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*Dramatic Publishing*

# Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit

A Play in Two Acts

By  
DAVID BARR III

*A musical play based on the true story of the world renown African-American contralto Marian Anderson and various family, friends and musical colleagues who helped shape the life and times of this singer who even the legendary, classical conductor Arturo Toscanini once said had a voice "...one is privileged to hear only once in a hundred years."*



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## IMPORTANT PRODUCTION NOTES

### *Each scene...*

should flow quickly into each other, without lengthy black-outs or elaborate costume and set changes. For this particular play, time shifts and changes of venue should be suggested with imaginative lighting and sound design.

### *The live music...*

should be performed with at least one live pianist throughout most of the show. If additional musical accompaniment is desired, I suggest one violin and one harpist. Music in the African sections of the play should utilize drum and African shaker only. All other music in this play should be done a cappella.

### *About the songs to be performed in the show...*

There are many songs in this play. **Please note:** It is not essential to sing every verse and chorus of every song. I do list certain songs with complete lyrics, but this is done only as a point of reference for the director and performers. Rather, I would prefer that the songs sung be performed sparingly at best; depending on length of the show and the singer's ability/skill level/comfort with singing their respective song. I do have my preferences for certain songs to be sung in their entirety. I have indicated these wishes with (\*\*) next to the title of those particular songs on the following page. Musical voiceovers have (\*) beside the title.

### *Lastly...a suggestion...*

Rather than indicate shifts in time per scene with an innocuous reference within dialogue, I'd prefer to have the time, date and place indicated on a scrim on the back wall of the stage. This could also be done with a *scene-by-scene* notation in the program but I often find that a little too distracting for an audience in a darkened theater.

— David Barr III

## LIST OF SONGS

### ACT I

1. "Lead Kindly Light" \*\*
2. "Rock A My Soul"
3. "Get Right Church"
4. "I'm So Glad"
5. "Behold That Star" \*\*
6. "Tavan 'yai" or substitute "Send the Light"
7. "Trocknet Nacht" \*\*
8. "Deep River" \*\*
9. "Ezekiel Saw the Wheel" \*\*
10. "Morgen" / Strauss' Opus 27 Number 4
11. "Tristan and Isolde" / Isolde's *Love-Death* \*
12. "No Ways Tired" \*\*
13. Medley of songs: "Oh What a Beautiful City," "There's No Hiding Place," "Witness" and "Ave Maria\*\*"
14. "Water Boy"
15. "My Lord What a Morning"
16. "America" \*\*

### ACT II

17. "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord" \*\*
18. "Crucifixion" \*\*
19. "Joe Hill" \*\*
20. "Jacob's Ladder" \*\*
21. "Un Ballo in Maschera" / "Re dell' abisso affrettati" \*\*
22. "Utonyi na Wui" or substitute "Power and Wisdom" \*\*
23. "I Stood on the River of Jordan" \*\*
24. "Prelude to a Kiss" \*
25. "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" \*\*

\* Indicates that the song could be performed live *or* played on tape within the appropriate scene.

# **EV'RY TIME I FEEL THE SPIRIT**

A Play in Two Acts

For 5 Men, 4 Women, each playing the following roles:

## **CHARACTERS**

**MARIAN ANDERSON:** African-American female concert singer. Age shifts from 27 to 80.

**YOUNGER MARIAN:** African-American female, morphs from late teens to early 20s. (Doubles as Ethiopian Girl and a Reporter)\*

**SIMONE TAKOUGANG NDIYAE:** African-American female reporter, former singer. Marian's Senegalese guide during her tour of Dakar. Early to late 40s. (Doubles as Anna Anderson)\*

**ANNA ANDERSON:** African-American female. Marian's mother. Age shifts from 30 to mid-70s. (Doubles as Simone Takougang Ndiyaie)\*

**PORTER:** African-American male. Pullman porter. Age shifts from early 20s to late 70s. (Doubles as Reverend Wesley Parks and Man #1)\*

**ORPHEUS "KING" FISHER:** African-American male. Marian's husband. Age shifts from mid-40s to late 60s.

**SOL HUOK:** White male. Russian-Jewish immigrant. Age shifts from mid-50s to early 70s. (Doubles as Radio News Announcer and Reporter #1)\*

ROLAND HAYES: African-American male. Famous tenor. Mid-40s. (Doubles as Reporter #3 and Billy King)\*

PAUL ROBESON: African-American male. Singer, actor, political activist. Shifts between early 40s to late 50s. (Doubles as John Anderson)\*

GRANDMOTHER ISABELLA ANDERSON: African-American female. Mother of John Anderson. Age 55. (Doubles as Cleaning Woman and Woman #1)

GIUSEPPE BOGHETTI: Second-generation, American-born, Italian male. Voice teacher. At age 25 to 30. (Doubles as Reporter #2, Front Desk Man)\*

REPORTERS #1-3\*

\* Indicates character is to be doubled with another in play.

