

*THE ROSEPHANYE POWELL CHORAL SERIES*

# QUIET REVOLUTIONARY

I. Quiet Revolutionary - 3

II. Blow the Trumpet - 5

III. Song in a Strange Land - 15

Music by Rosephanye Powell

SATB DIVISI AND PIANO



Gentry Publications

**Quiet Revolutionary**, for SATB, divisi with piano in three short movements was commissioned by Harvard University's Department of Music in honor of the 50th Anniversary of Eileen Southern's **The Music of Black Americans**. The work was premiered on April 8, 2022 by the choirs of Harvard University and The Aeolians of Oakwood University. The songs of **Quiet Revolutionary** may be performed independently. However, when performed as a set, the songs should be performed in the composed order.

Dr. Southern divided **The Music of Black Americans: A History** into four parts. Each part began with a descriptive title, years covered, and excerpted lyrics from songs which the author associated with the content covered. I employed the descriptive titles and excerpted lyrics to develop the lyrics for movements II and III.

### **Movement I: Quiet Revolutionary**

In 1992, Dr. Samuel A Floyd, Jr., respected author, and founder of the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College, wrote an essay entitled "Eileen Jackson Southern: Quiet Revolutionary." In it, Floyd stated "Southern's revolution is one of quiet, scholarly insurgency—the overturning of faulty assumptions and ideas about black music and black musicians and their place and role in the evolution of American culture." Thus, I chose **Quiet Revolutionary** as the title and first movement of the work. Dr. Southern's life was filled with many obstacles as an African American woman and scholar. Her interviews impressed upon me that the author treasured hours of peaceful solitude in research--diligently and systematically reading and digesting the history, music, and musicians of her people so that she could share "our" story with the world. In *Quiet Revolutionary*, I sought to depict Dr. Southern's delicate state of bliss through jazz harmonies, sparse accompaniment; and simplicity of form, lyrics, dynamics, melody, and rhythms. The piano introduction depicts Dr. Southern quietly at work, unaware of the passage of time.

### **Movement II: Blow the Trumpet**

The lyrics for **Blow the Trumpet** are comprised of the excerpt from *Go down, Moses* of Part II and an abbreviated statement of the descriptive title of Part III (Blow Ye the Trumpet). Since Dr. Southern was a concert pianist, I wanted to highlight the piano accompaniment which is comprised of a fast tempo of agitated rhythms through repeated eighth-note patterns of broken octaves in the left hand and eighth note and sixteenth note chromatic passages in the right hand. In ancient times, trumpets were sounded as a call to battle. The choir text paints "blowing trumpets" with glissandos on the word "blow." With its use of chromaticism in the vocal line, and a broad vocal range, singing *Go down, Moses, Blow the Trumpet* is a battle cry for those who fight for freedom, justice, and equality around the world.

### **Movement III: Song in a Strange Land**

*Song in a Strange Land* and *Lift Every Voice* are the book ends of Southern's masterwork as Parts I and IV of **The Music of Black Americans**. The first represents slavery in America and the latter represents the hope of freedom and justice after the Civil War. *Song in a Strange Land*, composed on Psalm 137:3-4, begins slowly expressing the anguish of the dejected slaves upon their arrival in the "strange land" of America, heard in the piano introduction. Stolen from their homeland and taken captive, the Africans are described as sitting by the "rivers of Babylon" weeping. While "wasted" physically, psychologically, and emotionally, from hard and demeaning slave labor, the slaves are commanded by their captors to sing joyful songs. But how can they sing their beloved songs under such harsh conditions? This cognitive dissonance is expressed musically through harmonic, lyrical and rhythmic shifts heard in the first sections of the song. As *Song in a Strange Land* unfolds, the darkness of slavery is overshadowed by the joy and promise of the august anthem *Lift Every Voice and Sing* composed by James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson. Once again, the piano is showcased with its majestic running passages while supporting the voices as they sing regally in unison. The song ends with the choir proclaiming resolutely, "We will sing *Lift Every Voice and Sing* in this strange land!"