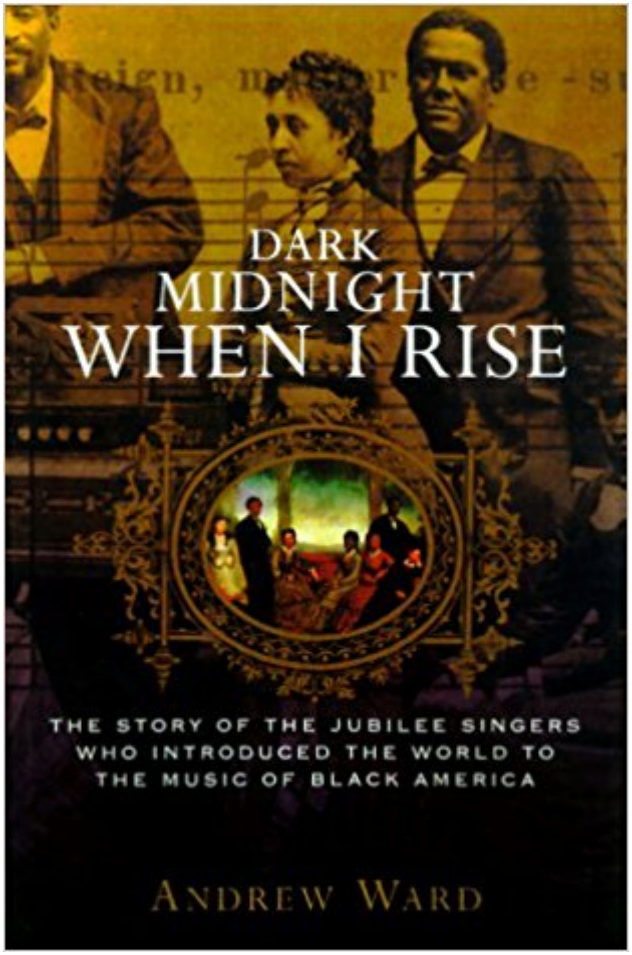
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Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story Of The Jubilee Singers, Who Introduced The World To The Music Of Black America



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Synopsis

Dark Midnight When I Rise tells the story of a troupe of young ex-slaves and freedmen whose odyssey from cotton field and auction block to concert stage and throne room is one of the most remarkable trajectories in American history. Singing the sacred hymns of their ancestors, the Fisk Jubilee Singers introduced the world to African American music. They enchanted such luminaries as Ulysses S. Grant, Frederick Douglass, Mark Twain, Queen Victoria, and Prime Minister William Gladstone, and demonstrated to millions of white Americans and Europeans the courage, dignity, and intelligence of African Americans. The Jubilees set out in the fall of 1871 to raise money for Nashville's nearly bankrupt Fisk University, one of many black schools established after the Civil War to teach reading and writing to the tens of thousands of emancipated slaves who clamored for an education. Ejected from hotels and railroad cars, shivering in the winter cold, the bedraggled singers performed along the route of the old Underground Railway to Brooklyn, where, a few days before Christmas, they sang for Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church congregation. They caused such a sensation that soon they were raising thousands of dollars a week performing to overflow audiences up and down the Eastern Seaboard. After tours of Great Britain, Holland, Switzerland, and Germany, they not only rescued Fisk but built it into one of the nation's preeminent African American institutions of higher learning. The Jubilees introduced scores of spirituals, from "Steal Away" to "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," with such soulful artistry they moved throngs to tears. But their contribution extended beyond their music. Forced to do daily battle with American racism in the dark midnight of Reconstruction, they bravely denounced segregation from choir lofts and concert stages, forcing the issue of discrimination onto the world's front pages. In their wake, Northern hotels, railroads, and schools opened their doors to blacks. Their success came at great cost. The eloquent Benjamin Holmes, who had taught himself to read as a slave, died of tuberculosis. Pious Julia Jackson, who as a small girl had helped her relatives escape from bondage, suffered a paralytic stroke. Frail, stalwart Ella Sheppard, the matriarch of the Jubilees, nearly died of pneumonia after seven years of unceasing toil. As they struggled to overcome exploitation and prejudice, the Jubilees transformed American music forever, foreshadowing the triumphs and travails of thousands of black performers. Based on the singers' own letters, memoirs, and diaries, Dark Midnight When I Rise is a compelling and deeply moving testament to the inherent decency of all men and women, and the power of art to change the heart of a nation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the fall of 1871, while the country was reeling from the effects of the Civil War, a choir of former slaves and freedmen took to the road to raise money for their school, Fisk University, which was near financial collapse. Under the direction of George White, a white missionary who was Fisk's treasurer and self-appointed choirmaster, the group traveled north, performing Negro spirituals. At first they encountered only ridicule, prejudice and physical hardship, and the venture seemed so surely headed for disaster that one alarmed father called his daughter home. But when the remaining singers reached New York City, the flamboyant abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher took up their cause, and the Jubilee Singers began to enjoy stupendous success. They traveled throughout the eastern U.S. and Europe, performing in churches, concert halls and the homes of the elite, astonishing audiences with moving renditions of plantation hymns, which most whites had never heard before. Ward (Our Bones Are Scattered) describes the Singers' three grueling tours, providing intimate portraits of each member of the group as well as their famous patrons and the besieged administrators and teachers back home at Fisk. In the process, he creates a vivid picture of the plight of blacks during and after the Civil War and shows how deeply whites opposed education for Negroes. At times, Ward's history may strike readers as overly detailed, but exhaustive factual accounts are relieved by quotations from the singers' own eloquently recorded impressions. The book is a fascinating tribute to a group of enterprising young men and women whose dignity and courage Ward calls "a constellation in the dark midnight from which they rose." Photos not seen by PW. (May) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Adult/High School-An incredible story of perseverance, courage, and determination. Established in the wake of the Civil War with a mission to teach emancipated slaves to read and write, Fisk University found it difficult to collect tuition from its desperately poor students. In 1871, needing to raise money to keep the school alive and operating, Fisk's treasurer and choirmaster, George White, organized a group of singers who would tour the eastern United States and, later, Europe. These nine students, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, took the music of black America and, in particular, the spiritual, to people of all different backgrounds, from queens to Supreme Court Justices to the common man. However, their efforts, and their success, did not come without a price. The singers faced heart-wrenching discrimination and, in some cases, such poor physical conditions that their health and voices were greatly compromised. Ward has done a wonderful job of relaying the events of the times and the history of the Jubilee Singers. Worthwhile reading about these ambassadors of music.-Peggy Bercher, Fairfax County Public Library, VACopyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Excellent resource for a very important time in American history. Highly recommended!