LOCALE: Various places in America and abroad...i.e., Paris, Africa, etc., during the years of 1912 through 1978. The play opens in the Sainte-Chapelle Theater in Paris, France. Shortly afterwards, the story shifts to Dakar, Senegal, on the eve of the First World Festival of Negro Arts.

SET: Much of the more modern-day action of the play centers around the makeshift cabana of Marian Anderson in Dakar, Senegal, circa April 1, 1966; the set should probably provide for much of this. There should also be a significant area of the stage that would allow the actors to move through time and space at will; presenting the illusion(s) of a different locale in almost every scene; i.e., train car, concert stage, a family room, a rehearsal room, a church pulpit, hotel lobby, train station, etc.



# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

*(AT RISE, the set is dimly lit. The distant sound of an African panpipe is heard. An elderly MARIAN ANDERSON slowly enters and softly sings “Lead, Kindly Light.”)*

MARIAN.

*Lead, kindly Light, amid th’encircling gloom.*

*Lead... Thou me on!*

*The night is dark, and I am far from home;*

*Lead... Thou me on!*

*Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see*

*The distant scene; one step enough for me.*

*(Lights fade on MARIAN.)*

## SCENE TWO

*(Lights crossfade to the elegant Versailles Room of the St. Regis Hotel, New York City, December 1963. MARIAN and her manager SOL HUOK are standing together at a podium facing what seems like a sea of anxious reporters and a thousand microphones. This is the announcement of her retirement from the concert stage. The entire mood of the scene should have the*

*sense of urgency associated with a major press conference.)*

HUOK. Her career stretches behind and before her. In the past it made history. It knocked down precedent, created respect and admiration for people of all races, creeds and cultures. Ladies and gentlemen of the press, it is my sincere pleasure...my honor...to introduce to you...Miss Marian Anderson.

*(REPORTERS #1-3 applaud as MARIAN steps to the microphones. She speaks with customary dignity and self-modesty; dignified, radiant, handsome...her voice and laughter soft and beautiful.)*

REPORTER #2. Miss Anderson...what was the deciding factor in you announcing your retirement?

MARIAN. We have never said that we plan to retire. All the announcements have carefully called this a "farewell" tour. To retire means you put the lid on this or that and it is finished. Retirement to us means that one stops whatever one is doing and sits down to wait for the inevitable. One does not plan to sit and fold one's hands.

REPORTER #3. Any regrets, Miss Anderson?

MARIAN. When one travels around the country...around the world as we have done for so long, one sees so many areas where help is needed, where one could make a contribution. But it was always a concert today and gone tomorrow. We were forced to rush by it all. We would like to know what it would be like not to do that for a change.

*(SIMONE NDIYAE enters in the midst of the sea of reporters. For a brief moment, the fervor and clamor of the press conference subsides. Soft freeze on the reporters. SIMONE is dressed in her traditional Senegalese dress; in direct contrast to the gray-flannel look of REPORTERS #1-3. She carries no notepad...and writes no notes.)*

SIMONE. Miss Anderson, I know you have done several benefit concerts for the upcoming Negro Arts Festival in Dakar, Senegal. I wondered...if you will attend our festival in Africa next year?

MARIAN *(caught off guard. Looking helplessly toward HUROK)*. Unfortunately, we do not think so.

SIMONE. Miss Anderson?

MARIAN. Yes.

SIMONE. Have you ever visited Africa? *(MARIAN somewhat uncomfortable. No response. Beat.)* Mother Africa calls for you to come home.

