



## CMP Teaching Plan THE STORM IS PASSING OVER

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The Storm Is Passing Over  
By Charles Albert Tindley, arr. Barbara W. Baker  
3-part treble and piano  
Hal Leonard 48004591

### Analysis

#### *Broad Description*

Traditional Black Gospel song with piano accompaniment

#### *Background Information about Rev. Charles Tindley (1851-1933)*

Along with Thomas Dorsey, Tindley is considered one of the fathers of modern Black gospel music. He wrote more than 60 hymns and gospel songs, including "I'll Overcome Someday," which later became the significant Civil Rights anthem "We Shall Overcome." "The Storm Is Passing Over" was published in a collection of Tindley's songs in 1905.



[www.gmhalloffame.org](http://www.gmhalloffame.org)

The son of slaves, Tindley was born free in Maryland but worked as a hired plantation worker in Maryland alongside slaves and other "hired on's" for much of his youth. After the Civil War, he moved to Philadelphia, one of many who left rural life for the hope and promise of urban centers. In the evenings, he enlisted the help of tutors to learn to read not only English, but also Greek and Hebrew. Eventually, he became the pastor of the Methodist church where he was first a janitor. It still has an active congregation today, now known as the Tindley Temple United Methodist Church.

Tindley is equally known as a tremendous preacher and an activist for racial equality and social injustice.

#### *About Dr. Barbara Baker*

Baker is an active teacher, arranger, and clinician with a nationally recognized reputation. She currently directs choral ensembles at Eleanor Roosevelt HS in Greenbelt, Maryland, as well as the Gospel Choir at the Colesville United Methodist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland. She publishes arrangements of gospel choral music with Boosey & Hawkes and Alliance Publications.

#### *About the history of Black gospel*

Most of us know the unique circumstances of history that led to the creation of field hollers, spirituals, and such. John Leland in his book *Hip: the history* has some interesting takes on the sweeping story, though. Why did this music become created only in the United States? It was because of the unique structure of slavery here, he says, which pushed the European and African populations together, culturally-speaking. In the massive sugar plantations of Brazil and the Caribbean, for example, slaves lived in overwhelmingly black worlds. Owners lived far away and ran the plantations from a distance. Until the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, most Southern farms were small. He writes, "The races lived together, unequally but intimately." This structure and its reality of many day-to-day informal interactions make it easier to understand how each culture subtly influenced each other. The melding of European and African musical traditions, of the oppressor and the oppressed, comes to make more sense.

Black gospel's history is directly tied to both the Great Migration and the Second Great Awakening, specifically the rise of Pentecostalism at the turn of the century. "Holiness" churches quickly spread to

urban centers in the Midwest and Northeast. The services were characterized by music that was accompanied by instruments (e.g. tambourine), whose message was relevant to the needs of common people in the rapidly growing cities (Detroit's African-American population grew 661.2% between 1910 and 1920), whose lyrics arose from a personal experience with God, that shared the timbre of the hoarse, gutsy, repetitive, call-and-response styled sermons of the storefront preachers.

One overriding characteristic of Black gospel is the critical importance of the message that needs to be transmitted. As Marvin Curtis writes, "It is not so much about the *performance medium*, as it is about the *meaning of the performance*." Vocal improvisation, ensemble improvisation, pitch sensibility, vocal timbre, rhythmic articulation, call and response, layering of textures, repetitions of phrases or lines – these all serve to convey the message and soul of the music. In that way, gospel shares more with rock than with most traditional sacred choral music. Precision and accuracy takes a backseat to heart and hope. Curtis says, "This is music that tells a story about what it means to be free, to be redeemed."

#### *Additional Choral/Instrumental Information*

It is stylistically appropriate to add additional rhythm section instruments if desired. Freedom can also be taken with the arrangement itself, e.g. adding a soloist or changing the form.

#### *Elements of Music*

Form – This is simple music. A verse and two phrases in the refrain, which are sometimes sung in one order, sometimes another, comprise the total song. (Tindley's original contains four verses; Baker uses only the first.) James Kinchen writes, "Music of the traditional repertory is usually thematically 'rich' and organizationally 'complex.' As such, its intellectual appeal is considerable. To some extent, we judge its worth by its complexity. In terms of length, sophistication, contrasts, elaboration or development, and organization of ideas, gospel music is not comparable." Indeed, one could probably say the same for most popular music of any era.

