

## CONTEXTUAL NOTES: “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,” arr. Roger Emerson

This arrangement is based on the well-known African American spiritual. It differs in its style (contemporary harmony) and in its melodic phrasing. In the definitive source of the earliest arrangements of spirituals, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, Da Capo Press, by James Weldon Johnson & J. Rosamond Johnson, the first word, “Didn’t” is treated as a pickup, as opposed to “on the beat,” as in this arrangement. The lyrics allude to the biblical story of Daniel, who was thrown into a lion’s den, for disobeying the king, only to have God send an angel to close their mouths, thus saving him. (Daniel 6:10-17.)

“The heroic delivery of the Hebrews from a lion’s den, the belly of a whale, or the fiery furnace not only gave the Africans enslaved in America hope, but also confidence that, if the Hebrews could be delivered, ‘why not every man’?” The impact of this assurance cannot be overstated, according to Eileen Guenther in her book, *In Their Own Words... Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals*, MorningStar Music Publishers.

According to an authority on spirituals, Dr. Rollo Dilworth: “It was quite common for enslaved persons to compose spirituals based upon scriptural narratives. Given their desires for freedom, justice and equality, they often celebrated the triumphs of biblical figures in their songs. Owners often took delight in hearing the enslaved people perform these pieces as they worked because such behavior demonstrated a spirit of productivity, submission and cooperation.”

An example of the dialect that was most likely used in the original spiritual is found in the 1916 arrangement by H.T. Burleigh, published by G. Schirmer: “Didn’t my **lord d’liver** Daniel, **An’ why not-a** every man, He **deliver’d** Daniel from **de** lion’s den, Jonah from **de** belly of **de** whale, **An’ de** Hebrew children from **de** fiery furnace,” as chronicled by Felicia Raphael Marie Barber in her book, *A New Perspective for the Use of Dialect in African American Spirituals*, Lexington Books. In addition, I highly encourage you to view *Spirituals: A Conversation with Alice Parker and André Thomas*, [www.melodiousaccord.org](http://www.melodiousaccord.org), for justification to keep on performing these arrangements so that the art form continues to thrive.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Way Over in Beulah Lan’: Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*, André J. Thomas, Heritage Music Press.

*Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro: As Sung at Hampton Institute*, Nathaniel Dett, Kessinger Publishing

*Ev’ry Time I Feel The Spirit: 101 Best-Loved Psalms, Gospel Hymns, and Spiritual Songs of the African-American Church*, Gwendolin Sims Warren, Henry Holt & Company