This is a fantastic book! I rarely read a book of this length (400+ pages), but I had to MAKE myself lay it down and go to other things I needed to do. The condition was excellent and it arrived in good time.

Author Andrew Ward presents a very informative telling of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. He does so with an impressive use of personal writings from the students, various administrators, and other individuals that hosted or otherwise interacted with the group. Reading about the singers' experiences through the participants' own words made for a greater degree of empathy and understanding. With that said, there are many names to keep track of, and some passages had so much detail I had to read paragraphs more than once. In the end, the read was well worth the time and I came away impressed that - given the times and resources - such an endeavor as the Fisk Jubilee Singers was even attempted, let alone successful.For me, the take-sways included learning more about Professor George White (the group's director), General Fisk (didn't know he was white), the purpose of the Freedman schools, the role of the American Missionary Association, and the lives of the students before, during, and after their time at Fisk (there's enough story lines to produce a great movie). The chapter notes and end sources were also very informative.Very vivid and humanizing telling of one of the better known events in African American history, as well as

music history.

As other reviewers have said, the story of the Jubilee Singers is a very fascinating and important one that deserves to be told. Ward's book is well-researched, and includes a lot of detail on background information and concert-by-concert travelogue of the singers. As far as I can find out, this is the only place where you can get a history of the Jubilees in more than a few paragraphs.However, Ward doesn't tell it very well. The reading gets tedious and slow almost from the very beginning. Ward has a tendency to get sidetracked by tangential information, and his habit of breaking up large quotes between a paragraph and an indented block is annoying. Although he tries to provide personal information, there is very little emotion in the telling of such an emotional story.Another thing--if you are expecting, as I was, a study of the Jubilees' music, you will be disappointed. Ward states in the introduction that he is not a musicologist and his intent is not to chronicle the history or influence of slave music. He is true to his word. Very little is said about the actual music, except that it had the power to move audiences. Finally, after 400 pages, he talks about the Jubilees' influence on later music for a page or two. But this is the story of the singers, not the music, and their struggle to present their heritage in song and to preserve their school.

Once again the influence of African-American Culture takes center stage in the cultural development of America. It was these young and very naive band of singers, that forever altered the course of music in America. Bringing to the world, a genre of music that was(is) able to hold the audience in complete awe. This story chronicles each members humble beginnings, a story that brings to light the triumph of the human spirit and the unfailing resolve of African-Americans "to make a way out of no way"

This story of the Jubilee Singers and Fisk University is an important part of history, for both blacks and whites. Also recommended for children is A BAND OF ANGELS, a Story Inspired by the Jubilee Singers, by Deborah Hopkinson, illustrated by Raul Colon.

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