However, it is the repetition of these simple musical ideas that are a stylistic hallmark. Singing a phrase again and again, heightening its drama each time, comes directly from the African tradition. John Chernoff in his seminal book, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms*, writes, "The repetition of a well-chosen rhythm continually reaffirms the power of the music by locking that rhythm, and the people listening or dancing to it, into a dynamic and open structure. The rhythms in African music may relate by cutting across each other or by calling or responding to each other, but in either case, because of the conflict of African cross-rhythms, the power of the music is not only captured by repetition – it is magnified." Substitute "musical phrase" for "rhythm," and he could be writing about gospel music. It is also for this reason that the form can be improvised; using Baker's arrangement as a launching point, phrases can be rearranged thoughtfully at the director's discretion. Examples might include singing the refrain on a neutral syllable (e.g. "ooh") behind a soloist who riffs on a main idea, or repeating sections additional times to increase excitement.

Rhythm – The phrase structure itself is constructed so as to leave room for instrumental or vocal responses; the choir calls, and there is space for someone to answer. Heavy, accented quarter notes mark the beginning of many phrases. Indeed, one of my favorite interpretations of the song (Detroit Mass Choir) features all accompaniment cleared out during the first verse except for two hip, weighty eighth notes at the downbeat of each phrase. These accented downbeats are counterweighted by the undeniable coolness of the offbeat jaggedness of the "hallelujah" phrase in the refrain. There is joy and exultation in singing broken-up, big, fat syllables on the syncopated backbeats; the repetition of so many of them in a row builds tension the way harmonic development would in a different style. The music relaxes into the downbeat to finish the phrase; the storm is indeed passing over.

Melody – The entire range of the melody spans six notes – *do* through *la* – and stays entirely within the diatonic scale, usually moving by step. Even the inclusion of *la* is an exception, making a special appearance at the height of the most intense “Hallelujah” phrase. The same, brief melodic ideas are used again and again; essentially, this is as singable as a “folk” melody gets.

Harmony – The vocal harmony follows underneath the melody in tight homophony, adjusting away from the diatonic as necessary to double Tindley’s chord progression. This is in keeping with characteristic Black gospel music (actually, all gospel choral music), though traditional choirs would improvise the harmony parts and/or learn them by ear. Tindley uses the diatonic I, ii, IV, and V chords mostly, though a beautifully interesting departure is the major III chord in the first verse, serving as a modified ii-V-I progression for the minor, diatonic ii chord. It is precisely that kind of sophisticated twist that makes this song sustainable as the phrases repeat again and again. Also of note is Baker’s use of a  $I^7$  as a substitution chord in a couple places, allowing for some funky blues notes in both the harmonic voices and piano accompaniment.

Timbre – The tight, interlocked vocal harmonies call out for rich and full vocal colors. Everyone needs to have something to say; every person needs to be heard. This is music you feel in vibrating in your core as you sing, as you together become of one voice with those standing next to you. Pulling away from this lushness is done occasionally, and when it happens, it creates moments of transparent gentleness and vulnerability. When should those moments happen? It truly is at the discretion of the director/ensemble/soloist.

Texture – Baker’s arrangement never wavers from the three-voiced homophonic texture. This community is staying together! All nuance and artistry comes from form, color, and expression.

Expression – Much like a jazz chart or a rock song, so much of what is the essence of the music’s expression cannot be captured in musical notation. Baker’s edition has an articulation mark on pretty much every single note, yet if one performed it that way – very carefully – it would sound fake and ill-informed (indeed, YouTube is filled with examples of choirs doing exactly that). Rather, it is only through listening to many recordings of gospel choirs that one can get a feel for what expressive decisions to make. Some traditional gospel stylings that make sense to use in this piece, however, might include:

- Full open vowels punctuated with strategically placed bright, explosive consonants. Listen to recordings of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speeches if you want suggestions of how this approach to diction can impact emotional directness.
- Strong, sustaining *fortes* during held notes.
- When a phrase will be repeated multiple times, start gently. Volume and richness of vocal timbre can be added with each successive statement. Let the building musical force match the rising conviction of the message.
- Generally, the rhythms have more meatiness and weight than they look on the page (even those dotted eighth notes on the offbeats). These notes carry the fullness of cultural legacy; don’t hurry them.
- It’s ok for the ensemble to breathe in the middle of a phrase, even in the middle of a word. There are different rules about this in gospel choral music than in most other choral traditions.

