

Oh, watch the stars was first published in 1925 by G. Schirmer in a collection of spirituals recorded and transcribed by Nicholas George Julius Ballanta(-Taylor) of Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa. The title page of *Saint Helena Island Spirituals* notes that the collection was prepared at the Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School on St Helena Island, Beaufort County, in South Carolina.

But these obligatory acknowledgements reveal nothing of the remarkable movement behind the work of Ballanta and others. The world was continuing to waken to the rich and powerful vocal music traditions of Americans who had been cruelly taken from their African homelands in the slave trade. There was also a growing conviction that people of African descent, especially those who had suffered slavery—either themselves or in their families—were in the best position to translate the songs into written notes and rhythms. Only they could fully feel, understand, and express the hearts of those who first sang this music and passed it down from generation to generation.

This arrangement of *Oh, watch the stars* was created for a programme of American Christmas music. Because there was only one usable verse in the original transcription, two additional verses were added with the same syntactical structure and rhyme scheme. Two sets of text have been provided here, allowing for performance at Christmas and throughout the year. The musical setting reflects melodic gestures and harmonic impulses conveyed by Ballanta and others of the period.

It is suggested that *Oh, watch the stars* be performed simply, naturally, and expressively. This will underscore that the performance is not intended to appropriate the culture of the original transcription, but to honour it. In this way, the piece serves as a remembrance and a tribute to those whose music this is.

for The Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square

Oh, watch the stars

Traditional,
with additional words by David Warner

African-American Spiritual
arr. **MACK WILBERG**

Simply, but with expression ♩ = 50

SOPRANO
ALTO

TENOR
BASS

PIANO

Simply, but with expression ♩ = 50

mp

p
Ped. *sim.*

SOPRANOS & ALTOS unis. *mp*

S./A.

Oh,
*Oh,

9

3

watch the stars, see how they run, oh,
watch the stars, see how they run, oh,

*These lyrics (italicized) may be used throughout the year as an alternative to the Christmas text.

Duration: 4 mins

An accompaniment for orchestra (fl, cl, hp, str) is available on rental from the publisher's Hire Library or appropriate agent.

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S./A. 

watch the stars, _____ see how they run! _____ The _____
 watch the stars, _____ see how they run! _____ The _____


17



stars run down _____ at the set-ting of the sun. _____ Oh,
 stars run down _____ at the set-ting of the sun. _____ Oh,

Ped. _____

21



watch the stars, _____ see how they run. _____
 watch the stars, _____ see how they run. _____

sim.