and tenor over syncopated chords (Fig. 9). Dett already shows his interest in counterpoint. A Grieg-like section, with ninth chords and frilly triplets (Fig. 10), provides a return to the opening, restated as before. A sudden modulation to Db major in m. 51 is poetic, although somewhat of a cliché. A large buildup in chords and octaves on a half-diminished seventh chord leads to a majestic statement of the opening followed by a peroration in triplet full chords. The first phrase is heard once again, *pomposo*, then dreams its way up the keyboard. Deep, quiet chords

³ unknown reviewer, *Daily Oklahoman*, quoted in Simpson, 361.

⁴ McBrier, *Life and Works*, 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

close the piece on VII7 - I. Nothing original here, but Dett has expertly assimilated the late Romantic style as he inherited it.

Magnolia Suite Part 1

No. 1 Magnolias

"Gorgeous Magnolias,
Spotless in splendor,
Sad in their beauty,
Heavy with perfume."

Moderato molto cantabile

mp

5

FIGURE 8 - "Magnolias" - Opening

17

p a tempo sotto voce

FIGURE 9 - "Magnolias" - Imitative writing m. 17-m. 20

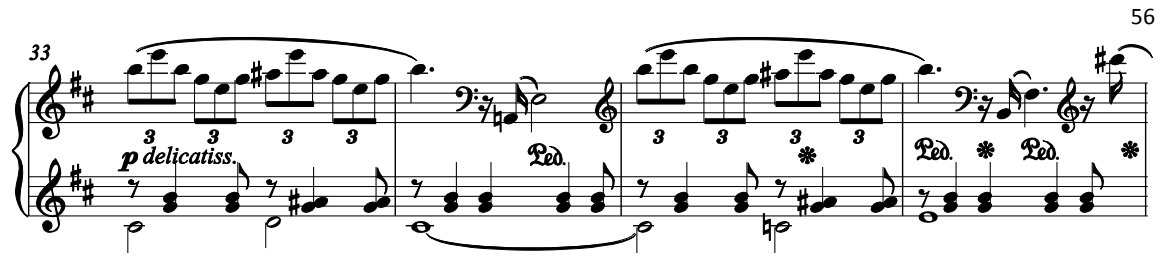


FIGURE 10 - "Magnolias" – Triplets m. 33 – m. 36

"The Deserted Cabin"

Largo con tristezza, melodia ben sostenuto, accomp. stacc.

B minor

Simpson remarks on "The Deserted Cabin's" resemblance to

... the Indian and Hungarian music in minor keys, the Negro origin is evident in similar use of occasional groups of quick notes, leading to a syncopated accent, a device imparting "a touch of tragedy," then breaking suddenly "into the deep yearning expressed in the long notes."⁶

Dett uses this type of rhythmic grouping of pickups followed by an accented-short-long rhythm

(Fig. 11 - end of first complete measure continuing into the second), in other pieces such as

"Mammy," and as late as "Father Abraham" of the *Eight Bible Vignettes*, the opening of which is

similar to "The Deserted Cabin." This rhythmic trait occurs in spirituals, such as the verse of the

spiritual "Father Abraham" (see Fig. 56 and 57). The accented-short-long rhythm is known as a

Scotch snap or Lombard rhythm.

⁶ Simpson, 358.

Magnolia Suite Part 1

No. 2 The Deserted Cabin

Largo con tristezza, melodia ben sostenuto, accomp. stacc.

FIGURE 11 - "The Deserted Cabin"

Regular pairs of *pianissimo* phrases are accompanied by march-like, staccato chords.

The third pair includes answers, suggesting call and response style, in the lower voices (mm. 10 and 12). An approach to C major (Neapolitan sixth - m. 14), and a Tchaikovsky-esque descending series of diminished chords over a tonic pedal point (mms. 18-20), add to the gloom. The final *pppp* cadence of A7 to B minor (lowered VII-i) is coloristic, adding a modal quality. The piece is unpretentious but effective.

No. 3 "My Lady Love"
Allegretto grazioso
A major

A two-bar vamp, I, iii, ii, V, with bass parallel fifths, begins the piece, like a square dance. The fiddle-like tune, entering on the fifth bar, features many repeated notes (Fig. 12). Besides being a charming folk dance, "My Lady Love" is like an etude for repeated notes. The left hand continues the dance rhythm in stride-bass format. Sudden modulations to distant keys, such as F major in m. 17, hint at changing partners in set dancing. Sudden halts in mm. 36 and 38 are Dett's use of stop-time, described as two or more strong beats followed by a sudden silence rhythmically tapped by the feet.⁷ The pianist should release the pedal, perhaps even tap the feet, as Scott Joplin directs the player in his stop time pieces, e.g. "Rag-time Dance" (1906) and "Stoptime Rag" (1910). The left hand crosses over the right in acrobatic fashion in mm. 27-28 and 31-32.

A middle section begins at m. 43, with the fiddle part in the left hand, now giving that hand a repeated-note exercise. More hand crosses and distant modulations add to the fun. More stop-time halts and a *staccatissimo* run announce the return of the opening. A bit of syncopation is introduced in the coda, winding up this piece of elegant and flirtatious style.

⁷ Ibid., 359.

Magnolia Suite Part 1

No. 3 My Lady Love

Allegretto grazioso

pp *mf* *pochissimo pedale*

dim. *senza ped.*

mf *<* *piu dim.* *p* *Ped.* *

FIGURE 12 - "My Lady Love"

No. 4 "Mammy"
Lento con tenerezza
 Db major
 Opening – Fig. 13

This piece of great simplicity and charm was very popular when Dett performed it. It was even performed on an organ recital given by Clarence Eddy (1851-1937), with such success that it had to be repeated.⁸ Its completely regular four-measure phrases seem repetitive, but if played with the tenderness (*due Pedale* is indicated) that Dett asks for, they can be sweet and touching. The piece is in a simple ternary song form. The first section is almost completely diatonic except for a secondary dominant at mm. 7 and 13. The pickup-Scotch-snap rhythm of "The Deserted Cabin" is now in a flowing triplet figure, often pentatonic. The left-hand accompaniment gently sways between bass notes and chords. These traits all contribute to creating an image of a rocking lullaby.

Magnolia Suite Part II
 No. 4 Mammy

The musical score for "Mammy" is presented in a grand staff format. The top staff is the right hand, and the bottom staff is the left hand. The key signature has three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo and mood are indicated as "Lento con tenerezza". The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand features a triplet melody in the first three measures, with the triplet figure repeated in the fourth measure. The left hand provides a simple accompaniment of bass notes and chords. The piece concludes with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking.

FIGURE 13 - "Mammy"

⁸ Simpson, 77.

The second section features another diatonic melody in the left hand with gentle syncopations. The A7 chord at m. 31 is therefore all the more surprising, the right hand falling in the syncopated rhythm and rising to a fermata. Dett, thankfully from the player's perspective, doesn't spell it with the theoretically correct B double flats. The chord does not resolve immediately; this is a good early example of Dett's use of the augmented-sixth chord as a coloristic and structural device. Chromatic chords, contrasting with the rest of the piece, lead to the uneventful return of the first section.

No. 5 "The Place Where The Rainbow Ends"

Allegro

Gb major

"The Place Where the Rainbow Ends" is based on a poem by the same name by Paul Laurence Dunbar⁹ (Fig. 14). Another of Dunbar's poems, "A Negro Love Song," was the inspiration for "Honey," from *In the Bottoms*. This bubbly and sparkling piece expresses the optimism of the Dunbar poem. It is a traditional rondo, with all its sections in closely related keys. Showy, but not difficult, piano writing makes this an attractive selection for students. The key of Gb also lies well on the keyboard. Its writing is derivative, particularly of the lighter Chopin pieces that Dett knew from his studies, but it makes an attractive and youthful close to Dett's first suite.

The piece follows an extended rondo form, Introduction-A-B-A-C-D-C-A-B-coda. It is the longest of *Magnolia*, perhaps a bit overly long. A capricious introduction, with Chopin-like passage work, announces the first theme at m. 32 (Fig. 15).

⁹ Ibid., 360.

"The Place Where the Rainbow Ends"¹⁰

THERE'S a fabulous story
Full of splendor and glory,
That Arabian legends transcends;
Of the wealth without measure,
The coffers of treasure,
At the place where the rainbow ends.
Oh, many have sought it,
And all would have bought it,
With the blood we so recklessly spend;
But none has uncovered,
The gold, nor discovered
The spot at the rainbow's end.
They have sought it in battle,
And e'en where the rattle
Of dice with man's blasphemy blends;
But howe'er persuasive,
It still proves evasive,
This place where the rainbow ends.
I own for my pleasure,
I yearn not for treasure,
Though gold has a power it lends;
And I have a notion,
To find without motion,
The place where the rainbow ends.
The pot may hold pottage,
The place be a cottage,
That a humble contentment defends,
Only joy fills its coffer,
But spite of the scoffer,
There's the place where the rainbow ends.
Where care shall be quiet,
And love shall run riot,
And I shall find wealth in my friends;
Then truce to the story,
Of riches and glory;
There's the place where the rainbow ends.

FIGURE 14 - "The Place Where the Rainbow Ends" - Paul Laurence Dunbar

¹⁰ Poem Hunter, accessed November 6, 2013, <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-place-where-the-rainbow-ends/>.

Where the Rainbow Ends

The musical score for "Where the Rainbow Ends" - Main section is presented in three systems. The first system begins at measure 31 and features a first ending bracket. The second system starts at measure 36 and includes the instruction "leggiere". The third system starts at measure 42 and includes the instruction "piu rit.". The score is written for piano and consists of two staves per system: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has four flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor), and the time signature is 3/8. The music includes repeated chords in the left hand and melodic lines in the right hand.

FIGURE 15 - "Where the Rainbow Ends" – Main section

Repeated chords in a catchy rhythm are followed by a *leggiere* arabesque, recalling somewhat the final movement of the *Wanderer Fantasy* of Franz Schubert. Dett plays with the 3/8 meter in swirling left-hand figures that create the image of a swirling waltz.

The second section features a new melody in the tenor, in Db major, accompanied by right-hand flourishes. The third section, in B major, *molto meno mosso*, is more rhythmically flexible. A questioning phrase, using the same catchy rhythm as heard in the first section, is played in the tenor. It is answered, after a short breath, by a higher *animato* phrase. A

gentleman is asking a lady to dance. Cross-hand leaps add to the coquetry and fun in an even slower restatement at m. 146.

The D section is more stormy, in G# minor, with left-hand octaves and right-hand arpeggios straight from the Chopin Bb minor Scherzo. The coda, beginning at m. 275, brings back a bit of the introduction. A sudden fortissimo D major chord intrudes; then the music rejoins its momentum, leading to a sudden pause at m. 315. Yet another *dolce* melody in hemiola is heard briefly at m. 315. Brilliant scales, octaves and chords finish up to a satisfying conclusion. “The Place Where The Rainbow Ends” is predictable salon-style music, nothing deep, but the rhythmic invention and variety suggest greater things to come.

CHAPTER 5

IN THE BOTTOMS

In the Bottoms is Dett's best known suite. There have been at least six recordings on LP and CD of the entire suite, including by the author. There is a piano roll of "Dance-Juba" by Percy Grainger, available on Youtube ¹, and an LP recording of a version for two pianos by Edouard Hesselberg.² De Lerma calls this work a "monument."³ Nowhere is Dett's mastery of pianistic color and texture more focused than in this suite. Each movement brilliantly expresses an image and program, each one like a miniature symphonic poem.

Its first dedication was to Mr. and Mrs. Fred H. Goff, who had assisted Dett's studies at Oberlin. Later Dett rededicated "Dance-Juba" to Percy Grainger. Grainger championed *In the Bottoms* and often played "Dance-Juba" as an encore. This final movement is Dett's one piece that has remained a staple in piano repertoire.

In a letter Dett mentions *In the Bottoms*, which he was in the process of composing at the time, as being more characteristic than *Magnolia*.⁴ His own preface to the first edition describes it as a continuation of the mood and images of *Magnolia*, "but suggests ideas incidental to life in a more particular geographic territory."⁵ A review from *Musical America* in 1913 states that the suite "fairly teems with musical ideas, and things of the cotton fields, of aged negroes, their sorrow and joys, of those intimate characteristic touches of humor."⁶

¹ Percy Grainger, pianist, "Dance-Juba" by R. Nathaniel Dett, Duo Art 6339-4 Reproducing Piano, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNZ5sj2Vjig>.

² Dominique-René de Lerma, R. Nathaniel Dett works, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://chevalierdesaintgeorges.homestead.com/Dett.html>.

³ Dominique-René de Lerma, *Reflections*, 204.

⁴ Simpson, 32.

⁵ Simpson, 365.

⁶ Unknown author, "New Music – Vocal and Instrumental," *Musical America*, November 29, 1913, quoted in Simpson, 364.

Raymond Jackson relates the following traits of Negro folk music to *In the Bottoms*:

It is an idiom sad but not somber, tragic but ecstatic, intense but bouyant...the Negro's love of gaiety and humor and his periodic rejection of the intense sorrow and seriousness that slavery brought him inspired the second strain of Negro folk music--light, mock, sentimental, full of pagan humor and sharp irony.⁷

Dett makes the following remarks to the performer regarding the entire suite:

"Metronome marks, which should be carefully observed, are given for all of the movements."


He then references Beethoven's statement regarding the Pastoral Symphony noted earlier:

"Remember always that program music is at its best when most in accord with those sentiments uttered by the great Beethoven in regard to his own "Pastoral Symphony" when he said, --

"more an expression than a painting."⁸ Dett is strongly rooted in nineteenth-century style, yet

includes many ethnic characteristics from Negro folk music and spirituals. The performer should also keep in mind the above statements about the central place of humor in this style. There is a lightness and bouyancy about the music, never is it ponderous or maudlin.

Dett explains that the rhythmic figure he uses throughout the suite, short, long, short

 is from ante-bellum folk-dances.⁹ Debra Ann Miles calls this a "head" motif, and remarks that its use is reminiscent of late nineteenth century cyclic traditions in large works.¹⁰

Interestingly, Dett's cyclic motif is a rhythmic figure, while in the European tradition they are commonly linear or harmonic.

Miles also mentions two characteristics of *In the Bottoms* that are rooted in folk music:

syncopation, and what she calls "gapped" or "altered" scales. (i.e. Pentatonic, Old Folk Song

⁷ Margaret Just Butcher, *The Negro in American Culture*, quoted in Jackson, *The Piano Music of Twentieth-century Black Americans*, 5.

⁸ Dett, *The Collected Piano Works*, 42.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰ Debra Ann Miles, "R. Nathaniel Dett's "In the Bottoms" Piano Suite: An Analysis with Historical Background" (master's thesis, Oberlin Conservatory, 1983), 3.

Scale (no leading tone), Byzantine, Hungarian Gypsy, flattened seventh (Mixolydian), Dorian, and Aeolian).¹¹ Open fifths and fourths are prominent in both "Prelude-Night" and "Dance-Juba," elements connected with spirituals and African music. Chords built on the sixth scale degree are also prominent and are used as both secondary key areas and pivot chords (Prelude m. 92),¹² examples of Dett's interest in relative major/relative minor tonal ambiguity.

No. 1 "Prelude – Night"
Adagio sostenuto
 D major

Prelude - is nightfall; the heavy chords represent the heavy shadows, and the open fifths, the peculiar hollow effect of the stillness: the syncopated melody which occurs, is the "tummying" of a banjo, which music is, however, only incidental to the gloom...The Prelude should open and close with an air of mystery, and most of its serenade part be kept subdued as if sounding from afar.¹³

The *Rockford Republic* reported Dett's own description before his performance of this piece on February 17, 1925:

with his descriptive talk and illustration of the motifs used the little house and its flickering candle were picturized vividly in the composition, opening with soft, quiet passages descriptive of the shadows about the house and lightened with the echo of the banjos, closing again as the shadows deepen.¹⁴

A reviewer for the *Daily Oklahoman*, after a performance of *In the Bottoms*, commented on this movement's expression of the "Negro's fear of darkness, mystery and dawn."¹⁵ This mystery is marvelously, yet simply, expressed in low open fifths (Fig. 16). The tonality, in its four regular phrases, shifts vaguely from D to B. A sudden chromatic movement in mm. 14-15 adds to the strangeness of the sound before finally settling in D major. These phrases are repeated with creepy chromatic broken octaves high above. Dett's vision of night is not the same as the

¹¹ Miles, 2.

¹² Miles, 14.

¹³ Dett, *Collected Piano Works*, 42.

¹⁴ Concert review, *Rockford Republic*, February 17, 1925, R. Nathaniel Dett collection, Niagara Falls New York Public Library, cat. no. I-304.

¹⁵ Concert review, *Daily Oklahoman*, March 2, 1924, quoted in Simpson, 363.

usual nineteenth-century one of peace, protection and deliverance. This opening is a striking departure from the conservative harmonic idiom of *Magnolia*.

Prelude Night

Adagio sostenuto $\text{♩} = 54$

pp

Musical notation for measures 1-8. The piece is in D major, 4/4 time, and begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand features a melodic line with a long slur over measures 1-4, and the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment.

Musical notation for measures 9-16. The piece continues with the same melodic and harmonic material as the previous system.

17 $\text{♩} = 60$
pp
piu mosso
p

Musical notation for measures 17-20. At measure 17, the tempo changes to *piu mosso* with a new tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 60$. The right hand begins a more active melodic line, while the left hand continues with a steady accompaniment.

21 *8va*

Musical notation for measures 21-24. The right hand features a rapid, sixteenth-note melodic passage, with an *8va* (octave) marking above the final measure. The left hand continues with a simple accompaniment.

FIGURE 16 - "Prelude – Night" - Opening

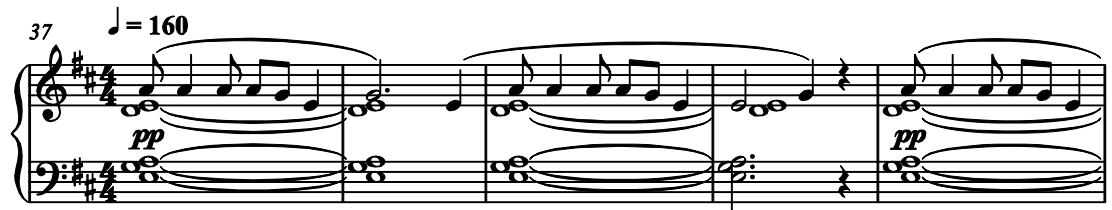
The "tummy" section (mm. 37-48 – Fig. 17) introduces the rhythmic head motif, moving in a narrow pentatonic range over a held indefinite chord. The rhythm breaks into a full pentatonic cheerful melody in D major at m. 49, accompanied by a gentle dance-like rhythm with syncopations and an open-fifth drone in the bass. The short phrases are answered in a lower voice. Alternation of I and V harmonies in successive phrases gives a somewhat Caribbean flavor. The melody is restated, gradually becoming more full and confident. After a detour to F# minor, full octaves and chords play the melody and its answers. This dies off to a close and pause.

