

**THE BLACK CHURCH:  
THIS IS OUR STORY,  
THIS IS OUR SONG**



# OUR SONG

guided playlist



# MUSIC IS WOVEN INTO THE VERY FABRIC OF THE BLACK CHURCH.

This guided playlist has been created for all you music buffs to listen along to some of the most influential songs featured in the documentary, get some behind-the-scenes insights on their history and significance, and discuss them with friends.

We learn a lot about the influence of music in **THE BLACK CHURCH: THIS IS OUR STORY, THIS IS OUR SONG**. Quite frankly, the Black Church would not be what it is without music. The Word expressed through gospel music is an integral part of how the Black Church has expressed beliefs, ministered, and showed progression through the years. “Music and the Black Church are synonymous with each other,” series’ director, Stacey L. Holman says. “So much of the worship experience is centered around song/music; it’s the first point of contact when you attend a service, and it ushers you out the door.”

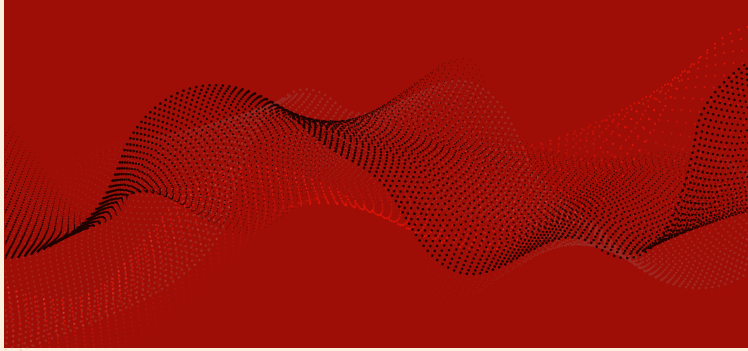
In each episode, music is threaded to reflect the evolution of the Black Church that directly correlated with socio-political changes in the United States. In its foundation, Negro spirituals were a form of radical expression, rebellion, and catharsis to survive chattel slavery. The early 20th century found Black Church hymns influenced by burgeoning genres like country, jazz, and

blues. During the Civil Rights era, the gospel was healing, functioning as repeated psalms to embolden strength through Jim Crow. Modern-day gospel music is multifarious, influenced by different music genres and used to explain one’s relationship with Christ.

As Holman puts it, “From spirituals to gospel, freedom songs to present (e.g. Gospel hip-hop), this series is musicology of all the above. Regardless of the genre or era, the songs have one theme, as does the church: to instill hope.

### [GUIDED PLAYLIST](#)

When you’re ready, you can open the playlist [here](#) and follow along for further insights below. Consider and discuss the prompts on the next page as you’re listening:



- What does each song make you feel?
- What sounds familiar and what sounds new to you?
- If you've heard a song before, where were you when you heard it and what memories does it evoke?
- In what ways does the sonic evolution of gospel music tell the history of the church?
- What effect did the blending of genres within gospel music have on its wider appeal?
- What music evokes a sense of faith for you?
- What are some aspects of culture you see bridging the "Saturday night-Sunday morning divide" discussed in the series?





# DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE

In Episode Two, we hear this song performed by Sister Rosetta Tharpe, who can make anything swing. She integrated the blues and gospel with her steel guitar—which was revolutionary and speaks to the transcendent nature of church music.

## NOTES



# RIDE ON, KING JESUS

Often versatile in its vocal arrangement, “Ride On, King Jesus” is a staple song in Black churches. It is a folk song/spiritual sung by enslaved people to carry them through troubled times.



## NOTES

# STEAL AWAY

Episode two explores spirituals like “Steal Away” and “Ride On, King Jesus,” which not only lifted African Americans’ spirits but spoke of God as a loving and just God.

## NOTES



# AMAZING GRACE

One of the most well-known gospel songs, “Amazing Grace” was an obvious fit for the series. In the third episode, this was Pastor Shirley Caesar letting the spirit lead, literally. The gospel icon integrates song in all that she does and this interview was no different.