*(Lights fade on scene. All except MARIAN and SIMONE are in darkness.)*

### SCENE THREE

*(Lights slowly fade on SIMONE and crossfade to an African musician and a female dancer adorned in a flowing white robe and head wrap, i.e., Ravoï, Bak, Borai from New Guinea similar to those worn by the African men and women of Mali or what was formerly known as the French Sudan. The musician is playing a sad, moody*

*song on an African pan flute. As the song progresses soft lights fade up on a transformed MARIAN ANDERSON... in her mid-sixties...lost in thought almost as if she is listening to the music of the flute. As the song and dance come to an end, ORPHEUS "KING" FISHER enters, awkwardly carrying several suitcases. He hands MARIAN a smaller bag to hold. Various members of the cast, brightly adorned in assorted African outfits...authentic and faux paus...enter. As they make their way to the bungalow DR, the cast sings several inspired verses of the traditional spiritual "Rock A My Soul.")*

#### CAST.

*Rock A My Soul  
In the bosom of Abraham,  
Rock A My Soul  
In the bosom of Abraham,  
Rock A My Soul  
In the bosom of Abraham,  
Oh! Rock A My Soul!*

*(As the song builds in intensity, the stage erupts in an explosion of African dancers and musicians. Their dance is one of celebration and welcome; Burundi and Mali influences are preferable for this particular section. The stage should light up with color, sound and rhythm as the various dancers and performers virtually abandon themselves to the music...hopelessly caught up in the reverie. MARIAN and KING enter. The room is filled with brightly colored flowers and modern African-inspired artwork. The shades are open in both rooms of the suite and light pours through. It is **March 31, 1966.**)*

KING. Is it really necessary for you to carry all of this luggage, everywhere you go? (*Impatient.*)

MARIAN. One likes to be comfortable when one travels.

KING. But fifteen pieces of luggage?! Pots, pans, even your sewing machine?

MARIAN. One always likes to be prepared.

KING (*flatly. Unapologetically*). And you can cut the third-person addresses. There are no TV cameras or pressboys around. They all left after the farewell concert at Carnegie Hall.

MARIAN (*bristling at the last comment from KING. But, regaining composure and steadying with less than an innuendo rebuttal to her "husband"*). One speaks as one pleases...when one pleases to speak.

KING (*indifferent*). Suit yourself.

MARIAN. One always does.

KING (*half-beat. Bemused*). Always have to have the last word, don't you? (*Beat. KING walks away.*)

MARIAN. No. (*KING stops in his tracks. Bemused even more. But a bit less confrontative. Playfully laughing, letting her guard down.*) I'm just teasing you, King.

KING. You? Marian Anderson...*Goddess Contralto*...a tease? Say it ain't so.

MARIAN. After all we've done to get here, I thought we both could use a little friendly joshing.

KING. Yes, but why is it that when you josh, I'm the one with the black eyes?

MARIAN. Well you simply don't josh well enough, my dear. (*Beat. KING abruptly picks up the bags and heads to their respective bedrooms within the bungalow. MARIAN rushes to extend the olive branch.*) Please, King, let's not fight. Not tonight. Besides...I'm an old

“retired” lady now. One needs little things like a bit of verbal volleyball to maintain one’s aura.

KING. Well... (*Beat. Putting the bags down.*) Toscanini sure thought you’d maintain that aura. How many times in my life have I heard it said “...she has a voice heard only once in a hundred years.”

MARIAN. What *Maestro* Toscanini *really* said was... “What I heard today, one is privileged to hear only once in a hundred years.” That is quite different. (*Coquettishly grabbing KING’s arm and trying to calm him.*) You know, the maestro could have been talking about my *accompanist*...or the acoustics of the auditorium for all I know. Sol just used the quote and touched it up a bit for publicity purposes...that’s all. That is what I pay my manager to do *for me...isn’t it?*

KING. My...we are sounding a little negative tonight, aren’t we? What would America think of their international goodwill ambassador acting so crabby?

MARIAN (*beat. Bittersweet*). Isn’t that what is supposed to happen when one grows old? They automatically become...well...*crabby?* And nobody ever says a word about it. Everyone always thinks it’s...quaint...a nice way to say feeble-minded. (*Half-beat. KING begins fixing himself a drink.*)

KING. Well, retired or not...we’ve got to make an appearance at the opening ceremonies tonight.

MARIAN (*resigned to her cruel fate*). I know. I know.

KING. So try to keep the melancholy in check and *please* be on your best behavior around *me*.

MARIAN (*surprised at his statement*). Oh, King, I’m always on my best behavior.

KING. Not always. If I hear one more of your admirers call me "*Mr. Anderson*" while you snicker in the background...I'll scream.