Without warning, the opening fifths return, fortissimo, the unease of the opening is now arresting and fearful. A chromatic progression follows, building from piano and making use of the broken octaves, now in shrill, short statements. A questioning, *marcato ed espressivo* phrase finally leads to a calming and more restful ending. "Prelude-Night" is a quite original and masterful expression of different emotions and colors of a night scene, far from civilization, with sounds of nature and the banjo, all within a form and textures of remarkable economy.

Prelude

Night

37 $\text{♩} = 160$



pp

42



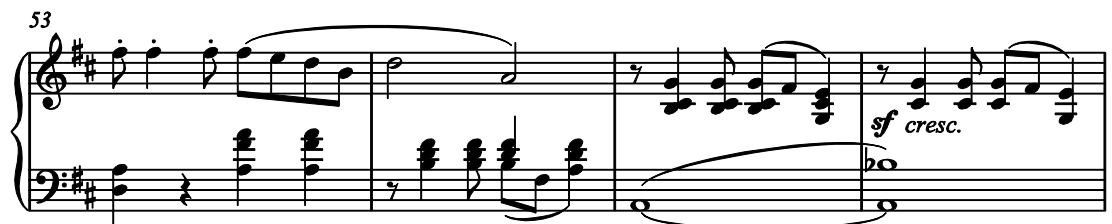
poco a poco cresc. e rit.

49 **Moderato** $\text{♩} = 176$



p leggierissimo

53



sf cresc.

FIGURE 17 - "Prelude - Night" - Middle section

No. 2 "His Song"
Andante non troppo, ma più patetico
 D minor
 Opening – Fig. 18

His Song - The psychological phenomenon is historic, that the moods of suppressed people have oftenest found their most touching expression in song. An aged Negro will sometimes sit for hours in the quiet of an evening, humming an improvised air, whose weird melody seems to strangely satisfy a nameless yearning of the heart...Let the major-key portion of His Song have a decidedly hopeful tone as it has prophetic significance.¹⁶

"His Song" is one of Dett's most beautiful works, simple in its texture, yet very intricate in construction, expressing a very personal experience of sadness, hope and resignation.

As Miles points out, "His Song" is an anomaly in the suite because it is homophonic and contains no syncopation.¹⁷ Entirely in four-part harmony, it suggests a capella choral music. Its lack of accompaniment is very unusual in Dett's piano music and difficult to bring off convincingly. Raymond Jackson helpfully remarks that "By the frequent indications in the music for the use of expressive *rubato* . . . the performer is made aware that this piece must sound spontaneously improvised. An objective, metrical rendition would be fatal to the inner spirit of this work."¹⁸

There are some parallels between "His Song" and the choral motet, "Listen to the Lambs" (one of Dett's most popular, written the following year). The obvious one is the key, D minor, and the choral texture of "His Song." The downward gesture from the third into the fourth measure is strongly related to the middle section in the choral motet, sung to "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." (Fig. 19) In addition, the passionate melisma near the close is similar to one near the end of the motet.

¹⁶ Dett, *Collected Piano Works*, 42.

¹⁷ Miles, 4.

¹⁸ Jackson, 28,

His Song

Andante non troppo, ma piu patetico ♩ = 120

FIGURE 18 - "His Song" - Opening

Meno mosso
molto espress.

Soprano Solo

He shall feed his flock like a shep- herd, and cary-ry the young lambs in his bo-som.

FIGURE 19 – "Listen to the Lambs" – Soprano Solo

"His Song" has a balance of shaping in its four-phrase grouping. The first three are predominantly upward, (the third being a repetition of the first) and the fourth downward.¹⁹ Dett's idea of "weird" is expressed in the tritone leap from the second to the third measure and the sudden downward acceleration in the fourth measure. Well-voiced left-hand chords in tenths give good support to the melody. Choral style is also hinted at by the connection of the alto to the soprano between the second and third phrases. The group of four phrases is

¹⁹ Miles, 21.

repeated in call and response style, with the solo in the deep bass. Augmented-sixth chord color is prominent in the second and fourth phrases.

Jackson says that the following section's (beginning m. 33) "melody and harmonies become bolder and more adventurous, as if one had "gotten the feel of things," exhibiting courage and confidence for a new adventure."²⁰ The moods and tonalities shift, still in regular phrase pairs, until a single phrase at m. 57, with a more functional bass line, breaks the flow with more direction. An impressive deep bass line now descends in a powerful crescendo from F to Bb, with calls and answers above. The arrival at Bb forms the climax of the piece, on a full voiced augmented-sixth chord, at m. 69 (Fig. 20). It continues ringing, suspended, for eight measures. As mentioned previously, this point corresponds to the movement's golden mean proportion.

FIGURE 20 – "His Song" – m. 57 – m. 69 (climax)

²⁰ Jackson, 29.

After this huge breath, the music builds once again over an A pedal point to a majestic statement of the opening in D major, a new bass line connecting the first two phrases together. This is Dett's expression of "prophetic significance." Even though he does not specify what that significance is, the hope for a promised land, so central to a people that had the common experience of losing their homeland and freedom, cannot have been far from his imagination.

This vision crashes into despair with a sudden turn to Bb major at m. 101, followed by a wailing chromatic line descending over chromatic harmonies. The bass voice from the beginning call and response section closes in resignation.

No. 3 "Honey – Humoresque"

Allegretto

F major

Literally, "Honey" is a colloquialism - the familiar term of endearment (South). It may mean much, little, everything or nothing; the intimation here, is one of coquetry. It is after a poem, "A Negro Love Song" by Paul Laurence Dunbar...Flirt all you please with Honey²¹

Dunbar's poem is quoted in Fig. 21. Dunbar was the first African-American poet to obtain national and international prominence. He was born in Dayton, OH, the son of former slaves and wrote verse during school days while working at a job running an elevator. His fame rests almost wholly upon his Negro dialect poetry, dialect poetry having a general vogue during and after his lifetime. Its vogue resulted from its qualities of "tenderness, sentimentality, homely humor, genial optimism."²² His mother worked for the family of Wilbur and Orville Wright who helped young Laurence. Dunbar met Frederick Douglass in 1893. His reputation was enhanced after Dodd Mead and Co. combined Dunbar's first two books and published them as *Lyrics of a Lowly Life*.

²¹ Dett, *Collected Piano Works*, 42.

²² Johnson, *Book of American Negro Poetry*, 49-50.

"A Negro Love Song"

Seen my lady home las' night,
 Jump back, honey, jump back.
 Hel' huh han' an' sque'z it tight,
 Jump back, honey, jump back.
 Hyeahd huh sigh a little sigh,
 Seen a light gleam f'om huh eye,
 An' a smile go flittin' by--
 Jump back, honey, jump back.

Hyeahd de win' blow thoo de pine,
 Jump back, honey, jump back.
 Mockin'-bird was singin' fine,
 Jump back, honey, jump back.
 An' my hea't was beatin' so,
 When I reached my lady's do',
 Dat I could n't ba' to go---
 Jump back, honey, jump back.

Put my ahm aroun' huh wais',
 Jump back, honey, jump back.
 Raised huh lips an' took a tase,
 Jump back, honey, jump back.
 Love me, honey, love me true?
 Love me well ez I love you?
 An' she answe'd, "Cose I do"---
 Jump back, honey, jump back²³

FIGURE 21 - "A Negro Love Song" Paul Laurence Dunbar

²³ Johnson, *Book of American Negro Poetry*, 52-53.

The capriciousness and tenderness of “Honey” is a welcome contrast to the darkness of the end of “His Song.” Dett perfectly captures the tender excitement of the young man thinking about his love with the syncopated left-hand (the rhythmic motif in augmentation) and right-hand grace-note anticipations. The sudden halt and rising fourth in the fourth measure, which repeats after each phrase, imitates the “jump back, honey, jump back” refrain of the poem (Fig. 22).

A restatement in A minor is followed by a coquettish pair of phrases (mm. 17-20) with a tango rhythm in the left hand, ending *lusingando*. The young man does a few quick moves to entertain his lady. The opening returns once more.

The next section, *molto meno mosso e parlando* (Fig. 23), represents a dialogue between the two lovers, as Raymond Jackson states.²⁴ He asks her if she loves him in a more pleading pair of phrases in mm. 37-40, waits for her answer during the echoing statements in mm. 41-44, and jumps in happiness at “Cose I do!” in the ending *Allegro con brio*. “Honey” is a short and masterful representation of Dunbar's charming vernacular poem without being a literal setting of its text.

²⁴ Jackson, 30.

Honey

Humoresque

Allegretto ♩ = 100

pp capriccioso *mf lunga*

5

9

13

FIGURE 22 - "Honey" - Opening

Honey

Musical score for "Honey" - Recitative, measures 29-43. The score is in 2/4 time and features a variety of dynamics and articulations.

Measures 29-34:

- Measure 29: f (forte), $\text{♩} = 72$ (quarter note = 72 bpm).
- Measure 30: mf (mezzo-forte).
- Measure 31: f (forte).
- Measure 32: mf (mezzo-forte).
- Measure 33: mf recitando.
- Measure 34: mf recitando.

Measures 35-42:

- Measure 35: f (forte), *rit. espress.* (ritardando, espressivo).
- Measure 36: *a tempo* (return to original tempo).
- Measure 37: *ritenuto* (ritardando).
- Measure 38: mf a tempo.
- Measure 39: pp quasi echo (pianissimo quasi echo).
- Measure 40: pp quasi echo.
- Measure 41: pp quasi echo.
- Measure 42: pp quasi echo.

Measures 43-48:

- Measure 43: mf rit. piu espress. (mezzo-forte ritardando, piu espressivo).
- Measure 44: pp quasi echo rit. e piu espress. (pianissimo quasi echo ritardando, e piu espressivo).
- Measure 45: mf (mezzo-forte).
- Measure 46: mf (mezzo-forte).
- Measure 47: sf (sforzando).
- Measure 48: sf (sforzando).

Tempo and Performance Markings:

- Allegro con brio** (Allegro with vigor) is indicated above measure 43.

FIGURE 23 - "Honey" - Recitative

No. 4 "Barcarolle – Morning"
Moderato molto grazioso
C major

The rhythmic figure, - [Dett quotes the short, long, short rhythm] which forms the theme of this Barcarolle is in reality, the rhythmic motif of the whole Suite; it is of most frequent occurrence in the music of the ante-bellum folk-dances, and its marked individuality has caused it to be much misused for purposes of caricature. Here it paints the pleasure of a sunshiny morning on the Father of Waters...let your love of the beautiful in Nature permeate the Barcarolle.²⁵

Miles describes this piece as being in the style of Chopin.²⁶ The florid right-hand scales and arpeggios over left-hand bass notes and chords do suggest the same texture as many Chopin pieces, although there is little similarity between this piece and Chopin's "Barcarolle."

There are two alternating sections. The first begins with a left-hand vamp setting up the swaying barcarolle motion (Fig. 24). A humorous, piquant chord containing A and A# (which Dett arpeggiates in his recording) is heard in the second measure. A graceful right-hand glissando brings in the melody. It contains the rhythmic motif, with the ingenious addition of another eighth note in between each occurrence, creating a 6/8 meter. The arabesques, ranging to the highest register, musically paint the "sunshiny morning" sparkling on the water.

²⁵ Dett, *Collected Piano Works*, 42.

²⁶ Miles, 29.

Barcarolle

Morning

Moderato molto grazioso $\text{♩} = 56$

p *glissando*

mf ma leggero *legato*

legato

pochissimo rit. *a tempo* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *glissando*

Ped. * *Ped.* * *Ped.* * *Ped.* *

Ped. * *Ped.* * *Ped.* *

FIGURE 24 - "Barcarolle - Morning" - Opening

The second section is also cleverly written for the piano (Fig. 25). A swaying melody and bass line, both in octaves, are punctuated by sixteenth groups and chords in the upper register. This texture, in addition to the now longer phrase lengths, beautifully creates the sound of open space on a large river. The entire section is written on four staves. The phrases build, never straying far from C major. A small interlude leads back to the playful glissando and first section.

FIGURE 25 - "Barcarolle" - Second theme

After only three phrases an oddly sounding whole-tone scale intrudes into the arabesques at m. 69, leading to a hesitant sounding close in E major. A strange five-measure detour, *poco piu mosso e decisivo*, now begins (mm. 71-75 – Fig. 26). The hypnotic swaying barcarolle disappears, as well as the regular phrase lengths. Quickly shifting harmonies become more chromatic, the tempo accelerates, crescendo is written three times, until a series of French-sixth chords descends precipitously. The tempo is suddenly regained along with the swaying rhythm and the melody, but with a more aggressive glissando. Finally all settles back down into C major. Obviously, the boat has hit some rough waters and the rider has had to

work quickly to prevent it from capsizing. This is a remarkable, and wonderfully descriptive passage, presaging Dett's later fascination with whole-tone color and parallel chords.



FIGURE 26 - "Barcarolle" mm. 71-75

The material of the second section returns, more reflectively. A remarkable repetition of four notes, D, E, F, E, builds and is harmonized most ingeniously. Three dreamy arpeggios close the piece.

In 1919 or 1920, Dett made a recording of "Morning-Barcarolle" for the Broome Special Phonograph label. George W. Broome was a black promoter based in Boston, whom Dett perhaps met while studying at Harvard. In addition, Dett is believed to be the first black pianist to make a piano roll, in 1912.²⁷ Dett's recording, with some cuts probably necessitated by the recording media, is fleet, light and capricious. Interestingly, he performs the double notes in the second section slightly unevenly, as in swing.²⁸

²⁷ Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 488-490.

²⁸ Nathaniel Dett, "Barcarolle," Nathaniel Dett, piano, in *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919*. Archeophone Records ARCH 1005, 2-CD set.

No. 5 "Dance- Juba"

Non troppo allegro

F major

Opening – Fig. 27

Dance - This is probably the most characteristic number of the Suite, as it portrays more of the social life of the people. "Juba" is the stamping on the ground with the foot and following it with two staccato pats of the hands in two-four time. At least one-third of the dancers keep time in this way, while the others dance. Sometimes all will combine together in order to urge on a solo dancer to more frantic (and at the same time more fantastic) endeavors. The orchestra usually consists of a single "fiddler," perched high on a box or table; who, forgetful of self in the rather hilarious excitement of the hour, does the impossible in the way of double stopping and bowing...A word of warning cannot be suppressed in regard to the tempo of the "Dance." Do not take it *too fast!* Much of the dancing in the bottoms is done with a grace and finish that a *Presto tempo* never could suggest.²⁹

There are several arrangements of "Dance-Juba:" for two pianos, band, orchestra, and one for piano and mixed chorus that Dett made himself in 1934. Dett wrote words for this that described a king named Juba.

The Juba dance (simplified from *giouba*) was an African step dance which somewhat resembled a jig with elaborate variations, and occurs wherever the Negro settled, whether in the West Indies or South Carolina. One variation – crossing and uncrossing the hands against kneecaps which fanned back and forth – was incorporated in the Charleston of the nineteen twenties. Juba and Jube are recurrent slave names particularly associated with dancers and musicians. Juba also occurs as the name of a supernatural being in some American Negro folklore . . .³⁰

When the use of drums or any kind of instruments by slaves was outlawed in 1740, slaves used objects such as bones, scraps of metal, and, most significantly, their feet to circumvent the laws. The virtuosity of tap dancing was a way to substitute for drumming.³¹

²⁹ Dett, *Collected Piano Works*, 42.

³⁰ Marian Hannah Winter, "Juba and American Minstrelsy," *Chronicles of the American Dance*, ed. Paul Magriel (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1948), 40

³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

Dance

Juba

Non troppo allegro ♩ = 120 - 144

The first system of musical notation for 'Dance-Juba' consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The music begins with a series of chords in the right hand, followed by a melodic line. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment of chords.

The second system of musical notation continues the piece. It starts with a measure number '5' above the first measure. The notation follows the same pattern as the first system, with a melodic line in the right hand and accompaniment in the left hand.

The third system of musical notation continues the piece. It starts with a measure number '9' above the first measure. The notation follows the same pattern as the previous systems, with a melodic line in the right hand and accompaniment in the left hand.

The fourth system of musical notation continues the piece. It starts with a measure number '13' above the first measure. The notation follows the same pattern as the previous systems, with a melodic line in the right hand and accompaniment in the left hand. The system concludes with a double bar line and a dynamic marking 'f' (forte).

FIGURE 27 - "Dance-Juba" - Opening

Juba was also an historical dancer, by all accounts a spectacular virtuoso, in the mid-nineteenth century, who toured with a troupe across the United States and England. A free African-American, born William Henry Lane around 1825, he was "Beyond question the very greatest of all dancers. He was possessed not only of wonderful and unique execution, but also of unsurpassed grace and endurance."¹

Dett was inspired to create this piece by watching two boys playing and dancing in front of his studio cottage at Lane. Watching as they played he caught the rhythm and only after completing the work discovered the rhythm to be that of an early New Orleans dance called "Juba," hence the title."²

"Dance-Juba" is a rondo, A-B-A-C-A-coda. The rondo form aptly suggests Dett's description of the dance, alternating a circle of onlookers with a smaller group of dancers. All the figurations contribute to the infectious, rhythmic propulsion of the piece. A foot stomp, followed by two quick hand claps, is represented in the left hand, the fiddle part in fourths in the right. The parallel fourths and pentatonic layout of the right hand and the simple alternation between I and ii harmonies in the left are traits suggested by African folk music.

The first episode is a bit more boisterous, with percussive repeated notes played with both hands. The ascending walking bass line imitates more foot stomping.³ The third section is more characteristic with the right hand humorously crossing over the left throughout. Jackson imaginatively likens its humorous bass line to "the take-off of a string-bass player whose musical escapade is accompanied with great delight by the strumming of the banjo."⁴ To return to the first material Dett writes a longer modulatory passage replacing the fourths of the opening with

¹ Winter, "Juba and American Minstrelsy" 42.

