CONTEXTUAL NOTES: "Witness," arr. Roger Emerson

This choral arrangement is based on the African-American spiritual better known as: "Who'll Be a Witness for My Lord."

In the book *In Their Own Words… Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals* by Eileen Guenther, she describes spirituals as "singing of joy and sorrow, hope and despair, enlightenment, and motivation. They form a window into the soul of the slave and touch the spirits of those who sing or hear them."

The enslaved people were introduced to Christianity by their owners, who viewed their willingness to adopt the religion and sing about its themes as a sign of submission and controllability. In reality, the spiritual was "the spirit of the people struggling to be free; it is their religion, their source of strength in a time of trouble," according to James Cone in his book, *The Spirituals and the Blue*s.

The dialect has been contemporized in many arrangements including this one. Most likely, the word "Witness" would have been pronounced "Wid-ness," and "Lord" would have been pronounced, "Lawd." For more information, see *African American Spirituals Dialect, A Practical Guide for Singers, Voice Teachers, and Choral Conductors* by Rosephanye Powell, published by Gentry Publications.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Books of American Negro Spirituals, James Weldon Johnson & J. Rosamond Johnson, Da Capo 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

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

Spirituals: A Conversation with Alice Parker and André Thomas, www.melodiousaccord.org