MARIAN (*laughs to herself*). It's exciting to be here with so many different Negro artists from around the world. I'm just glad the committee still considered me important enough to invite. (*Walking out onto the balcony. Looking at the African sunset.*) We are terrible, King, aren't we? For being so blessed to see all this. Surely God will punish us for feeling this happy.

KING (*slowly. Somewhat pointed*). I think he already has. (*He drinks. She hears his comment, but chooses to ignore it.*)

MARIAN (*with feigned, almost childlike excitement*). After all of these years, King? Everyone who matters knows your name is Orpheus "King" Fisher. What difference does it make if someone can't get it right?

KING. It still bothers me, that's all.

MARIAN. Just keep your hand on my shoulder at all times. As usual it will dispel all rumors. People will think we're still mad for each other after twenty-five years.

KING. Oh, I thought we were. I keep forgetting. (*Drinking. Half-beat.*) But you are still America's "darling." What difference does it make what I feel?

MARIAN (*laughs to herself*). America's *darling*. (*Half-beat.*) I really don't think I have *America's* sentiments on my side anymore. Did I tell you what happened to me the other day in Macy's?

KING (*half-interested*). No.

MARIAN. I'm standing at the perfume counter in Macy's...trying to make a purchase. The sales clerk be-

hind the register, a young Negro girl mind you...takes one good look at me and starts screaming at the top of her lungs "*Oh my God! Oh my God! It's you! It's really you! I've got to get your autograph! My mother will never believe it! Oh my God! Oh my God!*" (*Half-beat.*) Well...I didn't want to cause too much of a disturbance. It was in the middle of the noon-hour rush and there were all sorts of people in the store. So...I quickly pull out my pen and I hear the young lady calling out to her manager in the next aisle..."*Look, everybody! Look! It's Leontyne Price!!!*" (*Long beat.*) I'm a myth to my own people, now. Imperceptible. If I had only sung at that March on Washington in '63 at the Lincoln Memorial. (*KING flashes a "Not this again."*) I know what you are going to say, but I can't help it. Had I sung "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the March on Washington before the rally began as planned, I think I'd be perceived differently by everyone in the Movement.

KING. But you did get a chance to sing for the crowd that day.

MARIAN. I sang... (*Singing the bridge.*) "*He's Got the Whole World in His Hands.*" I realize that you are not musically inclined...but that song is in no way "The Star-Spangled Banner." It's just not the same. (*Beat.*) All I can really remember was Mahalia...whipping that crowd into a frenzy with "I Been 'Buked and I Been Scorned." You were there. You saw how they all reacted to her.

KING. I know, dear. But...I know you are in no way showing a little jealousy...after all of this time?

MARIAN. Of course not. I was...just very glad for her. (*Half-beat.*) And I'm glad that her dress fit...for a



change. (*Half-beat.*) Even in that color. (*Pause.*) Oh, King, everything was arranged. I still can't believe that we got stuck in traffic behind all of those marchers filing into the mall.

KING. I think everyone who was there saw the tears rolling down your face. (*Half-beat.*) It's time to put it behind you. That was three years ago. Besides...you're retired...remember.

MARIAN. Yes, but music is not like a...a faucet. It's something in your *heart*...it's in your *soul*. As long as they move, the music is still there. (*Beat.*) I've been thinking about quitting for years. (*Beat. Looking in the mirror.*) I've aged so quickly. I'm getting lines in my face. I've never really noticed until now. How strange.

KING. I'm going to check out the view on the balcony. Care to join me?

MARIAN (*slight hesitation. But icy in the end*). Maybe a little later.

KING (*masked disappointment*). Suit yourself. (*KING exits.*)

## SCENE FOUR

*(Lights fade. In this next section, the CONGREGATION...accompanied by REVEREND WESLEY PARKS... enter and take their seats; as if they are all preparing for a Sunday morning church service. Soft, inviting church organ music is heard as the parishioners file into the church. ANNA and JOHN ANDERSON enter proudly with YOUNGER MARIAN in tow. JOHN ANDERSON's overwhelming pride should be very evident in everything*

*he does relating to his daughter. GRANDMOTHER ANDERSON also enters. She is particularly vocal...responding joyously to everyone of PARKS' requests. I think she's a little sweet on Reverend. The time and place is 1912, Philadelphia's Union Baptist Church. Church organ music temporarily stops. REVEREND PARKS' clapping...bringing everyone to full attention.)*