² McBrier, *Life and Works*, 16.

³ Jackson, 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

sixths, increasing the difficulty. The coda accumulates excitement until the piece ends with a final statement of the rhythmic motif (m. 102) in large chords.

Dett's metronome marking of ♩ = 120-144, is a somewhat large span of possible speeds. The upper end of this range sounds quite fast, making Dett's emphatic warning about too much speed (reminiscent of Scott Joplin's warnings for ragtime) somewhat puzzling. A case could be made for a brisk speed from recordings of fast tempo spirituals such as "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" and "Religion is a Fortune" by period groups such as the Dixie Jubilee Singers.⁵ The rhythm of "Religion is a Fortune" is also a bit similar to that of "Dance-Juba." These recordings have great rhythmic precision, verve, and drive, which Grainger successfully captured in his piano roll, which is quick, at a speed of about 138. Whatever the tempo chosen, the piece needs to have both the grace but also the dash of Dett's description of the dancers, as well as Juba, the dancer.

⁵ A later and distinct group from the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

CHAPTER 6

ENCHANTMENT

Enchantment, written in 1922, represents a departure on many levels from Dett's earlier suites. It is the least influenced by folk or ethnic idioms of Dett's suites and has a unique formal structure, following a program written by Dett. The fast, slow, fast, slow sequence of the movements, as well as their key relationships, C# minor, E major, C# minor, and A major, suggest a sonata. The cyclic use of themes across movements and thematic transformation also suggests that Dett was interested in more formal structures at this time, specifically the nineteenth-century approach to the writing of sonatas and other large works.

On December 12, 1919, Grainger performed the premiere of Cyril Scott's first piano sonata in Boston, which was reviewed by Olin Downes.⁶ Dett attended this performance; Grainger also performed "Dance-Juba" with much success, which Dett acknowledged. "Reflets dans l'eau" and "Jardins sous la pluie" of Debussy were also performed on this program, which Grainger repeated in New York in 1920. Grainger wrote extensive program notes, offering his opinion that Scott's sonata was the most significant written since Brahms (reviewers of these concerts were more skeptical). It is certainly possible that Dett's hearing of the Scott sonata had an effect on his piano style and influenced his interest in the form. Parallel altered seventh and ninth chords begin to occur in Dett's music; these are features of Scott's music as well. Dett was evidently less interested in Scott's experiments in irregular meters, staying firmly rooted in rhythms derived from Negro folk music. Scott's own use of mystical ideas as subject matter for musical compositions, e.g. Scott's piano suite *In The Garden of Soul Sympathy* (1912), may also have appealed to Dett.

⁶ Olin Downes, concert review, *Boston Post*, December 12, 1919, R. Nathaniel Dett collection, Niagara Falls New York Public Library, cat. no. I-407.

The idea of writing a sonata-like suite with an extra-musical, narrative program, is unusual in keyboard music and is more common to the symphonic poems of Liszt, Tchaikovsky and Richard Strauss. An orchestral score of Liszt's *Les Preludes* was included in Dett's papers given to the Eastman School of Music. The keyboard writing in *Enchantment* is also more orchestral than that in Dett's first two suites. As discussed above, Dett's program strongly suggests a Rosicrucian connection, specifically an initiation rite.

Dett's complete title and program:⁷

Enchantment, A Romantic Suite for Piano on an Original Program

- I "Incantation"
- II "Song Of the Shrine"
- III "Dance Of Desire"
- IV "Beyond the Dream"

The Program

"What seek you? Say! And what do you expect?"
 "I know not what: the Unknown I would have!"
 What's known to me is endless; I would go
 Beyond the end. The last word still is wanting."

I. INCANTATION

A soul obsessed by a desire for the unattainable, journeying on an endless quest, wanders into a pagan temple, and there yields to an overpowering impulse of the moment to utter an Incantation before the shrine of an unknown goddess.

II. SONG OF THE SHRINE

From somewhere far within the shrine a mysterious voice answers - a
 "voice of molten melody
 Singing love that may not be."

III. DANCE OF DESIRE

A drum beats, and a gong sounds; strange shapes assemble for a carnival of passion, into whose company and revelry the soul finds itself drawn irresistibly. In the urge of the music the Incantation mingles with the now mocking Song of the Shrine.

⁷ R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Collected Piano Works*, 70-71.

After a mad swirl, there is a final crash, at the sound of which the apparitions vanish.

IV. BEYOND THE DREAM

And, as in a vision, the soul sees itself transfigured, appearing unto itself as an ever-shifting shoal of pale, opalescent fire, from which there rises in a visible exhalation, like smoke from smoldering incense, the still unsatisfied longing for the unattainable.

I “Incantation”
Un poco agitato, ma moderato
 C# minor

This movement uses two alternating themes that capture the questioning petitions for initiation outlined in Dett's program. Many tempo alterations are indicated, requiring a *rubato*, *parlando*, and improvisatory performing style. The first theme (Fig. 28) outlines a triad, sweeping with large intervals up and down, played with the right hand thumb and harmonized with parallel augmented triads. Two shorter initial phrases are followed by a down-up sweep in triplets, marked *accelerando* which gives a *precipitato* effect, closing in the dominant. This group is repeated with left-hand syncopations, which give more urgency, ending on the tonic. The augmented triads show Dett's increasing interest in harmonies built on whole tones.

Further material in the dominant minor follows using the same short-short-long phrase structure and making use of extended registers. The opening phrases return ending in a cascade of interlocking octaves and forceful C# minor close (Fig. 29). The petitioner has become more insistent, even angry. Dett's beloved augmented sixth chord occurs in m. 43, now including a ninth.

INCANTATION I

Un poco agitato, ma moderato
mp *piu rit.* *a tempo* *piu rit.*

5 *mf* *accel.* *L.H.* *R.H.*

FIGURE 28 - "Incantation" - First theme

The image shows a piano score for the first section of 'Incantation', measures 40 through 44. The music is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The score is written for piano with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Measures 40-43 are marked 'a tempo' and 'cresc.', while measure 44 is marked 'piu rit.' and 'ff'. The music consists of complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, with a '8va' marking above the first measure. The piece concludes with a final chord in measure 44.

FIGURE 29 - "Incantation" – First section close

The second section, mm. 48-93, in the relative major, features questions and answers, somewhat like call and response, but contrasting in character (Fig. 30). The questions are sequences of four chords in low register, all indicated with fermatas, and using altered seventh and ninths. The answers are in the high register in triplets marked *Poco Allegro, capriccioso*. The questioner is receiving evasive answers. Playful, delicate arpeggios are followed by another cascade, this time of parallel major chords. The questions return more forcefully, with richer chords and Dett playing with registral contrasts.

48 *molto tranquillo* **Poco allegro** *molto tranquillo*

mp *capriccioso*

3 3 3

FIGURE 30 - "Incantation" – Second theme

The remainder of the movement develops these elements in a fantasia. The opening theme, now re-harmonized, modulates through many keys alternating with the arpeggio idea. Two ninth-chord arpeggios sweeping up the entire compass of the keyboard, lead to a triumphant version of the opening in C# major, now played with both thumbs two octaves apart and heavy offbeat chords, a very orchestral texture. This is quickly dissembled by a series of descending chromatic chords and an even heavier statement of the theme, now in minor. The sequence of a triumphant statement followed suddenly by a darker minor one recalls the close of "His Song." More octaves and sixteenth sextuplet chords build into a Lisztian fury interrupted by a pause. One more question and answer is followed by a *presto* cadenza using a diminution of the first theme, chords marching up the keyboard, and a *prestissimo volante* descent. The movement closes with major sub-dominant and tonic chords – this progression also colors "Dance of Desire." The effect of the whole movement is of restless, emotional questioning.

II "Song of the Shrine"
Lento con molto espressione
 E Major
 Opening – Fig. 31

This movement was a favorite of Dett and Grainger, who often performed it separately. There is a report of a performance of an organ arrangement in Chicago by one Theodore Phillips.⁸ It is a look backward to the sugary salon style of some of *Magnolia*. The swaying left-hand accompaniment is more suggestive of the movements of a choir than "Magnolias," however. It is in a strophic song form, the melody employing trochaic rhythms, with only one modulation to C# minor, marked *doloroso*. The idiomatic piano writing includes widely spaced left-hand harmonies and placement of the melody in middle voice with a counter melody above (mm. 9-12) require good voicing skills from the player. Dreamy arabesques up and down the keyboard provide decoration. The melody's rising and falling shape expresses a yearning character.

Song of the Shrine II

Lento con molto espressione

The musical score for the opening of "Song of the Shrine" II is presented in a grand staff format. The key signature is E major (three sharps: F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo and expression markings are "Lento con molto espressione" and "mp". The score shows the first four measures. The right hand (treble clef) begins with a half note E5, followed by quarter notes G#5, A5, and B5, then a half note G#5. The left hand (bass clef) begins with a half note E2, followed by quarter notes G#2, A2, and B2, then a half note G#2. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

FIGURE 31 - "Song of the Shrine"

⁸ Concert review, Maude Roberts George, *Chicago Defender*, unknown date, R. Nathaniel Dett collection, Niagara Falls New York Public Library, cat. no. I-471.

A long soliloquy from mm. 55 using imitative statements of the melody and long E pedal points (suggesting a rendition on organ) creates a wistful close, including some altered seventh and thirteenth chords towards the end. Perhaps Dett felt he needed to cleanse the palate after *Incantation* with a piece in a simpler, more retrospective style. Although it may strike some listeners as overly sentimental, the piano writing is always skillful and rewarding to the player.

III "Dance of Desire"

Con moto

modulating introduction leading to C# minor

An early reviewer wrote of "Dance of Desire's" "striking and barbaric orientalism, . . . throbbing tom-toms and primal drums, . . . swaying melody line, and frenetic *presto* ending in octaves . . . a splendid passionate evocation of the savage Oriental dance at its musical best."⁹ Overlooking the somewhat amusing characterizations, in need of updating; this is a good description of *Enchantment's* most developed movement, which forms the center of the suite. Drumming on fifths in the bass and other imitations of percussion provide rhythmic propulsion. Frequent octave passages and low chromatic runs show the influence of Liszt and contribute to the orchestral texture. These qualities, combined with thematic transformation of themes heard in the previous two movements, (see Fig. 32 and 34) recall the *Bacchanale* movements of Berlioz (*Symphonie Fantastique*) and Liszt (*Faust Symphony*). Perhaps a tribute to Grainger, this movement is Dett's biggest bow to the nineteenth-century tradition of orchestral piano writing, of which Liszt was the greatest exponent. Dett's version of this genre sounds considerably more folk-like, however, making it seem a little mismatched with the program. It is fun and attractive music nonetheless.

⁹ Anonymous review "A New romantic Piano Suite on Original Program by R. Nathaniel Dett," courtesy Oberlin College Archives, cited in Simpson, 376.

The piece begins with 52 measures of material, which, due to their start-and-stop nature and gathering momentum, have the feel of an introduction. Alternating drumming on an anapest rhythm, alternates with a low ninth chord and arpeggio sweep up the keyboard (the gong from Dett's program). The sequence repeats in a circle-of-fifths progression. Tambourines are then suggested in rhythmic fifths and minor seconds in the left hand accompanied by *capriccioso* right-hand flourishes. A rising sequence of chromatic chords leads to an agitated passage with syncopated chords, first on black keys, then on white keys. Dett later takes up this idea of alternating seventh chords on black and white keys more extensively in "The Daybreak Charioteer" in *Tropic Winter*. A frenetic statement of the first "Incantation" theme is heard over pulsing syncopated chords (Fig. 32), leading to a black-key octave passage (mm. 45-48), which suggests Dett's practicing of Chopin's black key etude as a youth at Oberlin. Rumbling left-hand octaves, practically lifted from Liszt's "Waldesrauschen," close on C# minor at bar 53. The black key octaves point to F# major, the major sub-dominant of the main key.

The musical score for Figure 32 shows measures 41 through 48. The right hand part consists of syncopated chords and arpeggios, with markings 'sva' (sustained) and 'loco' (loco). The left hand part features a pulsing eighth-note accompaniment. The piece is marked 'f un poco espress.'.

FIGURE 32 - "Dance of Desire" - Transformation of "Incantation" theme

From this point on, a relentless rhythmic drive powers the movement. The main dance theme is folk-like (Fig. 33), with its mostly pentatonic mode and the same short-long-short rhythm that Dett uses as the motif for *In the Bottoms*, all over an eighth-note ostinato. Dett's favorite augmented sixth chord appears in m. 75, followed by a pentatonic cascade (mm. 80-83), the eighth-note *ostinato* pulsing all the while. A suspenseful *sotto voce* transition leads to a

sequence of chromatic chords (mm. 94 - 106) over accented bass syncopations. An *espressivo* flourish on what Dett calls the "Byzantine scale" leads to a development-like section.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the piano score of "Dance of Desire" - Main theme. The first system, starting at measure 53, features a tempo change from *poco rit.* to *a tempo*. The right hand has rests, while the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with dynamic markings of *sf sf sf sf* and *mp*. The second system, starting at measure 59, shows the right hand with a melodic line and the left hand continuing the eighth-note pattern. The third system, starting at measure 64, is marked *espress.* and features a dense, chromatic chordal texture in the right hand over the eighth-note bass line.

FIGURE 33 - "Dance of Desire" - Main theme

The drumming opening now alternates with the "first theme," passing through many keys. At m. 146 the "Song of the Shrine" makes its "mocking" appearance in Eb, (Fig. 34) using its rising portion, alternating with angry statements of the dance theme, *forte marcato*, in the deep bass. More pianistic material follows, taking advantage of extremes of registers, chromatic parallel chords, and relentless syncopations.

FIGURE 34 - "Dance of Desire" - Transformation of "Song of the Shrine" theme

At m. 176 a sort of recapitulation occurs, followed by more "Incantation" statements rising up the keyboard over Lisztian arpeggios. Low rumbling chromatic scales, angry statements of the dance theme in the bass, and a storm of octaves finish the piece on an *sff* C# minor chord.

All together, this movement is a fascinating amalgam of nineteenth century virtuoso piano writing, thematic transformation, African drumming, African-American short-long-short dance rhythms, and chromatic harmony. It strongly suggests orchestration; perhaps if Dett believed himself more skilled in instrumentation, he would have created an orchestral version.

IV "Beyond the Dream"
Andante patetico
 A Major
 Opening – Fig. 35

After the mini symphonic poem of "Dance of Desire," "Beyond the Dream" returns to the world of salon piano music, however with more sophistication than "Song of the Shrine." A modified sonata form is used with two themes that are developed and recapitulated. Dett expertly uses extremes of register and wandering harmonic colors, often using chromatic third relationships, to communicate the idea of endlessness, reaching for something intangible and unattainable.

BEYOND THE DREAM IV

Andante patetico quasi notturno

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. The first system (measures 1-4) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 5-8) includes dynamics *p*, *pochissimo rit.*, *rit.*, and *a tempo cresc.*. The third system (measures 9-12) includes *dim.*, *rit.*, and *a tempo mp espress.*. The fourth system (measures 13-16) continues the piece. The score features a mix of single notes, chords, and arpeggiated textures, with various articulations and phrasing slurs.

12 *dim.* *rit.* *a tempo mp espress.*

19

FIGURE 35 - "Beyond the Dream" - Opening

As Franz Liszt was lurking in “Dance of Desire,” Edvard Grieg, tinged at times with Wagner, makes a bow in this piece. Dett’s tribute to Grieg was perhaps made with Grainger, a protégé of Grieg, in mind. Dett also performed the “Notturmo,” op. 54, no. 4 on a recital in 1935, so it is safe to assume that he was familiar with Grieg’s popular piece when he composed *Enchantment*. Dett even marks the movement *quasi notturmo*. The rhythmic relationship between the melody and accompaniment in mm. 3-4, which becomes pervasive later, duplicates the second melodic strain in Grieg’s piece. The melody itself borrows part of the second theme from the last movement of Grieg’s *Piano Concerto*, op. 16. The accompaniment plays the second and third notes of a triplet, tying the first note, while the melody plays a duplet in cross rhythm. Whereas Grieg requires the cross rhythms to be played in one hand (often causing anguish to intermediate level piano students), Dett places them in different hands, taking advantage of registral differences, which become extreme in the second phrase.

An eight-bar phrase is followed by two four-bar phrases that elide into a restatement. The restatement is imaginatively reharmonized with an A seventh chord proceeding down in parallel second-inversion triads, injecting a bit of blues sound with the flatted seventh. The restatement uses ornamented and broken sixths to harmonize the melody in effective bell-like piano writing. Short phrases in C# major and C major, E major (all chromatic third relations) dissolve into arpeggios, falling gradually down to a large E major arpeggio, passing through an inverted A ninth chord, again adding a blues color.

A second tenor melody now follows, continuing the “Notturmo” cross rhythm, with a rising and falling chromatic shape. A prominent harmony is a B half-diminished seventh chord over an E pedal, a sonority which also occurs often in Grieg’s *Piano Concerto*. A modulation through C major to F major leads to another melody whose shape and harmonic sequences sound borrowed from “Liebestod” from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, the “Notturmo” cross

rhythm going all the while. This gathers momentum and plows up the keyboard on the B half-diminished seventh/E pedal sonority - marked *stretto*, another favorite Grieg indication. The falling-rising minor third motif makes an impassioned statement, planing down chromatically in major chords to two arpeggios through the entire keyboard range, again on a B half-diminished seventh/E pedal, and E Major. Perhaps this moment is the "visible exhalation" rising from the "opalescent fire" in the program. It leaves the music in a kind of suspension.

Following Dett's indicated *pausa* is a transition back to the opening material featuring the falling-rising third motif in diminution answered by swooning chromatic triads, sounding like a glissando. This repeats down the keyboard and rises again in a wedge-like chromatic figure to the return of the opening, now harmonized in tenths and sixths. More chromatic third relations are featured in phrases in Ab and C. A countermelody in cross rhythms is added, now both played in the right hand, requiring fine tonal control from the player. The second theme is heard sequentially through A, Db, F and A, outlining the augmented triad that opens the suite, answered by a fragments of the first theme. Increasingly tranquil phrases close with two-measure chords in mm. 191-199 and mm. 207-223, the latter with two-measure rests separating them. The final seven measures are an A major arpeggio reaching from the lowest note on the keyboard to the highest A. Space and suspension are expressed in this movement through masterful use of registers, well-voiced chords and cross rhythms. The completely idiomatic writing would not translate well to the orchestra.

