

BYE AND BYE

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This is one of the earliest negro spirituals known to man and it is one that you will hear at any Wednesday night prayer meeting at a Negro Baptist Church.

Have you ever been to prayer meeting at a Negro Baptist Church? I would like to extend to you an invitation to drop by sometime. The religion started as that of thousands of Negroes in the deep south. With terrific spiritual hunger and the greatest humility, these untutored black Christians -- many of whom could even read the book which was the treasure house of their faith -- have adapted the contents of the Bible to the consistencies of their everyday lives -- unburdened by the differences on more educated theologians they accepted the Old Testament as a chronicle of wonders which happened to people like themselves in vague but actual places, and of rules of conduct, true acceptance of which would lead them to a tangible, three-dimensional Heaven. At this meeting you'll hear music that has not only contributed to the culture of America but also to its history. Open your ears and your mind and you will find yourself crossing the ocean from Africa, working the cotton fields of the South, praying for freedom, songs of wonder and hope such as, "Josha Fit the Battle", "Didn't it Rain", "It don't Cost Very Much".

Traditionally, the Negro folk music has been contributed to in equal parts by the Bible and the kind of spiritual hope of reward in the future which pulled the Negro through slavery. This music contains not only the legend and history of the Negro but also the history of our nation. So if you listen closely when you come to prayer meeting you will receive the most interesting history lesson in your life.

Negro folk music started when slaves were first bought and brought to the United States to work the cotton and tobacco fields of the South. Forbidden to talk in the fields, the slaves turned to songs to pour out their emotions as well as to pass messages down the rows of up-coming revolts. These first songs were called Row Songs and later were renamed "Work Songs" because of the places where the songs were being sung and also the manner in which they were being sung. The original songs had little or no spiritual meaning but told of a land they longed to see and a freedom they hoped to have.

After the African was indoctrinated with Christianity, his songs still kept their same simple beat pattern but acquired new lyrics with great depth and emotional

significance. Because of a lack of education and an even greater fear of being punished if any education were shown, these songs, like the row songs, were not written down but were merely passed on from generation to generation. Present day attempts to write down this music have all but failed. The only person to even come close to writing this music down is Negro composer and conductor James Cleveland and unless you listen to his choir, his attempts are all but failures.

Negro Folk Music dosen't contain a beat pattern such as we have and know it today, 1-2-3-4-/. It is sung, or as the Negro says, moaned from the soul at any tempo the individual desires. Even with a group singing there is some sort of magnetic force which pulls everyone together so that they cut off, pause, crescendo, etc., all together. Everyone knows what comes next and how it is going to come. Emotions run high and in the middle of an old standard you'll hear a screan which indicates a cup is overflowing with the love of God. This is looked upon as a blessing because it has been said that you must indeed be closer to God to feel his power in this manner. The song continues.

And then you hear some voice praying. Slowly the music goes down until everyone is moaning and praying right along with whoever started, knees and heads are bent. Then emotion fills the room -- Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me, then only the prayer and another song starts and so service progresses far into the night.

No clock on the wall indicates that it is time to go. When everyone has felt the power of God moving within him then the minister speaks for a moment and the service ends.

Do drop by some time. It is a perfect way for us to understand each other better and for us to grow together.

For what God has brought together, let no man put asunder.