#### *Additional Considerations/Reasons to Perform This Composition*

One of the significant differences between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation is a genuine thirst to learn, to put aside preconceptions, and “lay one’s self low,” as Chernoff says. It is essential that one avoid the easy, pre-packaged path and search for music true to the respective cultural tradition while still fitting the students’ needs. As the teacher choosing both the repertoire and the pedagogy, I need to personally deal head-

on with (in the particular case of this song) the thorny issues of sacred music in school and the potential for racial insensitivity. The assertion of “why kids need this music” must be carefully considered and then diligently communicated to students, families, administration, and audience members. To that affect, I have read books and articles (some of which are listed below), conversed with many colleagues and music professionals, and done my sincere best to find the highest quality compositions and arrangements I can. I would strongly recommend that any teacher who is programming repertoire outside the “traditional” non-Western canon do the same.

To that end, my main defense for the essential place of “The Storm Is Passing Over” in my student’s music education is as follows: Learning the musical traditions of as many different types and groups of Americans is important. The music of enslaved Africans and the first few generations of freed African-Americans represents both a completely unique art form, unlike any other in the world, and also a tremendously influential one. These songs were the poetry of a people not allowed to read or write. Blues, jazz, and rock come from this music, which (in part) led and still leads to the Westernization of other cultures. American social and political history was formed and changed because of this music. To not learn this music is to leave a gap of understanding in our country’s artistic and humanitarian heritage.

Or, I suppose, here is another way of saying nearly the same thing:

*You know why music was the center of our lives for such a long time?  
Because it was a way of allowing Africa in.*

*- Brian Eno*

#### *Selected Resources*

- Curtis, Marvin V. "African-American Spirituals and Gospel Music: Historical Similarities and Differences." *ACDA Choral Journal* (March, 2001).
- Kinchen, James B., Jr. "Black Gospel Music and Its Impact on Traditional Choral Singing." *ACDA Choral Journal* (August, 1986).
- Leland, John. *Hip, the History*. New York: Ecco, 2004.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. Liner Notes for *African American Gospel: The Pioneering Composers*. [http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner\\_notes/smithsonian\\_folkways/SFW40074.pdf](http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/smithsonian_folkways/SFW40074.pdf) (Reagon has written quite a bit about Tindley and has a number of books on African American sacred music and music in Black urban culture; this resource is free, however)

#### ***The Heart Statement***

**The heart of “The Storm Is Passing Over” is the dignified, jubilant weight and space of the offbeat rhythms sung in tight, close-knit homophony. The “tension in time” created by the syncopations speaks to struggle; the vocal homophony speaks to security. When combined, they bring hope to the weary, sustenance from the community, and demonstrate trust in ultimate justice.**

## ***Skill Outcome***

**Students will accurately maintain part independence in tight, homophonic harmony while recognizing the basic function of their line within the chordal structure.**

### **Strategies**

#### *Find do-mi-sol*

While warming up with major scale patterns, practice “quick-finds” of notes in the tonic chord. Do this by ear, without help from the piano or teacher. Use Curwin hand signs. Alternatively, play an introduction to a song, stop, and have the students find *do*.

#### *Improvise chordal long tones*

Using a familiar song with a simple, repetitive chord progression (e.g. OneRepublic’s “Counting Stars”), improvise phrases of long tones. Begin on different notes of the tonic chord, moving pitches up or down as the ear necessitates to fit the chords. Have students identify whether they’re starting their line on *do*, *mi*, or *sol* and practice having multiple lines happening at once within the ensemble.