CHAPTER 7

CINNAMON GROVE

Simpson describes *Cinnamon Grove* as "not as popular as Dett's preceding suites, the overall mood of the first three parts is noticeably less active, less difficult for the pianist, and less dazzling as program music."¹ Its music is definitely lighter, and the style more conservative, than *Enchantment*, although the final movement contains some innovations of white-key diatonicism and quartal harmonies, which point forward to the third period of suites. Its most interesting aspects are perhaps the fusion of suite and sonata, as well as the poetic associations. Charles Griffes, in *Roman Sketches*, op. 7 (1915-1916), also a suite with poetic associations, could possibly have been a model, in addition to the MacDowell *Sea Pieces* mentioned previously.

I *Moderato molto grazioso, ma con moto*
on lines from "The Dream" by John Donne

"Dear love, for nothing less than thee
Would I have broke this happy dream." (see Appendix A for complete poem)

F major

The Elizabethan era poetry of John Donne (1572-1631) ranges from erotic love poems written in his youth, to metaphysical and religious sermons written after he converted to Anglicanism and became a priest. After a long eclipse his poetry experienced a strong revival beginning in the early 20th century.²

The Dream is an erotic poem about a woman who wakes a man while he is dreaming about her, essentially a wet dream in Donne's conception. He then attempts to seduce her,

¹ Simpson, 385.

² M. Thomas Hester, *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Current Online Version: 2012, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.temple.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195169218.001.0001/ac-ref-9780195169218-e-0141?rskey=tOpAyw&result=140>.

then she draws away. Sex and morality are the issues here, presented with the puns and sometimes obscene metaphors of Donne's style. Donne was also known for overturning the strict meters of Elizabethan poetry, perhaps a quality that appealed to Dett.

Dett's very light, somewhat syrupy, piece, takes up the dream aspect of the poem without touching on its eroticism and obscenity. It is in the style of salon music, with very minor pianistic challenges, suitable for an intermediate student. Its indicated 4/4 meter should be performed as 2/2, due to its flowing eighth-note figures and static harmonies. Some rubato could be added to suggest an improvisation. Added sixth and ninth chords and diatonic harmonies communicate a dreamy, floating quality.

The form is an unassuming sonata-allegro without development. Even the key relationships are traditional, with a second theme section in the dominant. This begins in m. 38 with a new melody presented in an inner voice, following a modulatory section (mm. 30-37) with more ninth chords. A quarter-triplet figure, also in an inner voice, begins in m. 52. More material follows based on the opening theme. A left-hand arpeggio under right-hand chords closes the section, like a passage straight out of Claude Debussy's early "Reverie." The opening reappears with very minor changes, and all the previous material is uneventfully recapitulated in F major.

II *Adagio cantabile*
on lines from *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore

"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." (see Appendix B for complete poem)

Db major
Entire movement – Fig. 36³

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Indian polymath, was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. "Tall, robed, and bearded, he made a profound physical impression in the West."⁴ Tagore obviously was a poet close to Dett's heart since this piece is in an entirely different order than the preceding one. It is one of his most beautiful and touching creations. Tagore must have been an inspiring figure for Dett, in a similar way to Coleridge-Taylor. Tagore symbolized the achievements of non-white cultures, not only in literature, but also in education, and philosophy. His friendship with Gandhi, and renouncing of knighthood following British massacres in India, made him also a political and social figure of high stature. Tagore was also a composer of songs, whose *rabindrasangit* style was named after him.⁵ That possibly prompted Dett's interest in *Gitanjali* (1910), which is subtitled "*Song Offerings*," and specifically the second of its long series of poems, which opens with "When thou commandest me to sing."

³ *Cinnamon Grove* by Robert Nathaniel Dett © 1928 (Renewed) SUMMY-BIRCHARD, INC.
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⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, quoted in Simpson, 387.

⁵ Simpson, 387.

“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.”

Adagio cantabile

p
legato e con tenerezza

7

13

sf *mp più espress.*

19

cres *cen - do* *mf*

25

poco in - tenso *espress.*

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31 *più marcato ed espressivo* *poco rit.*

37 *p* *8va*

43 *(8va)* *molto dim.* *poco*

49 *allarg.* *cresc.* *p* *a tempo*

56 *rit.* *p*

62 *molto rit.* *mp* *smorz.* *pp*

Detailed description: This figure shows a page of musical notation for a piano piece. It consists of six systems of music, each with a measure number at the beginning. The notation is in a key with three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature. The systems are: 1. Measures 31-36, featuring a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. Performance markings include 'più marcato ed espressivo' and 'poco rit.'. 2. Measures 37-42, starting with a piano 'p' dynamic. The right hand has an octave extension marked '8va'. 3. Measures 43-48, also with an octave extension '8va'. Performance markings include 'molto dim.' and 'poco'. 4. Measures 49-55, marked 'allarg.' and 'cresc.', with a piano 'p' dynamic and 'a tempo' marking. 5. Measures 56-61, marked 'rit.' and ending with a piano 'p' dynamic. 6. Measures 62-67, marked 'molto rit.', 'mp', 'smorz.', and 'pp'. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

FIGURE 36 - Cinnamon Grove Movement II

The style is choral, in four-part harmony throughout. The first three phrases are completely diatonic, except for flatted sevenths (Cb) in lower voices (mm. 3 and 4), and the climax at the close of the third, using once again an augmented-sixth chord. The flatted sevenths, so early in the piece, establish a connection to spirituals right away. The sequential leaps in the melody in the third phrase effectively contrast with the stepwise motion in the opening two. Rich, flowing lower voices also move in steps. The Db major tonality, associated with expressive keyboard music in the nineteenth century, completes the effect of unabashed romanticism. Dett's great abilities in choral writing serve well here.

One phrase, mm. 25-28 is chosen to be repeated with ever richer harmonizations and lower voices in mm. 33-36 and mm. 45-48. Following the last of these, the music dissembles a bit with chromatically moving ninth chords beginning with a somewhat surprising downward leap at m. 51. A touch of minor sub-dominant harmony at m. 64 leads to the close on a simple I-vi-I progression, another example of Dett's predilection for this harmonic relationship.

This piece was published separately in the October, 1933 edition of *Etude*. Simpson suggests a rendition by a brass quintet;⁶ perhaps a string quartet version would be the best choice of an arrangement (in a different key), besides a choral version.

⁶ Simpson, p. 387.

III *Ritmo moderato e con sentimento**Quasi Gavotte*

on lines from "Epimetheus" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"Have I dreamed? or was it real,
 What I saw as in a vision.
 When to marches hymeneal
 In the land of the Ideal
 Moved my thought o'er Fields Elysian?" (see Appendix C for complete poem)

Bb minor

As a boy Dett was taught to memorize much poetry by his mother. This presumably included the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), the dean of nineteenth-century American poetry. Longfellow was also the author of *Hiawatha*, which was set by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor in his ground-breaking oratorio. *Epimetheus* uses a monotonous repetition of anapest, iamb, amphibrach rhythm, and an unvarying rhyme scheme. Dett seems less interested in the meaning of the poem, aside from its reference to a wedding (hymeneal) march, than in its repetitive, hypnotic rhythm.

Dett's gavotte begins with a full measure rather than the half-measure typical of a traditional Baroque gavotte (Fig. 37)⁷. A march-like rhythm proceeds for two measures which then continues in an unbroken series of eighth notes. The square rhythm is broken only by a low drone of a fifth played on the second beat of the first measure. A three-eighth-note upbeat figure becomes prominent beginning in the second measure. Augmented-sixth chords in mm. 13-14 lead to a half close on the dominant at m. 16. A second dance strain then begins, suggesting a traditional binary form. This section includes a surprising approach to the distant key of A major in m. 31, which then closes on the tonic.

⁷ *Cinnamon Grove*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

III

"Have I dreamed? or was it real,
 What I saw as in a vision.
 When to marches hymeneal
 In the land of the Ideal
 Moved my thoughts o'er Field Elysian?"

Ritmo moderato e con sentimento
Quasi gavotte

The musical score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system begins with a dynamic marking of *mp* and includes a *pp* marking later in the system. The second system starts at measure 5 and continues with similar piano textures. The tempo and mood are indicated as "Ritmo moderato e con sentimento" and "Quasi gavotte".

FIGURE 37 - *Cinnamon Grove* Movement III – Opening

The most remarkable trait of this piece is its pianistic texture. Parallel legato thirds, sixths, and octaves that sometimes enclose thirds, are everywhere. Nowhere else does Dett make such a reference to Johannes Brahms. Similarly to Brahms, it requires considerable skill from the player to perform the double notes and octaves legato in a softer dynamic. The first section closes more powerfully. The trio, *Maggiore*, is very simple, in a much thinner texture than the first section, and features a variation of the opening rhythm, two quarters and four eighths, in retrograde (four eighths and two quarters). The descending whole-tone scale in m. 8 is curious, contrasting with the diatonicism of most of the remainder of the piece. The

minor section is heard again as before. A nine-measure coda builds to powerful chords and another somewhat odd run of chromatic major thirds over a contrary motion bass.

IV *Allegretto*

"Oh, the winter'll soon be over, children,
Yes, my Lord."

F major

In *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro as Sung at Hampton Institute*, Dett sets "De Winter'll Soon Be Over" with a pulsing ostinato on "winter" underneath the melody (see also Fig. 3).⁸ In the last movement of *Cinnamon Grove* he reproduces this in smooth thirds in lower right-hand voices. The player should keep in mind the ostinato character of Dett's setting, suggesting a steady, non-rubato tempo. Dett's metronome mark of ♩ = 104 in *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro* is also a helpful guide. A left-hand dactylic arpeggio provides rhythmic variety. "Yes, my Lord" is repeated in mm. 15-16, creating a regular four-measure phrase grouping whose half close on the dominant in m. 16 (Fig. 38)⁹ is answered by a full close in m. 32 (Fig. 39).¹⁰

⁸ Dett, *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro as Sung at Hampton Institute*, 82-83.

⁹ *Cinnamon Grove*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

IV

“Oh, the winter’ll soon be over, children,
Yes, my Lord.”

Allegretto

mp

6

12

The musical score is written for piano in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 1-5) begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The right hand features a melody of eighth notes with accents, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system (measures 6-11) continues this pattern with some chordal textures in the right hand. The third system (measures 12-16) shows a more complex texture with sixteenth-note runs in the right hand and a more active left hand accompaniment.

FIGURE 38 - *Cinnamon Grove* Movement IV - Opening to m. 16

12 *8va* Yes, my Lord Yes, my Lord

FIGURE 39 - *Cinnamon Grove* Movement IV m. 29 – m. 32

Dett strongly suggests Haydn in closing this suite-quasi-sonata with a rondo in 2/4. He perhaps also chose Haydn as a model because of Haydn's folk influences. The more aggressive B section, beginning at m. 33, is the first example of white-key diatonicism in Dett's piano music. The opening dactyl is extended, and continues with rather brusque widely-spaced octaves and chords. A striking series of quartal harmonies in mm. 53-56 (Fig. 40),¹¹ with offbeat accents, leads to the A section. This version puts the melody in the middle, with the thirds far above in addition to the bass line. This three-hand effect, straight out of Liszt, is considerably difficult (Fig. 41)¹².

sf *sf* *sf* *sf*

FIGURE 40 - *Cinnamon Grove* Movement IV - Quartal harmonies

¹¹ *Cinnamon Grove*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

¹² *Ibid.*

The image displays a musical score for the Cinnamon Grove Movement IV, specifically measures 61 through 65. The score is written for piano in 2/4 time and D minor. It features a 'grazioso' marking and a 'three-hand effect' where the right hand plays a melody while the left hand plays a complex, multi-note accompaniment. The notation includes various chordal textures, including triads and dyads, and is marked with 'mp' (mezzo-piano) and 'grazioso'. The score is presented in two systems, with measures 61-64 in the first system and measures 65-68 in the second system.

FIGURE 41 - *Cinnamon Grove* Movement IV - Three-hand effect

The C section, *Minore* in D minor, has short, regular phrases that use the dactyl rhythm in augmentation (Fig. 42)¹³. The fourth phrase, as noted before, is from “Run to Jesus” and is in Dorian mode. The *espressivo* marking provides a clue that it has a special identity.

¹³ *Cinnamon Grove*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

77 *Minore*

82

87 I don't ex-pect to stay much long_ er here.

cresc. *espress.*

FIGURE 42 - *Cinnamon Grove* Movement IV - Second theme

The first melody returns now in several keys. Quartal harmonies reappear in mm. 129 and 131 as well as a polytonal (E major, Db major) contrary motion scale in mm. 133-135. The music gradually gathers steam, with a new *molto marcato* melody played in octaves, sudden dynamic shifts, the three-hand spiritual variation, and a brief return of the "B" section, all in rapid succession. Noisy octaves and chords and a final *volante* flourish up the keyboard to close the movement. The children have gotten more and more excited and rowdy, joyously running about.

CHAPTER 8

TROPIC WINTER

The ten-year period separating the composition of *Cinnamon Grove* and *Tropic Winter* was taken up with Dett's master's degree studies at Eastman and the composition of his largest work, the oratorio *Ordering of Moses*. At Eastman, Dett studied with Howard Hanson (1896-1981), gaining more knowledge of and exposure to various twentieth-century compositional techniques and styles.

Tropic Winter is the most experimental, most varied in style, and least integrated of the suites. Perhaps as a result, it is the least performed. As of this writing it has never received a commercial recording. Some of the movements, such as "The Daybreak Charioteer," "A Bayou Garden," and "Noon Siesta," are strikingly modernist, and are a significant departure from Dett's earlier works. Others are more backward looking or have roots in popular music of the time, such as "Pompons and Fans" and the closing movement, "Parade of the Jasmine Banners." Here Dett returns to the concept of portraying images in music, although his notion of "tropic" seems somewhat vague. Dett's great lyric talent shines in "Legend of the Atoll" and "To a Closed Casement." These two pieces form the emotional center of the suite. Even in Dett's most forward-looking music, melodic inspiration is central to his style.

Solo piano music is an ideal vehicle for exploring novel and experimental ideas. Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, Claude Debussy, Arnold Schoenberg, and Olivier Messiaen, to name only a few, are examples of composers that used this medium to break new ground in musical style. Dett has left behind the integrated sonata structures of *Enchantment* and *Cinnamon Grove* to try out new directions and sounds, unconstrained by the requirements of texts and large constructions that he needed to address in *Ordering of Moses*.

Of course the nature of experiments is that some are more successful than others, and the seven pieces of *Tropic Winter* are no exception. It could be said that, of the six, this suite is the most concerned with various types of harmonic sonorities. Most of the pieces seem to explore and play with a particular sound: “The Daybreak Charioteer” with minor seventh chords, “A Bayou Garden” with fourths, “Pompons and Fans” with augmented chords, “To A Closed Casement” and “Noon Siesta” with white-key diatonicism. “Legend of the Atoll” returns to musical idioms from spirituals, “Parade of the Jasmine Banners” combines major seventh and ninth chords, and pentatonic melodies with a popular band sound.

“The Daybreak Charioteer”

Pomposo marziale moderato

No key signature indicated; centered in Gb major/Eb minor

Opening – Fig. 43¹⁴

Sketches of portions of this piece are present in a notebook in the Hampton University Archives that dates from Dett’s time at Eastman. Dett chooses to open his last two suites with music that uses the piano’s maximum resources of power. An image of a flaming chariot, guiding the sun up from the horizon, is expressed by an extremely thick texture of eight- or nine-note chords and octaves over the whole range of the instrument. This is the noisiest of all of Dett’s piano movements; at one point he directs the player to brace the third finger with the thumb of the right hand to play single notes (m. 20) for maximum power. The elegance and delicacy of many of the early suite movements are far away.

¹⁴ *Tropic Winter* by Robert Nathaniel Dett © 1938 (Renewed) SUMMY-BIRCHARD, INC. Exclusive Print Rights Controlled by ALFRED MUSIC All Rights Reserved Used by Permission.

The Daybreak Charioteer

Pomposo marziale moderato

FIGURE 43 - "Daybreak Charioteer"

The piece opens with a Gb major chord in the right hand and an Eb minor chord in the left. This minor seventh chord is the harmonic equivalent of the relative major/relative minor tonal ambiguity that Dett uses in many of his works. This chord moves up a half step to an E minor seventh chord in the second measure. This movement between two unrelated chords, from black keys to white keys, is exploited later, particularly in the coda (mm. 30-41).

An octave melody in two-measure phrases rises, harmonized with unrelated minor-seventh chords, over deep bass octaves on weak beats. The effect is of a pompous march, as in Dett's indication. Stormy octave passages alternate with a restatement of the march theme over thick bass triplet chords (m. 24). The coda, *con furore*, is a tempest of more triplet left-hand octaves and chords on black keys alternating with white keys, ranging over the keyboard with abandon, finally ending with a ten-note Gb added-sixth chord. The effect is not too far from the clusters of Henry Cowell's (1897-1965) wilder pieces. It is a bombastic creation, difficult to bring off convincingly.

“A Bayou Garden”
Adagio molto sostenuto
 Bb major
 Opening – Fig. 44¹⁵

This movement is very evocative of a sultry, steamy garden. It opens *pianissimo* and is mostly quiet throughout. It is concentrated in the low register, reaching its highest note at its climax. Low right-hand quartal chords are placed over octaves in the deeper bass, also moving in fourths. The rhythms express well the slow swaying of large trees in a quiet breeze. Black keys move to white keys in the third measure, similarly to the opening of the previous movement.

A *dolce* melody (m. 9), approaching Eb minor, slowly descends chromatically over parallel dissonances and fifths in the bass. A surviving sketch from 1931, during Dett's studies at Eastman, shows an earlier version of this section.¹⁶ A rhythm of half-note, dotted-quarter and eighth, is introduced (mm. 13-15) and taken up later. G major is reached, with an added major seventh and ninth in m. 20. Parallel triads, in the rhythm heard in the previous section, build to a climax on a Bb major ninth in measure 28. Bb is finally established, making the key signature superfluous until now. The opening material returns, ending on a Bb major seventh.