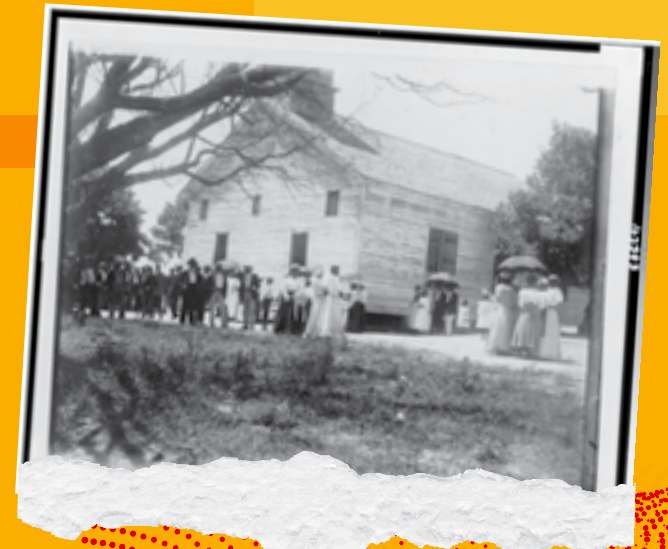
## NOTES



# ADAM IN THE GARDEN

Make sure to listen up for this special song in the series. "Adam in the Garden" has been preserved by the residents of St. Helena Island and it goes back to slavery times. For the music team, it was important that they hit every musical marker for this series by including this song.

## NOTES



# GLORY GLORY HALLELUJAH

In Episode Two, “Glory Glory Hallelujah” serves as an uplifting song that speaks to a redemptive God. In the series, as in church, this classic hymn speaks to a God who restores, particularly after generational struggle. It was included in the series by request from Henry Louis Gates Jr., who wanted to share this powerful song with audiences.

## NOTES





# G O D S O H A S O B E E N N G O O D T O M E

A favorite of Executive Producer John Legend, “God Has Been Good to Me” is a classic example of a celebratory prayer. Songs like “God Has Been So Good to Me” serve as meditations of positive thoughts for many in the church.

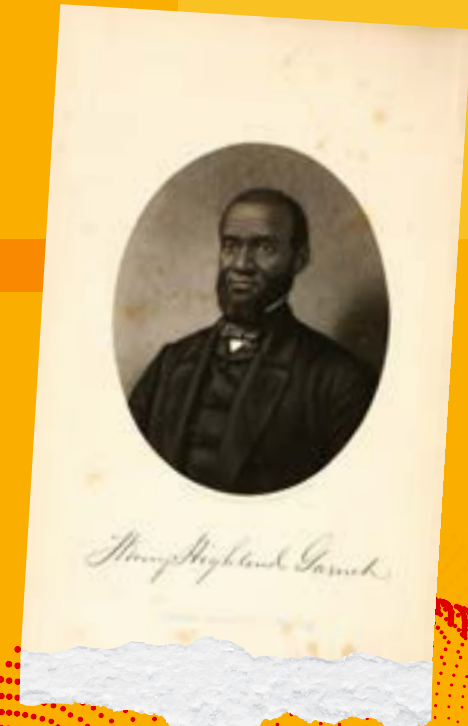


## NOTES

# S W I N G L O W

First heard in Episode One, this classic Negro spiritual is one of the most prolific in the series. As explained in episode one, songs like “Swing Low” expressed pain and hope for Black slaves in bondage.

## NOTES





# WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN

Often associated with New Orleans jazz, this song speaks to the range and crossover appeal of gospel. It was famously recorded in 1938 by Louis Armstrong and his orchestra, but iterations of the song date back decades earlier. It makes sense to use this song in the final episodes because it ties into the idea that the church often finds its way into popular culture through music.

## NOTES



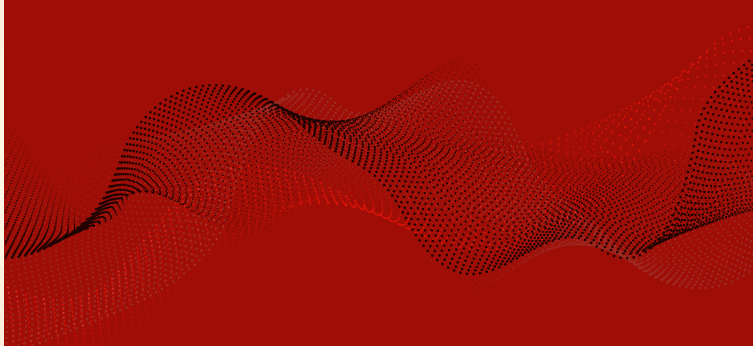
# I'M A SOLDIER

This song is used in Episodes Two and Three to show two powerful ways Black men and women fought for freedom on the battlefield called the United States of America during the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement.



## NOTES

A large white rectangular box intended for taking notes.



The story of Black survival in the United States is one of perseverance and unimaginable resilience—but it's not solely predicated on the existence of struggle. While gospel serves as storytelling that reflects the circumstances of the time, it is also a form of praise, giving testimony to the glory of God. As you watch the series, consider the redemptive nature of music and how vital it is to the existence of Black churches.