#### *Cabin cross check*

In airline speak, this means that flight crew has verified that others have done their jobs in preparation for take off. In practicing a warm up, a long-tone improvisation activity, or working on the piece itself, the teacher (or a student) can call for a quick “cabin cross check!” to have the ensemble sing through the tonic chord and verify that everyone is on the starting or ending note they should be (and think they’re on).

#### *Score annotation*

Label the first and last note in every phrase (and every part) with a circle for *do*, a rectangle for *sol*, or a horizontal line for *mi*. Notice anything about the similarities/differences about each phrase? Compare different phrases to each other, too. (Once complete, this can also be evaluated as an assessment. Perhaps include a quick journal entry explaining the discoveries that were made.)

#### *Circle singing*

Choosing one phrase, everyone becomes proficient at every line. Use Curwin signs to designate which note a particular line begins/ends on. Students self-select a line to sing as the ensemble transitions to three-part harmony. Create individual circles of each part (i.e. three separate circles in the classroom). When successful with that step, move to concentric circles. Finally, try mixing up the three parts within a large circle, or even on the risers. Try having individuals select a different part on a second or third day of practicing this strategy.

### **Assessment**

- Use the “Find *do-mi-sol*” strategy but as a brief quiz on a journal page.
- Submit a recording of either a “virtual duet” with Ms. Altman or a multi-track performance of a self-selected phrase. The “virtual duet” is created by playing the practice file of one of the parts (one you are *not* singing) out loud on your iPad (no headphones) while – at the same exact time – recording yourself singing *your* part. For the multi-track performance, record yourself singing one part. Put the headphones in (cover just one ear, though!) and record yourself singing a second part while the first one plays back. Optional: repeat a third time with the final phrase. Now you have a whole choir of YOU!

## **Knowledge Outcome**

**Students will relate changes in vocal timbre to variation of anatomical function.**

### **Strategies**

#### Chest voice/head voice experimentation

Play with finding your two timbres separately, using echo vocal and kinesthetic strategies: e.g. cv shouts with hand on sternum, disco whoops while pulling string out of crown of the head, etc. Vocalize descending patterns on a neutral syllable, starting quite high. Raise hand when you feel yourself transitioning into cv. Try the same experiment again and see if you can identify exactly what is changing physiologically when you feel the shift. What do you need to understand about human anatomy to be able to describe your ideas effectively?

#### Big diagram sheet

Give students a blank diagram of the human torso. Locate and label the following: lips, jaw, tongue, soft palate, larynx, vocal folds, lungs, ribs, spine, intercostal muscles, diaphragm. Annotate certain items if/how they directly relate to cv/hv production. Important note: do NOT do this in one class period. Let the students “play” with discovering how their body functions as they sing (How does the back of your ribcage move as you breathe in? Can you feel changes in tension of your tongue when you sing with your thumb underneath your jaw?) before whipping out the diagram. Let exploration drive the process; students should be curious and thirsty for your expertise before you give it. (Once complete, it can also be evaluated as an assessment.)

#### The diva and the emcee

A video of the MRIs of two individuals performing in two very different styles. Great for watching how vocal anatomy works in real life. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2OdAp7MJAI>

#### Vocal timbre meter

Create a kinesthetic “meter” showing cv, hv, and mix. For example, hand at belly button level designates full chest voice sound, arm fully extended above head means complete head voice; hand level can fluctuate anywhere in-between to designate a combination of timbres. Teacher or student conductors can use the meter to nonverbally adjust the timbre of the ensemble. Students can show their own timbre choices in “real time” as they sing through a passage individually or collectively. (Caution: there is a tendency to confuse both volume and pitch with timbre when performing this strategy.)

#### Predicting

Annotate your score with predictions of where the ensemble should use mostly cv, mostly hv, or a mix. Listen to exemplar choirs to see how their choices align with your ideas.

#### Do it “wrong”

What happens if we sing opposite timbres than logic (or our prediction) dictates? (Listen to the recording of the Miami Choral Society Children’s Choir.)

#### Hunting for favorites/least favorites

Examples of choirs singing the piece (both Baker’s arrangement and otherwise) are all over YouTube and iTunes. Listen to a number of them and send Ms. Altman links to your favorite and your least favorite (with a defense in both cases, of course). Listen to a sampling in class (NOT all on the same day) without revealing if it’s a star or a dud. What do you think? Defend your opinion! (Note: Most of the success, or lack thereof, when young people sing this piece, in my opinion, boils down to awkward timbre decisions. Steer conversations/discussions/debates using language in The Big Diagram or the elements of music.)