This short (38 measures) piece is quite effective, Dett using his new techniques of parallel dissonances and harmonic vagueness to express his image. The slowly moving chords are beautifully voiced for the instrument and make excellent use of the bass register.

¹⁵ *Tropic Winter*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

¹⁶ Simpson, 393.

A Bayou Garden

Adagio molto sostenuto

The musical score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. The first system (measures 1-4) is marked **pp**. The second system (measures 5-8) includes the instruction *piu cresc.* and *poco allargamente*, with a **pp** dynamic at the end. The third system (measures 9-12) is marked *dolce* and *pochiss. rit. poco a poco dim.*. The fourth system (measures 13-16) includes the instruction *piu espress.* and a **pp** dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and a triplet in measure 7.

5 *pp* *piu cresc.* *poco allargamente* *a tempo* **pp**

9 *dolce* *pochiss. rit. poco a poco dim.*

13 *piu espress.* **pp**

FIGURE 44 - "A Bayou Garden"

"Pompons and Fans"

Grazioso

G major

Dett subtitles this movement "Mazurka," a somewhat curious cross-cultural association for a piece about the tropics. A mazurka rhythm is definitely expressed, however, by its 3/4 meter, downbeat triplet leading to a half-note second beat, and regular four-measure phrases (Fig. 45)¹⁷. The indication, "hauntingly," in the third measure, suggests a performance in a rather free tempo, like a mazurka. Harmonically, this movement is considerably more conservative than the previous two; G major is firmly established from the beginning. The second pair of four-measure phrases moves to the dominant in m. 16.

Pompons and Fans

Mazurka

The musical score for "Pompons and Fans" Mazurka is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 5. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo and mood are marked "Grazioso" with a quarter note equal to 96 (♩ = 96). The first measure features a triplet of eighth notes on the treble staff and a half note on the bass staff, with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second measure continues with a similar triplet and half note structure. The third measure is marked "hauntingly" and features a triplet of eighth notes on the treble staff and a half note on the bass staff. The fourth and fifth measures complete the first phrase. The second system contains measures 6 through 10. Measure 6 starts with a new phrase, marked with a triplet of eighth notes on the treble staff and a half note on the bass staff. The piece concludes in measure 10 with a *piu rit.* marking.

FIGURE 45 - "Pompons and Fans"

¹⁷ *Tropic Winter*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

Each measure ends with an augmented chord, subtly upsetting the conventional key relationships. A lithe run in contrary motion major thirds (m. 8) also contribute to a sly, flirtatious character. The first group of four-bar phrases is repeated, which Dett suggests performing an octave higher.

A second idea (m. 33), *molto semplice*, is a scalar dotted-rhythm melody over a non-moving A minor seventh (ii) chord. This repeats on E minor seventh eight measures later. The triplet figure of the opening is developed into a cadenza on the dominant which leads to the opening section. This is heard again but with cleverly shifting augmented chords.

The second section also returns, followed by a coda which includes a flourish on an F sharp-eleventh chord (which includes the Eb, G, B augmented triad), and more whole-tone harmonies and parallels. The ending includes a descending bass line in whole tones, a whirling trill in the treble, and emphatic G major chords to close.

“Pompons and Fans” is retrospective, recalling “My Lady Love of Magnolia,” simple and beguiling. It also makes extensive use of whole-tone harmonies, such as augmented chords.

“Legend of the Atoll”
Lento, recitando un poco dolente
 D major

After Dett's musical travels he returns to the language of his beloved Negro folk music in “Legend of the Atoll,” notwithstanding the title.¹⁸ If played well, with sensitivity, it contains some of Dett's most beautiful music, with touching and intimate simplicity.

Beginning centered in A, its form is an alternation of solo and chorus, similar to many spirituals. He begins with an unaccompanied recitative, the first occurrence of this texture in Dett's piano music, and one he takes up further in *Eight Bible Vignettes*. Spiritual style is also

¹⁸ Whether or not Dett had a particular legend in mind is not known.

suggested by the Scotch snap/Lombard rhythm in the first measure, and the call-and-response-style chordal answers after each phrase. These rise and fall, questioningly, in minor thirds (Fig. 46)¹⁹. The final recitative phrase prominently features a flatted seventh, G, *teneramente*. A dreamy arpeggio on an A eleventh chord, and a final falling minor third answer sets up the chorus.

Legend of the Atoll

Lento
recitando un poco dolento

FIGURE 46 - "Legend of the Atoll" - Opening

A simple yearning, pentatonic melody, in 6/4 trochaic, swaying rhythm, begins in B minor over four-part harmony (Fig. 47)²⁰. The second phrase features Dett's favorite augmented-sixth color. Successive phrases build through F# minor on the way to closing calmly in D major. The harmonizations feature relative minor/relative major ambiguity, with some chromatic chords.

¹⁹ *Tropic Winter*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

FIGURE 47 - "Legend of the Atoll" mm. 15-18

All of these elements are heard again, much like the second verse and refrain of a spiritual. The recitative is now centered in D with the melody and chord responses reversed in register. The chorus is more richly harmonized in D major, in octaves, with rich fifths in the bass, and ninth and whole-tone colored chords. Its climax is now a lush D ninth chord. A final phrase of recitative and an adagio amen-like chord progression end the piece quietly and eloquently.

"To a Closed Casement"

Andante espressivo

C major

Opening – Fig. 48²¹

"To a Closed Casement" is another lyrical expression of wistfulness and yearning. An image of a closed window perhaps suggested longing to Dett. In ternary song form, its first idea experiments with white-key harmonies. The left-hand melody is very simple, in a two-, two-, four-measure phrase structure. It first outlines C major and A minor triads in a trochaic rhythm and continues sequentially to lead to D minor, the key of the second idea. The right hand plays white-key chords in a pulsing eighth-note ostinato. This eighth-note motion continues unbroken through almost the entire piece, until m. 35.

²¹ *Tropic Winter*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

The second idea is more troubled, with downward leaps and ornamentation, now in the right hand. The left hand plays a sighing figure in double notes. The first D minor statement is sequenced downward to C minor, a hint of Rachmaninoff. The opening material returns in a dialog between voices. A harmonic change into chromatic and whole-tone harmonies begins in m. 21. This builds up, rather unexpectedly, to a full-throated statement, *passione e drammatico*, of the second idea at m. 25. A G pedal point continues from m. 25 all the way to m. 38, as the music settles down, alternating between diatonic chords and whole tones.

To a Closed Casement

Adndante espressivo ♩ = 72

p molto semplice

4

8

piu rit.

a tempo con tenerezza

mf

mp

pochiss. rit.

FIGURE 48 - "To a Closed Casement"

There is a sudden pause at m. 35, breaking the eighth notes. Broad, *molto espressivo* statements follow, arching up in seventh chords, still over the G pedal point. A final descent through more whole-tone harmonies and a series of slow arpeggiated chords, close the movement quietly in C. These recall the end of "Barcarolle" from *In the Bottoms*. This last section is a good example of Dett's use of whole-tone parallel chords to express a post-climactic bliss. The end of Dett's last piece, "Madrigal Divine," is another.

“Noon Siesta”

Lento quasi berceuse

No key signature indicated - centered in A minor/G major

Entire movement – Fig. 49²²

In some ways, this 28-measure miniature is the most striking of the set, in its modest way. It is played entirely on the white keys. The right hand plays two fourths, D/G and E/A in an unvarying, hypnotic, pianissimo, ostinato throughout. The left hand plays two lines, one below and the other crossing above the right hand. The lower line is marked piano, the upper pianissimo. Even though the notes are easily sight-readable, the sometimes rapid alternation of the two, necessitating rapid crosses of the left hand over the right, requires excellent tonal control from the player.

Everything in this piece is derived from the tonal polarity of A and G. The upper line consists simply of sets of four descending notes in four-measure phrases, often with different indicated shapings. The starting notes of these are A, G, D, and E, outlining the polarity.

The lower line is in two-measure phrases that close with an eighth-note triplet figure, which is sometimes extended by one or two notes to create additional activity. The final pitches of the first three phrases are A. These begin to change, moving to E, B, and F, until, in measure 18, a phrase begins with the triplet figure and returns to A, again establishing that tonality. A longer phrase at measures 23-25, along with a speeding up of the upper voice, subtly disrupts the rhythmic structure. The final pitches now descend to D and the final note, G. The final arpeggiated chord is G major plus the other two pitches of the ostinato, E and A, a thirteenth chord. The G tonality strikes the listener as completely unexpected, but the two tonal centers have been encapsulated in the right-hand ostinato all along. For the listener, the effect is of

²² *Tropic Winter*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

someone nodding off and falling asleep at the final surprising chord, very similar to Schumann's "Kind im Einschlummern," from *Kinderszenen*.

Noon Siesta

Lento quasi berceuse

pp

L.H. L.H. L.H.

6 L.H. *simile*

12

18

23 *dim.* *e* *pochissimo rit.* *poco a poco* *al fine* **ppp**

The musical score for "Noon Siesta" is written in 4/4 time and begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The tempo is marked "Lento quasi berceuse". The score is divided into five systems. The first system (measures 1-5) features a left-hand melody (L.H.) with a triplet of eighth notes in the bass clef and a right-hand accompaniment of chords. The second system (measures 6-11) continues the left-hand melody, marked "L.H." and "simile", with triplets in the bass clef. The third system (measures 12-17) shows the left-hand melody with triplets in the bass clef. The fourth system (measures 18-22) continues the left-hand melody with triplets in the bass clef. The fifth system (measures 23-27) concludes the piece with a dynamic range from *dim.* to *ppp*, marked "al fine".

FIGURE 49 - "Noon Siesta"

“Parade of the Jasmine Banners”

Allegretto grazioso

Eb major

In 1937 Grainger had asked Dett to compose a work for the high school orchestra for the National Music Camp at Interlochen. Dett declined, not feeling confident of his abilities in orchestration.²³ Perhaps this piece is a kind of effort to satisfy that request, it could be arranged effectively for a marching band or school orchestra. The key also suggests a possible intention for band. The sound is more light and conservative than the rest of the suite, like popular music of the time. Ferde Grofe (1892-1972) comes to mind. The many ninth, added sixth, and French sixths chords fit with the popular jazz styles of the day.

It is a graceful march in 6/8 that ends more forcefully than it begins, like parade music (Fig. 50)²⁴. Two ideas are presented, both strongly rooted in Eb. The first features some flowing triplets with leaps, the second, *gato*, is a cute tune with a typical march long-short rhythm (Fig. 51)²⁵. Both would sound well on clarinet. An imitation in mm. 10-11 is also a band music trait. A capricious *recitativo con fantasia* in mm. 17-18 is like a solo, answered by the group.

²³ Simpson, 233.

²⁴ *Tropic Winter*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

PARADE OF THE JASMINE BANNERS

Allegretto grazioso

p

7

12

sf *dim.*

rit.

FIGURE 50 - "Parade of the Jasmine Banners" - Opening

FIGURE 51 - "Parade of the Jasmine Banners" - Second theme

The accompaniments emphasize the two beats in march style, sometimes with short chords, particularly during the second tune. The chords often contain added sixths, major sevenths, and ninths. They would be well scored for light brass.

The first idea returns in minor at m. 58. A modulatory interlude leads to the second idea in Gb major, now in the left hand. A new *scherzando* version in octaves is accompanied by colorful jazz chords. The flourish is heard in minor going now to the first idea, back in the major. A trombone counter melody in left-hand octaves makes it more pompous (Fig. 52)²⁶.

The coda begins featuring a trumpet call on a repeated F#, with chromatic chords flirting with Eb minor in between. A long scale settles the excitement down to begin building again at m. 155. The march builds again to full triplet octaves and chords. A humorous, dissonant chord is hammered out at mms. 185-186 and 191-192, perhaps imitating a car horn. The final *con entusiasmo* chords are repeated Eb major chords with added seconds.

²⁶ *Tropic Winter*, used by permission of Summy-Birchard, Inc. and Alfred Music.

Come prima

mf marcato

5

2

FIGURE 52 - "Parade of the Jasmine Banners" – Recap with countermelody

CHAPTER 9

EIGHT BIBLE VIGNETTES

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."¹

The *Eight Bible Vignettes* (Title page – Fig. 53)² were published separately by Dett's new publisher, Mills Music, from 1941-1943. They were intended for Grainger but not published as a set until after Dett's death in 1943. "As His Own Soul" and "Desert Interlude" were composed first in the summer of 1941, while on an artist's retreat at Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, NY. This offered time to compose and a welcome respite from his heavy teaching schedule at Bennett College in North Carolina. These two pieces were published in 1942 along with "Martha Complained," "Father Abraham," and "Bountiful Shepherd,"³ which is possibly an earlier version of "Madrigal Divine." It is remarkable how organically the pieces fit together into the large structure of the suite, considering that they originally appeared separately.

Dett kept his primary family residence in Rochester, NY. He was involved at the time with assembling a large mixed-race choir in Rochester.⁴ Racial reconciliation was an increasing preoccupation of Dett and finds its strongest expression in his final suite. It is his most ambitious achievement.

Dett's ear for keyboard sonority was always finely developed but never at such a high level as in these pieces. The contrast of textures, from the lush Rachmaninoff-like accompaniments of "As His Own Soul" to the terse, stark opening of "Barcarolle of Tears" and "Other Sheep" is impressive. Imaginative use of the high and low range of the instrument,

¹ Galatians 3:28.

² *Eight Bible Vignettes* by Robert Nathaniel Dett © 1941 (Renewed) EMI MILLS MUSIC, INC. All Rights Controlled by EMI MILLS MUSIC, INC. (Publishing) and ALFRED MUSIC (Print). Used by Permission. All Rights Reserved.

³ Simpson, 246, 250.

⁴ Simpson, 246.

distinctive and surprising modulations, and beautifully voiced chords give this work a sensuality and pianistic beauty rare in twentieth-century American piano music until Samuel Barber. The harmonic experiments of *Tropic Winter* have now found a natural voice, coexisting comfortably with music in the Romantic style from Dett's earlier works.

Of Dett's performance of *Eight Bible Vignettes* in Washington, D. C., Glenn Dillard Gunn wrote:

These are eight original compositions and without parallel in the literature of the instrument. Except as the Bach Choral Preludes have been transcribed for it, or for one or two sacred pieces by...Franz Liszt, the piano is entirely the agent of secular expression.⁵

⁵ Glenn Dillard Gunn, Concert review in *Washington Times-Herald*, mid-June 1943, quoted in Simpson, 396.

FIGURE 53 - *Eight Bible Vignettes* Title Page

No. 1 "Father Abraham"
Molto maestoso
 F minor

In 1942 Dett played "Father Abraham" in Niagara Falls, explaining that it was "derived from both a fourteenth-century Hebrew legend and a Negro spiritual."⁶ Dett often lectured during recitals. In 1943, Dett performed excerpts on a concert in Washington, DC. The following is also from Glenn Dillard Gunn's review:

The composer spoke, from time to time, on the spiritual as form of folk art, and on the sacred folk art of the Jews. He has drawn upon both these sources for thematic material developed in a set of piano pieces.⁷

On the title page⁸ Dett quotes the melodies and text of the two themes that he uses: the Negro melody, "Father Abraham" (Fig. 54) and the Hebrew melody, "Leoni" (Fig. 55), although Dett gives no name for it, other than "Father Abraham."

⁶ Simpson, 248.

⁷ Glenn Dillard Gunn, *Washington Times-Herald*, quoted in Simpson, 251.

⁸ from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library. This page and title pages of some of the later movements of the *Eight Bible Vignettes* are not included in 1996 edition of the *Collected Works*. The 1973 edition includes some of the missing pages.

Father Abraham

I

Negro Spiritual

Fa - ther A - bra - ham Sit - tin' be - side the Ho - ly Lamb
Way up on the moun - tain top; My Lord spoke and the char - iot stop!

FIGURE 54 - "Father Abraham" spiritual

Father Abraham

I

14th Century Hebrew

The God of Abra - ham praise, All prais - ed be His Name, Who
was, and is, and is to be, And still the same!

FIGURE 55 - "Leoni" melody

The melody is attributed to Myer Leoni, English cantor (d. 1796).

Born Meir ben Judah Loeb, probably in Poland, he was first known in England as an opera singer named "Meir Leoni." In 1767 he was engaged as cantor at the Great Synagogue, London, on condition that he would conduct himself henceforth as an observant Jew. His tune for the *Yigdal*, known as the "Leoni

Yigdal, " was heard at the synagogue in 1770 by the Methodist minister Thomas Olivers and adapted for the Christian hymn, "The God of Abraham Praise."⁹

Yigdal ("May He be magnified"), is the opening word of a liturgical hymn based upon the Thirteen Articles of Faith enumerated by Maimonides.

English translations of *Yigdal*, retaining the rhyme, have been composed, such as that of Alice Lucas (1852–1935). Her rendition begins:

The living God we praise, exalt, adore!
He was, He is, He will be evermore!
No unity like unto His can be:
Eternal, inconceivable is He.

It concludes:

He at the last will His anointed send,
Those to redeem, who hope, and wait the end.
God will the dead to life again restore.
Praised be his glorious Name for evermore!¹⁰

The text of the spiritual:

Father Abraham
Sittin' beside the Holy Lamb
'Way up on the mountain top;
My Lord spoke and the chariot stop!

⁹ Roth, Cecil. "Leoni, Myer." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 12. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 647-648. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Accessed November 3, 2013, http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2587512142&v=2.1&u=temple_main&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&asid=6ef8bb8ede1adc952e6ce140ce7ecfe3.

¹⁰ Rothkoff, Aaron, and Bathja Bayer. "*Yigdal*." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 21. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 373-374. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Accessed November 3, 2013, http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2587521270&v=2.1&u=temple_main&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&asid=f4a958c25e541f181b8ebe344eea1eab.

Dett continues with two quotations, one from Genesis, the other from a second Negro spiritual, "I am Seeking for a City:"

By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord: . . .
 That in blessing I will bless thee,
 and in multiplying I will multiply
 thy seed as the stars of the heaven,
 and as the sand which is upon the
 seashore, and thy seed shall possess
 the gate of his enemies;
 And in thy seed shall all the
 nations of the earth be blessed;

--Genesis 23:16-18

We will trappel on together, Hallelujah,
 Gwine to war agin' de debbil, Hallelujah,
 Gwine to pull down Satan's kingdom, Hallelujah,
 Gwine to build up de walls o' Zion, Hallelujah.
 Dere's a better day a-comin', Hallelujah!

--*Negro spiritual* "

The lines from the spiritual come from the second verse and the first line of the third verse of "I am Seeking for a City." Dett's use of it could hint at his nomadic existence at the time, shuttling between Bennett College and Rochester. Dett also states on the title page:

It is something more than a mere coincidence that Abraham, patriarch of Old Testament history, should also be apostrophized in the Negro spiritual; for the emotional and mystical keynote of the Negro, even as of the Jewish folksong, is emancipation and great happiness in some future state.

Moreover, from the standpoint of musicology, the interval of the augmented, or "barbaric" second (Byzantium mode) which occurs in the melody of the spiritual, identifies it as belonging more to the great family of oriental folksong than to any offshoot of Moody and Sankeyism, as has been sometimes alleged.

In this piece, appropriately the first of this set of BIBLE VIGNETTES, parts of both the Jewish and the Negro tunes are used and, because of their similarity of mood and melody, it is hoped that their association will appear to be logical and natural.¹¹

¹¹ Dett, *Collected Piano Works*, 150.

In his second paragraph Dett refers to the controversy in the early twentieth century concerning the originality of Negro spirituals. It was theorized by some writers at the time that the spirituals were in fact derived from white gospel hymns, in particular those by Ira David Sankey (1840-1908) and Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899), which were very popular. Dett participated in the debate, along with John Work, Jr. and others, arguing that the presence of certain musical traits, such as the augmented second, made the theory untenable.

Even though a reviewer in *Musical America* thought the choice of the relationship between the two melodies "interesting . . . one that probably would not have occurred to anyone else,"¹² the connection is very logical. Both melodies are published in versions in F minor (Anglican hymnal¹³ and Dett's *Negro Spirituals* collection¹⁴), and have a similar, arch shape. The spiritual is built on a triad, the Hebrew melody on an ascending scale. Dett has already convincingly explained the connection in meaning.

The opening is impressive (Fig. 56)¹⁵, using the full sonorous resources and range of the piano, and written on four staves. The verse of the spiritual opens the piece (Fig.57, beginning m. 10). There is also a similarity in the shape of this melody to "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." In Dett's arrangement of the spiritual "Father Abraham" for his edition of *Negro Spirituals*, the solo melody is answered by the chorus repeatedly exhorting the soloist: "Tell It!" in call and response style. Dett transcribes this arrangement powerfully for the piano. The chords are various chromatic chords such as augmented, ninth and half-diminished seventh. The pianist should imitate how a chorus would sound shouting "Tell It!" in the performance of the chords. Upbeat (anapest) combined with short-long (Scotch-snap or Lombard) rhythms are

¹² Unknown reviewer, *Musical America*, quoted in Simpson, 397.

¹³ *The Hymnal 1982: according to the use of The Episcopal Church* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1982), 401.

¹⁴ R. Nathaniel Dett, ed., *Negro Spirituals* (London: Blandford Press, 1959), 61.

¹⁵ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

prominent in the melody. The rhythmic and pianistic layout is reminiscent of “The Deserted Cabin” from *Magnolia*, now in a powerful version.

Father Abraham

I

Molto maestoso

Way up on the moun- tain top—

Tell it Tell it Tell it

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It begins with the tempo marking **Molto maestoso**. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line starts with the lyrics "Way up on the moun- tain top—" and is accompanied by a piano accompaniment. The piano part is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-3) shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The second system (measures 4-6) continues the piano accompaniment with triplets and dynamic markings. The third system (measures 7-8) concludes the opening with a final chord and a fermata.

FIGURE 56 - "Father Abraham" - Opening

Father Abraham

R. Nathaniel Dett

Molto solonelle

Fa - ther A - bra - ham, Sit-teth be - side the Ho - ly Lamb! Fa - ther

rit. a tempo

A - bra - ham, Sit-teth be - side the Ho - ly Ho - ly Lamb!

Sit-teth be - side the Ho - ly Lamb!

Un poco piu mosso e declam

1. Way up on the moun-tain top,
2. Up on the moun- tain, my Lord spoke;

f Tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it,

piu cresc. e marcato

My Lord spoke and the char - iot stop!
Out his mouth came fire and smoke!

tell it, tell it, tell it, tell it!

sff

sff

FIGURE 57 - "Father Abraham" - Dett's arrangement from *Negro Spirituals*¹⁶

¹⁶ Dett, ed. *Negro Spirituals*. London: Blandford Press, 1959 p. 61.

The refrain of the spiritual (rising and falling triad) is canonically interpolated, unaccompanied in Ab minor, a third relation away from the F minor main key. The change from massive to bare texture is striking. These two elements alternate through distant keys through the first fifteen measures, until a cadenza, sweeping up the keyboard, leads to the first statement of the Hebrew melody in m. 18.

Interestingly, the Hebrew melody is presented first in Ab major, not in its original key of F minor. Only the first phrase appears, in imitative fashion, through four voices, soprano to bass. The tonic, dominant, tonic, dominant entrances mimic a fugal exposition. These statements are immediately followed by the figure in inversion, leading back to the tonic. Now in m. 27, *piu espressivo*, the melody appears in its original form in Ab minor, the second phrase presented in an answering voice. The third phrase is suggested by its rhythm but not its shape. The unadorned, almost severe, counterpoint, frequent rests, and approach to distant E minor give a rather tentative, questioning feeling. The impression is of a kind of exposition and working out of the elements of "Leoni."

This is suddenly interrupted by the reappearance of massive chords in m. 36. Now the rising/falling triad of the spiritual, a heavy staccato version of "Leoni," and "Tell It!" chords are tossed around the keyboard in a kaleidoscope of keys. More canonic writing and another cadenza sweep moves to a "Leoni" statement in the original key of F minor (a kind of reverse development — the original version of an idea occurs after its working out). The *maestoso* ending returns followed by more flourishes. An arresting series of octatonic chords marches up the keyboard, then closing strongly in F major.

No. 2 “Desert Interlude”

Larghetto patetico

A minor

Opening – Fig. 58¹⁷

For “Desert Interlude,” Dett again quotes Genesis on the title page:

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread
and a bottle of water, and
gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder and the child,
and sent her away. And
she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

Genesis 21:14

Followed by his own remarks:

DESERT INTERLUDE therefore, deals with that short period of time, wherein the banished Hagar, clasping the hand of Ishmael, her son, stood wonderingly, and despairingly in the desert, lost in dark contemplation.

The loaf of bread was almost gone, and the water "was spent in the bottle." The heat of the wilderness, each moment grew more oppressive. -- What nostalgic thoughts of the home from which she lately had been thrust, --- what fears for the immediate future ---what maternal dread for the fate of her child, filled her breast!

What should she do? Was there no hope? Had God, even as Abraham, forsaken her?¹⁸

The choice of this Biblical episode is very significant. First, as noted before, in some traditions Hagar is considered to be a mother to the Africans, giving rise to the expression “Aunt Hagar’s chillun.”¹⁹ Second, even though Abraham had rejected her, God had raised from her a great nation — this focus on the African nation is continued in the penultimate movement, “Other Sheep.” That Hagar was Sarai’s²⁰ slave could not have been lost on Dett. He may also have been thinking of the dreadful Atlantic crossings of the slave trading ships in his words

about Hagar's nostalgia for home and her fear.

¹⁷ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

¹⁸ Dett, *Collected Piano Works*, 165.

¹⁹ Geneva Smitherman, *Black talk*, 57.

²⁰ First Biblical name for Abraham’s wife, later Sarah.

DESERT INTERLUDE

2

Larghetto patetico ♩ = 88

The first system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a series of eighth notes, starting on G4 and moving up to B4, with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The left hand (bass clef) provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes, including a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The system concludes with a dynamic marking of *p*.

The second system continues the piece. The right hand (treble clef) maintains the melodic line, now including a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The left hand (bass clef) continues with its accompaniment, featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The system concludes with a dynamic marking of *p*.

The third system shows the final part of the piece. The right hand (treble clef) has a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand (bass clef) has a triplet of eighth notes. A *cresc.* (crescendo) marking is present in the second measure. The system concludes with a dynamic marking of *p*.

FIGURE 58 - "Desert Interlude"

Dett's great melodic gift shines in this movement in A minor, marked *Larghetto patetico*.

The Dorian inflected melody is accompanied by a swaying left-hand figure of bass notes and chords. Movement and rhythm are always present in Dett's music, as in Negro spirituals. Simpson's remark on its "French flavor"²¹ is perhaps suggested by harmonies such as the major sevenths at the end of the first two phrases, which are vaguely reminiscent of the "Gymnopédies" by Erik Satie (1866-1925). Dett's harmonies are considerably more sophisticated, however. The opening two four-bar phrases are answered by two short phrases with blues-like alternation of D major and G dominant sevenths. Long, melismatic phrases from mm. 13-21, with sinuous tessituras of wide range, contribute to the Middle Eastern, Islamic, flavor. They suggest a performance on a reed instrument. The widely modulating harmonic progressions wonderfully express Hagar's wandering. A quiet close to the first section in slow parallel fifths over a deep bass uses a large keyboard range to musically convey a vast desert landscape.

A contrasting section follows in densely-moving eighth notes in four-part texture, imitating choral writing. A pair of phrases is repeated a fourth higher, the melody continues its rise over the accompaniment of the opening, culminating in a particularly pathetic phrase using the "barbaric" second (m. 37). This ingeniously dovetails into bits of the opening phrases. A long flowing descent from mm. 49-53 in Dorian mode closes into the same fifths that end the first section.

This movement is Dett at his finest. Idiomatic keyboard writing, unusual chord progressions that are always natural, never forced, and haunting melodic lines show his distinct personal style. The craftsmanship is first-rate.

²¹ Simpson, 398.

No. 3 "As His Own Soul"
Moderato semplice quasi volkslied
 Gb major
 Opening – Fig. 59²²

Dett's Biblical excerpt:²³

And it came to pass....that the
 soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and
 Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

1 Samuel 18:1

There is a letter from Dett to one Private R. A. Wilson of July 6, 1943 (three months before Dett's death), in which Dett handwrites the opening theme of "As His Own Soul." In the letter he writes "Above is the first line of 'As His Own Soul' from my new suite, *Bible Vignettes*. At present this is my favorite number. However very soon it may not be."²⁴

"As His Own Soul" is dedicated "To the memory of Carl." Simpson mentions Dett's friend, pianist and composer Carl Diton, as a possible dedicatee but dismisses the idea since Diton died in 1962, nineteen years after Dett.²⁵ A more likely possibility is George Carl Hastings, Dett's second piano professor at Oberlin. Dett's poem, "The Rubinstein Staccato Etude," was also dedicated to Hastings, more than thirty years earlier. Hastings had studied in Leipzig (as had many of the Dett's Oberlin teachers), and probably knew German well, perhaps prompting the "*volkslied*" indication. Then again, the identity of the dedication may be a mystery.

²² *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

²³ Dett, *Collected Piano Works*, 161.

²⁴ R. Nathaniel Dett, Letter to Private R. A. Wilson, R. Nathaniel Dett Collection in Niagara Falls New York Public Library, cat. no. S2-144.

²⁵ Simpson, 399.

AS HIS OWN SOUL

3

Moderato semplice quasi volkslied ♩ = 84

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time, with a tempo of Moderato semplice quasi volkslied and a quarter note equal to 84 beats per minute. The key signature has four flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat). The score is divided into three systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a melody in the treble staff with slurs and accents, and a bass line with eighth-note patterns. The second system includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system features two instances of a crescendo (*cresc.*) and concludes with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The piece is marked with various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

FIGURE 59 - "As His Own Soul"

"As His Own Soul" is an A-B-A song form, with a simple melody (as Dett indicates), and uses a harmonic language that is more retrospective, using little of Dett's more modernistic traits. The keyboard writing is in the Russian style of Rachmaninoff and early Scriabin. The key is the quintessential Romantic pianistic tonality of Gb major, with the B section in the relative minor, Eb. The melody is unassuming, its anapest rhythms suggest a poetic setting, and its falling lines are gentle and caressing. The short-short-long phrase sequence fits with the "volkslied" idea. The long phrases are melismatic, especially in mm. 13-15. The interplay between the accompaniment and the melody is especially effective, the left hand engaging in short canonic imitations in mm. 1 and 3. Unobtrusive chromatic inflections enrich the almost complete diatonicism of the melody. Dett's expertise in choral writing shows well in this movement.

The B section is plaintive in the relative minor and more chordal. Blues-like voice leading in lower voices gives color in m. 21. The four short phrases are repeated first in an upper register, then lower with Rachmaninoff-like sixteenth-note chromatic flourishes in the left hand. This rich accompaniment continues under the restatement of the A section, now in octaves, and again with imitations in the left hand in mm. 34 and 36. A climax is reached, extending the final phrase of the melody, in mm. 40-46, marked *passione*, with widely-spaced keyboard textures and chromatic progressions including an approach to C major. A coda takes up pieces of the melody now laden with lowered chromatic notes notated with many double flats; stubbornly refusing to enharmonically change key. Blissful pentatonic wisps and a plagal cadence end this most heartfelt piece. Its contrapuntal richness and interplay beautifully evoke the "knitting" of the text.

No. 4 “Barcarolle of Tears”

Andante

C minor

Opening – Fig. 60²⁶

This is the only movement that Dett has not chosen to relate to a particular Biblical verse. Its extreme contrasts in mood and texture, and more modern style, point to an intensely personal expression. It contrasts with the preceding piece in almost every way possible. A bare, unaccompanied line, swaying in 6/4 rhythm, opens the piece and returns transposed at various points, like an obsessive ostinato or vamp. After the lush writing of “As His Own Soul,” its starkness is arresting, with the sadness of “Desert Interlude” but without any of its sensuality. This line alternates with a mournful, cantabile melody in thirds, making prominent use of augmented seconds. The texture is chorale-like four-part harmony. After the second appearance of the ostinato (m. 12) there is more imitative counterpoint (mm. 16-17). An outburst ensues in mm. 24-25 with full chords and octaves now reaching C major, like a release of repressed emotion. Parallel half-diminished seventh and ninth chords, marked *disperato*, lead to the ostinato once more.

The meter now shifts to 4/4 with the same two beats per measure. A left-hand solo builds, almost atonally, to a majestic statement of full C major seventh chords over a C pedal, marked *con decisione e devozione*. The sudden appearance of organ-like sonorities is like a vision, a prophetic statement of deliverance, reminiscent of “His Song” from *In the Bottoms*. Like the earlier piece, however, it rises only to crash in despair on a half-diminished seventh chord with a rumbling trill in the deep bass. The ostinato returns, scored more richly this time, though, leading through parallel chords to the theme in thirds in A minor (m. 60). A final questioning C minor statement is followed by a fermata, and then a magical, plagally colored

²⁶ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

cadence in C major. A richly textured Bb seventh chord in second inversion (bass F) is followed by a deep C major sixth. Bell-like slow arpeggios ascend to the top of the keyboard on each chord. The final arpeggio combines a C open fifth with A minor, the same axis of keys that the “thirds” theme was presented in.

BARCAROLLE OF TEARS

4

1 **Andante** ♩=144

3 *cantabile*

7 *decresc.*

FIGURE 60 - "Barcarolle of Tears"

This movement expresses deep sadness, hope, despair, and peaceful deliverance. Probably its only parallels in feeling are the *Threnody* pieces of the third year of *Années de Pèlerinage*. Perhaps, since no particular Biblical reference is present, its nature is autobiographical.

No. 5 "I Am the True Vine"
Con moto, ma espressivo
 Ab major

The next four pieces form the second half of the series, now turning to the New Testament. As Abraham began the Old Testament section, Jesus begins the second half. "I Am the True Vine" is a three-voice fugue. Following are Dett's excerpts:²⁷

I am the true vine, and my Father
 is the husbandman.

John 15:1

I am the vine, ye are the branches:

John 15:5

On the title page of this movement (Fig. 61)²⁸, Dett first quotes the beginning of the subject, showing that it is in fact a setting of a combination of the two verses: "I am the true vine, ye are the branches." He then writes:

Because of the triune conception of the Divinity, this fugue is assigned to three voices; and as in the case of the other actual word quotations, the rhythm and flow of the text decided both the inspiration and the treatment of the theme.²⁹

The symbolism of three is communicated by the meter, three beats per measure and the three voice texture. The shape of the subject also prominently features an augmented triad, which divides the octave into three equal parts. It is not a strict fugue; after the exposition (mm. 1-21),

²⁷ from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library. This title page is not reproduced in the 1996 reprint of the *Collected Works*.

²⁸ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

²⁹ from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library, cat. no., 170.

the subject only appears in its original form twice more, in mm. 26 and 58. Rather, elements of the subject and countersubject are manipulated and developed separately, using various inversions, strettos, and combinations of the shape of one element with the rhythm of another.

I Am The True Vine 5

LEGEND:

I am the true vine, and my Father
is the husbandman.
--- John XV - 1

I am the vine, ye are the branches:
--- John XV - 5



Because of the triune conception of the Divinity, this fugue is assigned to three voices; and as in the case of the other actual word quotations, the rhythm and flow of the text decided both the inspiration and the treatment of the theme.

FIGURE 61 - "I am the True Vine" - Fugue subject

The subject is in two parts, corresponding to the phrases in the scripture. It begins on the accented second beat with the word "I." It descends through an Ab triad to its only chromatic note, E, accented now on the downbeat, corresponding with "true." The notes of the descending augmented chord formed by C, Ab and E become the main key areas: C major at m. 26, E (spelled Fb) at m. 46, and returning to Ab at m. 58. The second part of the subject is sequential, including a long-long-short rhythm. The exposition proceeds traditionally, in tonic,

dominant, tonic keys, with the entrances moving up the three voices. The countersubject has an ascending eighth-note scale (m. 9), which becomes pervasive through much of the rest of piece, suggesting the vine.

The climax is reached at m. 50 during a stretto, which begins at m. 46. Keys spelled with double flats, Fb major, Gb minor, Cb major seem to reveal a bit of an academic bent, possibly Dett's desire to be theoretically correct. The only inversion of the opening figure, at m. 54 in Ab minor, feels plaintive, marked *dolce e con espressione*. Confidence is restored with the complete subject at m. 58, heard in the bass in the original key, and the fugue ends gently.