### A voice lesson inside the choral rehearsal

Free 3-minute voice lesson from Ms. Altman! A volunteer comes down, sings a phrase, and gets some one-on-one attention. Do this repeatedly over several class periods. Once the essentials of The Big Diagram are learned and it has been modeled for a while, invite students to be the teacher, too.

### **Assessment**

Record a video of yourself or a friend singing a phrase from the song. Write a paragraph explaining what timbre choices were made and what you/they did anatomically to create that timbre. What did they do that was particularly successful? How would you suggest improvements be made? Refer to at least five body parts in The Big Diagram.

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## ***Affective Outcome***

**Students will examine why song is so often a vehicle of cultural continuity and determine their personal place in a cultural legacy of music.**

### **Strategies for Understanding Historical Context**

#### Guest teacher

Invite the 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies teacher in to teach a 30-minute mini-class on the Transatlantic Slave Trade. (He does this amazingly well; students turn the classroom floor into a world map and travel, walking through the trading routes.)

#### Timelining music we know

Give students slips of paper with titles of pieces studied in the past year or two. Choose repertoire that is West African, from the Western canon before 1900, a spiritual, and/or a musical descendent of spirituals (e.g. blues, jazz, rock, etc.). Have students put the titles in a timeline on a large sheet of paper. They can work in small groups or alone; annotate decisions as needed to provide explanation.

#### Marian Anderson to MLK, Jr.

Spend 15 minutes telling the story (with video clips) of the banned Marian Anderson performance in Washington, DC and its connection to the “I Have a Dream” speech: a strong example of how song is a vehicle of cultural continuity. Finish with a quick journal entry/exit slip about what they heard that they already knew and what surprised them.

- 1939 newsreel on Anderson performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XF9Quk0QhSE>
- I Have A Dream (3:20): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vDWWy4CMhE>

### **Strategies for Examining Cultural Legacy**

#### Parent Survey

Adapt the usual September parent/student survey to include a question about music’s influence/function in your culture. There might also be a question about your favorite song you learned from a family member when you were very young and why it has remained close in your mind.

### Thinking about cultural legacies

Why do you think song might be one of the few traditions of African-American culture that has lasted from the days of slavery to today? What comparisons to you see between the importance of music in this culture and your own/ones you're familiar with?

### USM Musical Legacies

How is music a part of our USM cultural legacy? Brainstorm; discuss; journal. (e.g. Singing the "Alma Mater" at the end of assembly each week.) Invite Upper School students or alumni (via Skype) into rehearsals to discuss how performing music at USM has been meaningful in their life. Follow with a quick journal response.

### **Assessment**

Nearly all of the strategies for this outcome (including the Introduce the Piece strategy below) can result in either a brief journal entry or a longer written response. The teacher can evaluate some or all of these, as desired. Another strategy is to have the students keep the collection of their ideas in their chorus journal. Near the end of the semester, they can choose one idea/response that was particularly meaningful for them and create a video of themselves sharing their reflection. These can be edited into a short video that can be shown at the concert. Another possibility is to collect written quotes and create a video of text (perhaps interwoven with still photos of students with family members or rehearsal candids) set to background music that can be shown as a pre-concert trailer.

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### **Introducing the Piece**

This works well as a "storytime" moment in the last couple minutes of a rehearsal. It could be set up as an actual homework assignment (send me a paragraph explaining your choice) or a "thinking" homework assignment (come prepared to share your idea).

*Imagine yourself fifty years in the future. You're now a grandparent, sitting on your front porch with your flying car out front and your little grandchild on your knee. It's a lazy summer afternoon, and your grandchild is being a little fussy – definitely time to sooth them with a song. You think back to your childhood; what song was so important or meaningful to you as a child that you want to pass it on to another generation? What is it about that particular song that makes it special to you?*

In class, after there has been a chance to share song choices, explain that we will be learning a song that was just that special – not just for one grandparent, but many. Then teach the melody by rote.