The impression is of simplicity and unassuming gentleness. It is perhaps less compelling and has little of the great color of the surrounding movements, in a narrow keyboard range, with no doublings. Its brevity and unassuming nature connects with a gently confident and peaceful image of Jesus.

No. 6 "Martha Complained"

Larghetto

C minor

Martha is the female biblical character in the second half of *Eight Bible Vignettes*, corresponding with Hagar in the first. Dett writes the following notes and musical setting of the Biblical quotation:

In MARTHA COMPLAINED, the ground bass represents the monotonous drudgery of work and the high-pitched melody, Martha's dissatisfaction with it. Her feelings become more and more tense until finally, in her impatience, she breaks a dish (an imaginative incident represented by the arpeggiated dissonant chord: [Dett writes out the ten-note chord, played hand over hand to the top of the keyboard] and this proves to be the last straw. She goes straight to the Master:

"Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?
Bid her therefore come and help me, - bid her therefore come and help me."

Luke 10:40

But Jesus reproves her:

"Martha, Martha, Martha,
 You are careful and troubled about many things:
 But one thing is needful:
 And Mary hath chosen that good part,
 Which shall not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:41-42

To which it is easy to conceive the celestial choir responding: - AMEN
 Martha returns to her duties and upon reflection (it is the composer's thought)
 a change takes place in her feelings; the music changes from minor to major,
 indicating that something of light has passed into her soul.³⁰

Dett's ground bass is a widely-spaced arpeggio, repeated as an ostinato (Fig. 62)³¹.

Triplets in 12/8 create a swaying motion but with the downbeats missing, giving a hesitant feeling. A figure which sighs Bb to A, in C minor, is repeated endlessly, expressing the drudgery Dett describes in his notes. The melody is high above, using the blues scale, ascending and descending over a large range. The arabesques of the melody are both vaguely middle-Eastern and Chopinesque. The keyboard texture is very much like a Chopin nocturne. A brief modulation to the subdominant in m. 15 again suggests the Blues. An improvisatory section interrupts the motion from mm. 23-39. An ascending passage with major thirds interlocking with a chromatic scale, creating whole-tone harmonies, is a bit reminiscent of Gershwin (Fig. 63)³². The ostinato returns in mm. 40, interrupted by the "broken dish" chord, a sudden percussive sonority with no relation to what preceded (Fig. 64)³³.

³⁰ from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library. This title page is not reproduced in the 1996 reprint of the *Collected Works*.

³¹ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

MARTHA COMPLAINED

6

Larghetto $\text{♩} = 72-80$

The musical score is written for piano in 12/8 time, featuring a bass line and a treble line. The key signature has two flats. The score is divided into four systems, each with two staves. The first system includes the tempo marking 'Larghetto' and a quarter note equal to 72-80. The first measure of the first system is marked 'mp'. The second system includes the markings 'con espress.', 'pochiss. rit.', and 'a tempo'. The third system includes a fermata over the first measure of the treble staff. The fourth system includes a fermata over the first measure of the treble staff and a '2' marking above the second measure of the bass staff, indicating a second ending.

mp

con espress.

pochiss. rit. *a tempo*

2

2

FIGURE 62 - "Martha Complained" - Opening

FIGURE 63 - "Martha Complained" mm. 25-26

FIGURE 64 - "Martha Complained" - Broken dish chord

The scripture setting follows, in recitative style (Dett marks *parlando molto*). After a fermata on a half-diminished seventh chord (by now the listener associates this sonority with Martha), Jesus answers; *Largo, pianissimo* and *molto espressivo*. Solemn parallel second-inversion chords give a bit of an African touch to the sound. The descending whole-tone scale in mm. 64, as well as the chord voicings, in right-hand ninths and left-hand tenths, in mm. 72-74, are remarkable, showing Dett's wonderful ear for pianistic sonority (see Fig. 65 for Dett's setting)³⁴.

Martha's drudgery returns in m. 78 after the *velato* "Amen" of the "celestial choir," but now marked *un poco piu teneramente*. An unusual modulation through Bb minor and A minor

³⁴ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

leads to Martha's music in C Major, now *con molt' espressione*. A beautiful alto line from mm. 91-95 closes on a C ninth chord with descending bell-like fifths and fourths answering. This sound mirrors the end of "Barcarolle of Tears," expressing redemption and "light entering the soul."

Martha Complained

6

She goes straight to the Master:

Lord, dost Though not care that my

sis-ter has left me to serve a - lone? Bid her there-fore come and

help me, bid her there - fore come and help me.

But Jesus reproves her:

Mar- tha, Mar - tha, Mar- tha, You are

care-ful and trou-bled a-bout man-y things: But one thing is need-ful: And

Ma-ry hath cho_sen that good part, which shall not be tak-en a - way from her.

FIGURE 65 - "Martha Complained" - Dett's text setting

No. 7 "Other Sheep"
Largo - poco allegro
 G minor

This is the most extended and complex of all the movements and is in some ways the focal point, both musically and spiritually. It could be said to be the externalization of Dett's personal feelings, expressed in "As His Own Soul," to a statement about the reconciliation of all races as the members of one "fold," Dett's ideal. It also connects with and continues the sound as well as the story of Hagar from "Desert Interlude."

The keyboard writing is stark and orchestral, counterpoint is almost everywhere, and Chopin has gone away for good. The concentration on the sound of fifths, fourths, and octaves, as opposed to thirds and sixths, reflect Dett's knowledge of African music. The general effect is noble severity; uncompromising, majestic, and intensely beautiful in its otherness.

The John quote and Dett's notes.³⁵

And other sheep I have, which
 are not of this fold: them also
 I must bring,

John 10:16

That there were other groups besides the "chosen people" to whom the Messianic message should be brought, is evidenced by the pronouncement of the Master Who these might be, we do not know, but it is reasonable to suppose that they were outside the pale of the Twelve Tribes.

The melody used for representation is one of many given the writer several years ago by a former pupil Mr. Dahklama Simango, a native African; and was chosen because it seemed to possess a certain yearning quality suitable for the portrayal of the feelings of those who "longed for light".

The whole piece is a large two-part form, of which the first section is a set of variations, and the second section, (*Poco Allegro*), a sonata-allegro with coda.

It is obvious that the opening phrase is an unaccompanied setting of the biblical quotation and as in "Martha Complained," the divine words are followed by an imaginary "Amen" by the celestial choir.³⁶

³⁵ from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library. This title page is not reproduced in the 1996 reprint of the *Collected Works*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

One might add the continuation of the John verse:

and they shall hear my voice; and
there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.³⁷

On the title page Dett writes out his setting of the scripture (Fig. 66)³⁸. The short-long (Scotch snap or Lombard) rhythm that sets "other," as well as falling minor thirds, and augmented seconds, announce its African quality. The tonality is vague, the keyboard texture of single line arresting, after the rich close of "Martha Complained." The following "Amen," again marked "*velato*," features deep parallel fifths in the bass, conjuring a choral sound.

Other Sheep 7

LEGEND:

And other sheep I have, which
are not of this fold: them also
I must bring,

---John x, 16

Oth-er sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them al-so I must bring,

FIGURE 66 - "Other Sheep" - Dett's text setting

³⁷ John 10:16.

³⁸ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

The chant is now heard in a high register, shrill against deep, sonorous chords on open fifths and fourths (Fig. 67)³⁹. These harmonies wander from G into increasing numbers of flats, giving a Phrygian color. The chant itself features a repeated-note figure alternating duples and triplets, a *parlando* quality. The falling second and minor third in its second measure is a figure that Dett will use throughout the entire movement, unifying the variations with the sonata-allegro. The chant has four pentatonic phrases, the second and third of which are similar. The tonal center moves from G to Bb and returns to G, an example of what Western harmony calls a relative major, relative minor relationship — yet another example of this polarity, inherent in the pentatonic mode.

³⁹ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

OTHER SHEEP

7

1 **Largo** ♩=58

f
declamato sed espress.

decresc.
mf

9

rit.

f a tempo

poco rit. a tempo

poco rit.

15

a tempo

poco rit.

a tempo

poco rit.

mf

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a piano piece titled 'Other Sheep' - Opening. It begins at measure 1 with a tempo marking of 'Largo' and a metronome marking of ♩=58. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The first system (measures 1-8) starts with a forte (f) dynamic and a 'declamato sed espress.' instruction. The right hand plays a melodic line with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 4. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 4. A 'decresc.' (decrescendo) instruction leads to a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic in measure 6. The second system (measures 9-14) begins with a 'rit.' (ritardando) instruction. It features a series of triplet eighth notes in the right hand, alternating with 'f a tempo' and 'poco rit. a tempo' markings. The left hand continues with chords and triplets. The third system (measures 15-18) continues the triplet patterns in the right hand, with 'a tempo' and 'poco rit.' markings. It concludes with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic in measure 18.

FIGURE 67 - "Other Sheep" - Opening

The variations proceed in a four-part texture with the chant moving to various voices, first the bass (variation 1), alto (variation 3), and tenor (variation 5). The accompanying voices take up the duple-triple alternation in rhythmic counterpoint beginning in variation 2, creating increasing complexity and pianistic difficulty. This has the effect of more voices joining in their own chant variations, creating polyrhythms in African fashion, and gathering intensity. Dett stays within the G minor tonality with touches of expressive chromaticism.

Prominent features in the variations include the low tenor chant and wailing right-hand octaves in variation 5, and parallel fifths in variation 7. Variation 8, marked "*Maggiore, dolce cantabile*," provides a respite, although its functional harmony and thirds are strangely jarring. Perhaps Coleridge-Taylor makes a final appearance here.

Variation 10 (beginning in m. 90) is like a fantasy, its powerful keyboard writing utilizing full chords and double octaves. Dett separates out the chant's two elements, repeating the falling second-minor third figure in diminutions in mm. 98, 100 and 104. Rising parallel whole-tone harmonies begin in m. 97, introducing a Dett stylistic trait from modern European harmony. The final variation, *Tempo primo*, m. 108, returns to the chant, now with parallel ninth chords. A downward Ab major scale, mirroring the Phrygian aspect of Dett's harmonies, flourishes into *Poco allegro*.

The sonata-allegro form beginning at m. 123 is brief, tersely written, and suggests African drumming (Fig. 68)⁴⁰. A left-hand eighth-note ostinato rocks between two notes of a drone fifth in 2/4. The right hand plays fourths and fifths in a call-like figure derived from the beginning accompaniment to the chant, while drumming out a syncopated note. At m. 135 the left hand continues the eighth-note motion using the three-note descending figure from the

⁴⁰ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

chant, rhythmically across the beat, punctuated by right-hand fifths. The short second-theme group is an unadorned line played by both hands in unison, making use of the three-note descending figure of the chant. It is chant-like with an undefined tonality. A group of sixteenth notes in m. 166 is developed later.

123 **Poco allegro** ♩=100

mp *non legato* *mp* *p non legato*

131 *non legato*

cresc. *mf*

136

mp

FIGURE 68 - "Other Sheep" – Allegro

The development, beginning in m. 177, uses the opening allegro material in various keys, building to the return of the chant in the guise of its tenth variation, with *ponderoso* octaves and chords. It continues to gain power until fifteen successive *sforzando* octaves and chords climax with the chant hammered out in fury (m. 211). The music then becomes more reflective until the second theme is heard again, followed by a coda. The drumming ostinato is in the deep bass, while brusque right-hand statements build, using the sixteenth-note figure from the second theme, up to the top of the keyboard, *strepitoso*. Seven measures of rapid chords with Lydian touches, recalling the short-long snap of the opening scripture setting, close the movement powerfully.

Dett's structure imaginatively unifies the variations and sonata-allegro with common elements in a movement of strong contrasts and power. The return of one of the variations in the development section of the sonata-allegro hints at the formal ambiguity exploited in the Romantic period by Liszt and others. The chant melody, plaintive and wild, combines with the rhythmic drive of the allegro to create a compelling portrait of virility and stark beauty.

No. 8 "Madrigal Divine"
Moderato, molto tranquillo
 C major

Entire movement with the author's setting of the text – Fig. 70-72⁴¹

Dett places the text of Psalm 23 on the title page,⁴² then writes:

In designating this piece a "Madrigal" the earliest significance of the idea of a madrigal was followed: etymology tracing the origin to a word meaning "a shepherd's song."

⁴¹ *Eight Bible Vignettes*, used by permission of EMI Mills Music, Inc. and Alfred Music.

⁴² from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library. This page is not reproduced in the 1996 reprint of the *Collected Works*.

The melodic development simply follows the flow and rhythm of the text; the cadencing phrase of the first section is echoed instrumentally, and there is also a short instrumental interlude prefacing the return of the first idea, which idea then appears at the octave.

Dissonant harmonies over a ground bass simulate the ringing of church bells; especially at the climax, this idea should be treated accordingly.⁴³

Dett has chosen the title to continue the "flock" idea of "Other Sheep."

The piece is essentially a setting of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd." The ground bass is simply an alternation of tonic-dominant on beats 2, 3, 4 of a four beat measure, in the deep register of the piano. The absence of downbeats creates a gentle motion, suggesting both the swaying of large bells and the swaying movements of a choir. The setting is a melody over parallel dissonant chords, all on white keys. This pan-diatonicism extends through the setting of the first three verses (mm. 1-14). The chords contain many seconds and are often spread over ninths (mm. 1-4) and tenths (m. 7). The necessity of projecting the top-note melody over such large stretches presents a challenge for the player. Arpeggiating the chords is an option, but would lessen the slightly percussive bell-like effect that Dett requests in his notes. As mentioned earlier, the texture of parallel dissonant chords over fifths in the bass is remarkably similar to Balfour Gardiner's "Prelude – de Profundis," which Dett likely heard Grainger play on his recital programs (Fig. 69).

The setting of "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His names sake" is set in recitative style with repeated notes. This phrase is repeated, *sotto voce*, in a lower register. Dett's use of recitatives throughout the *Bible Vignettes* is remarkable and unusual, recalling his choral setting of *Ave Maria* as well as Liszt's late piano works.

⁴³ from the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection, Niagara Falls, New York, Public Library. This title page is not reproduced in the 1996 reprint of the *Collected Works*.

Verse four, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. . .," is set in a more melodic texture, accompanied with left-hand thirds, sixths and occasional arpeggios. Its chant-like melody, containing many repeated notes, rises plaintively through a ninth from E to F#; Dett marks *piu crescendo* three times. The phrase peak on "Art with me" is echoed in call-response fashion. "Thy rod, thy staff" is troubled, with a pathetic augmented second in mm. 23-24. "Comfort" descends peacefully through a D major seventh.

Verse five builds majestically over a G pedal point, with the white-key pan-diatonicism returning. Strong accents on "enemies" could be Dett's personal defiance of the many who had criticized him unfairly though his life. "Runneth over" is a slide of downward triads, in exuberant Gospel music style. This section should be powerfully played, with true *emportée* feeling. The short interlude that Dett mentions (mm. 36-37) is a series of staccato bell chords, gently descending; also in Gospel style.

Verse six, *grandioso*, returns to the parallel chords of the opening, with some whole-tone touches. The left hand carries the swaying motion of the beginning with rich white-key chords. The final sentence, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," *molto marcato e crescendo*, melodically rises over a descending bass. The climax, on "forever," is reached with parallel whole-tone ninth chords, the whole-tone color expresses boundlessness, reaching for something unattainable. The parallel chords gradually descend while the bass rises, all in whole tones, until settling on a Bb major chord (m. 47). This passage is like Dett's other prophetic visions, only instead of being answered with resignation and despair, the piece closes with three long "Amen's," all in white-key harmonies, over the opening ground bass. A majestic C major arpeggio eloquently ends this magnificent work, and Dett's vision of reconciliation and the promise of a new era. The symbolism of the number eight as superabundance and new beginning is completed.

Prelude (De Profundis.)

H. Balfour Gardiner

Slow.

p

4

FIGURE 69 - Balfour Gardiner's "Prelude de Profundis"

MADRIGAL DIVINE

8

Moderato, molto tranquillo

The Lord is my shep - herd I shall not want He

5 mak - eth me to lie down in green past - ures He lead - eth me be side the still

8 wa - ters He re - stor - eth my soul He leads me in the paths of right-ous-ness for his

12 name's sake He leads me in the paths of right-ous-ness for his name's sake Yea though I

16 walk through the val-ley of the sha-dow of death I will fear no

mp

p

cresc.

mf

mp

sotto voce

rit.

a tempo

mf

FIGURE 70 - "Madrigal Divine" page 1

20 ev - il For thou art with me (art with me) Thy

quasi echo mf

23 rod thy staff they com fort

con espress. decresc.

27 me Thou pre - par - est a Ta - ble be - fore me In the pre - sence of mine

p

32 en - e - mies Thou anoint - est my head with oil My

L.H. R.H. piu cresc. L.H.

34 cup run eth ov - er

f poco rit. a tempo p poco rit.

FIGURE 71 - "Madrigal Divine" page 2

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

Musical history is not kind to figures that fall outside preconceived ideas of musical periods, styles, and meanings. The following are some of the reasons why Dett's music is difficult to categorize.

Dett was a composer with deep roots in Germanic Romanticism. His studies at Oberlin with professors who were mostly trained in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century made sure of that. Dominique-René de Lerma reminds us that the United States was close to Germany, in politics and culture, until the First World War.¹ Until the advent of Nadia Boulanger, American composers were either trained in Germany or by other musicians who were. Dett's suites were written between 1912 and 1943, a time in which the prominence of German culture in the United States was on the wane and a new modernism rapidly replaced Romanticism. Even Dett's experiments with new musical styles in his third period were much milder than many other compositions written in the 1930's and 40's. Compared with the leading composers of that period, Dett's style was 'behind the curve.' Tonality is always firmly established, except in one or two movements of *Tropic Winter*, and melody, rhythm and harmony are always the prominent elements of Dett's style.

Dett composed at the end of an era in which the piano was a central element of middle class life. The 'bread and butter' of publishers was music written for the amateurs who played the piano in their homes. Therefore, much of his piano music does not make demands on the player that exceed the abilities of a good amateur. Today we live in a world of the proliferation of piano competitions. These require players to surmount an ever rising bar of prestidigitation

¹ de Lerma, *Reflections*, 15.

and dazzling virtuosity, in increasingly, almost ridiculously, short amounts of time. Little, if any, of Dett's music is suitable to this world. It is not technically demanding enough and too subjective to be successful in competitions.

Dett is a composer of African descent who did not embrace jazz. In fact, when offered a commission from Carl Engel of the Library of Congress to compose a work for piano, violin, saxophone, and banjo, Dett refused. In an exchange of letters, Dett explained that

the instruments you suggested have never been approved by the Negro church as an institution. The fact that the Negro church has dominated Negro life almost entirely would make the use of the instruments which you suggest incongruous to the expression you seem to wish...The best class of Negro music, which is represented by the spirituals, could never in the Negro mind be interpreted on a banjo or a saxophone, which...were instruments of the devil....the associations of the saxophone have not been regarded as respectable...²

Later, while teaching at Bennett, Dett took a poll of chorus students about whether spirituals should be "swung." The students reported that they liked swing music but not in spirituals. After hearing a popular quartet sing on the radio one student wrote "I like the music, but I don't like the way it was sung; it does not have musical value. I think it lowers the spirituals," and "I do not care particularly for these spirituals; a rather low element seems to have entered in . . . these are not close to the spirit of the old spiritual." Dett obviously agreed with the students' opinions.³

Besides these somewhat superficial issues, there are more fundamental conflicts surrounding Dett's music. A good case could be made for Dett's music as the most perfect answer to Dvořák's exhortation for American composers to find their own voice by uplifting their own folk music. After Harry Burleigh introduced Negro melodies to Dvořák, Dvořák challenged American composers to overcome their feelings of cultural inferiority by using these

² de Lerma, Preface to the *Collected Works*, 6.

³ Simpson, 240-241.

melodies as a basis for composition, using European traditional models.⁴ However, there was vast difference in the amount, and type, of resistance that Dvořák had to face in his effort to uplift the folk music of his native Bohemia and what Dett had to face. It was not so difficult for Dvořák, Liszt, Brahms, Glinka, Mussorgsky, among many others, to find acceptance for their use of ethnic music for the basis of their compositions. Dett experienced intense conflict from many sides, because of the long and difficult history of race relations in the United States. Many prominent American musical figures thought that Negro melodies were not appropriate for a school of composition. Any composer who would contradict that opinion and

wishes to elevate steel band tunes or *Mood Indigo* [or Negro spirituals]..must have the freedom to do as he wishes. If he fails (and he would then be judged by European aesthetics) or not, he should be ready to be called an exploiter if he is White, or an Uncle Tom if he is Black.⁵

In *Racial Uplift and American Music: 1878-1943*, Lawrence Schenbeck suggests that a main reason for Dett's goals of the casting of Negro music in European forms, was to appeal to white audiences, taking "full advantage of continuing white nostalgia for the spirituals and also [linking] them to 'universal' (i.e., European) musical discourse."⁶ He places Dett, along with Du Bois, in the racial uplift ideology of the time. "Both Dett and Du Bois, as black-elite leaders, cultivated significant relationships with white patrons, allies, and co-workers in the 'kingdom of culture . . .'", "both demonstrably remained faithful to the core ideals they had embraced as members of what Du Bois famously termed the Talented Tenth."⁷

Indeed, in his essay "Negro Music" Dett remarks:

Though one who makes pencil sketches on paper may achieve results every bit as perfect in their way as another who chisels similar figures from marble, there

⁴ de Lerma, *Reflections*, 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ Lawrence Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878-1943* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 115.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

is little doubt as to which artist's name will be written higher in the hall of fame.⁸

Therefore one of Dett's goals was with the upliftment of his material to form large musical works, just as it has been for countless composers throughout musical history.

Schenbeck connects this desire with:

Targeting sympathetic, educated whites and presenting oneself as part of the 'better class' of Negroes was an inescapable component in the constellation of uplift-centered practices that any reasonably clever person in that position had to employ. Dett was very good at it.⁹

There certainly is much in Dett's music that appeals to "sympathetic, educated whites," however it is the opinion of the author that the suggestion that this arises from cleverness and a "psychic investment in the integration fantasy,"¹⁰ conflicts with Dett's stated mission and emphasis on artistic sincerity. Numerous critics commented on the directness and sincerity of his performances, both as pianist and choral leader. Motives of artifice are belied by Dett's rejection of the easy popularity of writing music in the current ragtime style of his time and the personal messages and ideas in many of his piano works. This appraisal of Dett's motivations as recently as 2012 show how difficult it is, even now, to appreciate this music on its own terms, apart from the tragic history of race relationships in America.

Some of Dett's fiercest critics were musicians who greatly admired spirituals but wanted them preserved in their original form. They disapproved of the reworking of spirituals into choral motets or their use as the basis for composed art music. The following review of Dett's *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro: as Sung at Hampton Institute* by George Pullen Jackson reflects a common view ". . . tunes are musicianly handled - perhaps too musicianly, for with their inappropriate and over-generous Italian expression, directions, and other artifices, one

⁸ Dett "Negro Music," 128.

⁹ Schenbeck, 109.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

sees that they are polished up for the technically refined concert stage . . ." ¹¹ Jon Cruz in *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation*, explains the importance of spirituals in the development of American preservationism and ethnosympathy. He traces the history of their discovery by White America before the Civil War, their transformation into a cultural weapon in the service of Abolitionism, and their becoming an artifact. ¹² When something becomes an artifact a debate begins to take place concerning whether it should be absolutely preserved in its original state, or whether it may be used as a basis for a new creation.

Coincidentally, or perhaps not, the first half of the twentieth century was also the apex of a sort of preservation movement in European music. A canon of great works of classical music, predictably mostly German, was elevated to the status of unchangeable artifact, ignoring the traditions of improvisation and arrangement that were current at the time of their composition.

Spirituals became not only artifacts, but symbols in the highly charged atmosphere of race relations in the United States. Consequently they were often either revered as unchangeable creations of beauty by preservationists, or corrupted in the most demeaning way by blackface minstrel groups. This polarized environment is the one that Dett created in, making him subject to much more artistic conflict than Dvořák.

For example, in the European tour of the Hampton choir, disagreements arose about the presentation and repertoire for the concerts. Following the choir's return, Dett wrote an

¹¹ review by George Pullen Jackson, quoted in McBrier, 52.

¹² Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation*, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 24.

article for *The Crisis*,¹³ recounting the tremendous success of the European concerts. *The Crisis* responded in an editorial criticizing the

deliberate omission of the racial unpleasantries encountered in Europe by the choir.. rather poor reporting, of which the unconscious motive was the wrong kind of race pride. But..he shows certain race prejudices, so characteristic of the "fine type" American Negro, full of Goodness, Truth and Beauty, that his mental processes form ideal illustrations of just what I mean.¹⁴

Significantly, the editorial also complained that there were not enough spirituals on Dett's programs. Dett's object was that the Hampton choir could show European audiences that an African-American group could perform at the same level as the finest choirs in the world. Therefore his program tended to include more works from the classical repertoire rather than spirituals. Even *The Crisis* had difficulty understanding this mission. This conflict was likely a contributing factor to his dismissal from Hampton the year following the tour.

There is a troubling subtext to the preservationist attitude toward spirituals and Negro folk music. The underlying message is that "Negro" choirs (and by extension all African-American musicians) should stick to their own music, and not arrange it in too complex a fashion or use it as the basis for anything more. Dett put himself in the center of this conflict, and paid dearly with the loss of his position at Hampton after nineteen years of service.

Through all these trials, by all accounts, Dett remained an eloquent and dignified personality, greatly loved by his students and colleagues. His piano music, especially, reflects a great humanitarian, with lofty ideas about reconciliation and the unity of humankind, in keeping with his Rosicrucian beliefs. If he had continued writing more pieces like the early *After the Cakewalk* and *Cave of the Winds*, he would have avoided many of these conflicts and stayed within the box in which societal conditions placed him. However, his goals, both as a musician,

¹³ Journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

¹⁴ quoted in Simpson, 198-199.

and as a person, were much higher. To interpret his music, the most important thing is to understand something of these qualities. Knowledge of spirituals, the social conditions of his time, and Black history is important, but at the root, Dett's music is an expression of his personality, his dignity, his playfulness, his sorrows, his triumphs, and his hopes for a better world.

A great deal has been written about Dett, his importance to Black history, American musical history, and about his writings about spirituals. It is now high time for the categories to be broken, for Dett's music to be heard, and appreciated as the personal expression of a great human being.

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APPENDIX A

"THE DREAM"

John Donne

DEAR love, for nothing less than thee
Would I have broke this happy dream ;
It was a theme
For reason, much too strong for fantasy.
Therefore thou waked'st me wisely ; yet
My dream thou brokest not, but continued'st it.
Thou art so true that thoughts of thee suffice
To make dreams truths, and fables histories ;
Enter these arms, for since thou thought'st it best,
Not to dream all my dream, let's act the rest.

As lightning, or a taper's light,
Thine eyes, and not thy noise waked me ;
Yet I thought thee
—For thou lovest truth—an angel, at first sight ;
But when I saw thou saw'st my heart,
And knew'st my thoughts beyond an angel's art,
When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st when
Excess of joy would wake me, and camest then,
I must confess, it could not choose but be
Profane, to think thee anything but thee.

Coming and staying show'd thee, thee,
But rising makes me doubt, that now
Thou art not thou.
That love is weak where fear's as strong as he ;
'Tis not all spirit, pure and brave,
If mixture it of fear, shame, honour have ;
Perchance as torches, which must ready be,
Men light and put out, so thou deal'st with me ;
Thou camest to kindle, go'st to come ; then I
Will dream that hope again, but else would die.

APPENDIX B

GITANJALI (second poem)

Rabindranath Tagore

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.

All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony---and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.

I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.

I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.

Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord.

APPENDIX C

"EPIMETHEUS"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Have I dreamed? or was it real,
 What I saw as in a vision,
 When to marches hymeneal
 In the land of the Ideal
 Moved my thought o'er Fields Elysian?

What! are these the guests whose glances
 Seemed like sunshine gleaming round me?
 These the wild, bewildering fancies,
 That with dithyrambic dances
 As with magic circles bound me?

Ah! how cold are their caresses!
 Pallid cheeks, and haggard bosoms!
 Spectral gleam their snow-white dresses,
 And from loose, dishevelled tresses
 Fall the hyacinthine blossoms!

O my songs! whose winsome measures
 Filled my heart with secret rapture!
 Children of my golden leisures!
 Must even your delights and pleasures
 Fade and perish with the capture?

Fair they seemed, those songs sonorous,
 When they came to me unbidden;
 Voices single, and in chorus,
 Like the wild birds singing o'er us
 In the dark of branches hidden.

Disenchantment! Disillusion!
 Must each noble aspiration
 Come at last to this conclusion,
 Jarring discord, wild confusion,
 Lassitude, renunciation?

Not with steeper fall nor faster,
 From the sun's serene dominions,
 Not through brighter realms nor vaster,
 In swift ruin and disaster,

Icarus fell with shattered pinions!

Sweet Pandora! dear Pandora!
Why did mighty Jove create thee
Coy as Thetis, fair as Flora,
Beautiful as young Aurora,
If to win thee is to hate thee?

No, not hate thee! for this feeling
Of unrest and long resistance
Is but passionate appealing,
A prophetic whisper stealing
O'er the chords of our existence.

Him whom thou dost once enamour,
Thou, beloved, never leavest;
In life's discord, strife, and clamor,
Still he feels thy spell of glamour;
Him of Hope thou ne'er bereavest.

Weary hearts by thee are lifted,
Struggling souls by thee are strengthened,
Clouds of fear asunder rifted,
Truth from falsehood cleansed and sifted,
Lives, like days in summer, lengthened!

Therefore art thou ever dearer,
O my Sibyl, my deceiver!
For thou makest each mystery clearer,
And the unattained seems nearer,
When thou fillest my heart with fever!

Muse of all the Gifts and Graces!
Though the fields around us wither,
There are ampler realms and spaces,
Where no foot has left its traces:
Let us turn and wander thither!

APPENDIX D

DETT'S CONCERT REPERTOIRE

DETT'S OWN WORKS:

1925 at ceremony after election as president of National Association of Negro Musicians - Song of the Shrine, Barcarolle

Inspiration Waltzes, Cave of the winds - ca. 1903 at Halsted Conservatory

Magnolia (sometimes without Deserted Cabin)

In the Bottoms (often Barcarolle and Dance-Juba only)

Enchantment (often without last movement or only Song of the Shrine)

Sonata in E minor - Moderato Nobile (1924, 1925)

Cinnamon Grove (1931, 1935)

Dett often performed his own piano works along with his choral works, also joint recitals with Charles Flax, Baritone

WORKS BY OTHER COMPOSERS:

J. S. Bach - Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother, 1935

J. S. Bach-F. Liszt - Fantasia and Fugue G minor 1935

Beethoven, Sonata op. 10, no 2 - ca. 1903 at Halsted Conservatory

Beethoven, Sonata op. 31, no. 2 Adagio only - ca. 1908 at Oberlin, 1935

MacDowell - Sea Pieces - ca. 1903 at Halsted Conservatory

Chopin - Nocturne op. 37, no 1 - ca. 1903 at Halsted Conservatory

Chopin - Nocturne C minor - 1926 at Hampton

Chopin - Waltz Op. 64, no 2 - 1926 at Hampton

Chopin Op. 25, no 3, Op. 10, no 4, ca. 1908 at Oberlin

Chopin Ballade in G minor - 1908 at Oberlin

Mendelssohn Hunting Song - ca. 1903 at Halsted Conservatory

Schumann - Aufschwung - ca. 1903 at Halsted Conservatory, 1926 at Hampton

Schumann - Whims - at Hampton 1926

Brahms - Rhapsodie in B minor - 1935

Grieg - Nocturne - 1935

Coleridge-Taylor - Let us Cheer the Weary Traveler (for Coleridge Taylor music club)

Debussy - Arabesque - 1926 at Hampton

Saint Saens - Etude en Forme de Valse - 1926 at Hampton

Moszkowski, Barcarolle op. 27, no. 1 G minor - ca. 1908 at Oberlin

Rubinstein Etude in C major, op. 23, no. 2 - ca. 1908 at Oberlin

Schulz-Evler - Concert Arabesques ca. 1908 at Oberlin

APPENDIX E

GRAINGER'S CONCERT REPERTOIRE AT THE TIME OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH DETT

Bach-Busoni - Chaconne - Boston 1919, 1920, NY 1920
J. S. Bach - WTC I C# minor - 1924 Ogden Hall at Hampton
Scarlatti - Selected Sonatas - 1924 Ogden Hall at Hampton
Scott - Sonata no. 1, op. 66 - Boston 12/12/1919 (Boston premiere - Dett also in attendance as Dance-Juba was the hit of the recital as reported by Olin Downes in Boston Post), NY 1920
Chopin - Sonata no. 3 in B minor - 1924 Ogden Hall at Hampton
Schumann - Symphonic Etudes - 1924 Ogden Hall at Hampton
Balfour-Gardiner Humoresque and Prelude (De Profundis) - 1920 New York
Grainger arrangements, transcriptions - Molly on the Shore, One more day, my John, Shepherd's Hey, Country Gardens - 1919 Boston
Debussy - Reflets dans l'eau, Claire de Lune, Toccata, Jardins sous la pluie - 1919 Boston

APPENDIX F

PIANO WORK LISTING

"S" numbers are from Anne Key Simpson's biography

S. 1 After the Cakewalk - Published 1900 by Van der Sloom Music Company, Williamsport, PA

S.2 Cave of the Winds - Published 1902 by S. C. Fragard, Niagara Falls, NY

S.3 Inspiration Waltzes - Published 1903 by Richard A. Saalfield, London

S.4 My Agnes from Niagara - Published 1909 by S. C. Fragard, Niagara Falls, NY

S.5 Magnolia - Published 1912 by Clayton F. Summy, Chicago

Part I

Magnolias; *Moderato molto cantabile*

The Deserted Cabin; *Largo con tristezza, melodia ben sostenuto, accomp. stacc.*

My Lady Love; *Allegretto grazioso*

Part II

Mammy; *Lento con tenerezza*

The Place Where the Rainbow Never Ends; *Allegro*

S.6 In the Bottoms - Published 1913 by Clayton F. Summy, Chicago

Prelude - Night; *Adagio sostenuto*

His Song; *Andante non troppo, ma piu patetico*

Honey - Humoresque; *Allegretto*

Barcarolle - Morning; *Moderato molto grazioso*

Dance-Juba; *Non troppo allegro*

S.7 Enchantment - Published 1922 by John Church, New York

Incantation; *Un poco agitato ma moderato*

Song of the Shrine; *Lento con molto espressione*

Dance of Desire; *Con moto*

Beyond the Dream; *Andante patetico*

- S.8 Nepenthe and the Muse - Published 1922 by John Church, New York
- S.10 Cotton Needs Pickin' - 1924 unpublished
- S.11 Fair weather - Published 1926 by Theodore Presser, Bryn Mawr, PA
- S.12 Cinnamon Grove - Published 1928 by John Church, New York
- I *Moderato molto grazioso ma con moto* (on lines from "The Dream" by John Donne)
- II *Adagio cantabile* (on lines from "Gitanjali" by Rabindranath Tagore)
- III *Ritmo moderato con sentimento, quasi gavotte* (on lines from "Epimetheus" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)
- IV *Allegretto* (on lines from a song in *Religious Folk Songs of the Negro* "Oh, the winter'll soon be over, children, Yes, my Lord.")
- S.14 Tropic Winter - Published 1938 by Clayton F. Summy, Chicago
- I Daybreak Charioteer; *Pomposo marziale moderato*
- II Bayou Garden; *Adagio molto sostenuto*
- III Pompons and Fans (Mazurka); *Grazioso*
- IV Legend of the Atoll; *Lento*
- V To a Closed Casement; *Andante espressivo*
- VI Noon Siesta; *Lento quasi berceuse*
- VII Parade of the Jasmine Banners; *Allegretto grazioso*
- S.15 Eight Bible Vignettes - Published 1941-43 by Mills Music, New York
- I Father Abraham; *Molto maestoso*
- II Desert Interlude; *Larghetto patetico*

- III As his own Soul; *Moderato semplice quasi volkslied*
- IV Barcarolle of Tears; *Andante*
- V I am the True Vine; *Con moto, ma espressivo*
- VI Martha Complained; *Larghetto*
- VII Other Sheep; *Largo*
- VIII Madrigal Divine; *Moderato, molto tranquillo*

Angel of the Dark - unpublished manuscript - Niagara Falls Public Library, Niagara Falls, NY