

# *Camp Meeting*

*(Down in the River to Pray / Shout all Over God's Heaven)*

*for SSATTBB choir  
arranged by Thomas Lloyd*

## *Introduction*

Camp meetings were a phenomenon in the frontier areas of early 19<sup>th</sup> Century America as part of what we now call the “Second Great Awakening”.

In her landmark study, *The Music of Black Americans*, Eileen Southern wrote:

“[The camp meeting’s] participants were the common people, black and white, of all the Protestant denominations; its format [was] that of a continuous religious service spread out over several days, often an entire week. Religious services took place in a forest or woods, the members of the huge temporary congregations worshipping in large tents and living in small tents....The camp meeting was primarily an interracial institution; indeed, sometimes there were more black worshipers present than white.” (pages 82-83)

This arrangement seeks to recreate a possible encounter at such a camp meeting between two racially separated groups of singers on opposite sides of a field. Choirs are encouraged to incorporate creative movement into their performances.

I learned about the song “Down in the River to Pray” from Allison Krause’s beautiful version recorded for the movie “Brother, Where Art Thou?” Because of its context, I assumed it to be a so-called “white spiritual” from Appalachia. After I started the arrangement, I found that the earliest published version of this song is actually found in the 1867 *Slave Songs of the USA*. It was later obviously widely sung by both whites and blacks, so I kept it in the arrangement. The words speak of going “down in the river to pray” to study about “that good ol’ way” and ask the question “who shall wear the robe and crown? Good Lord show me the way!”

We hear the women sing this song first, by themselves. Then the men, opposite the women representing the slave community, sing the song variously known as “I got a robe” or “Shout all over God’s Heaven”. The first part of their song answers the question of who shall wear the robe – “I got a robe – you got a robe- all o’ God’s Chillun got a robe!” – and that’s worth celebrating – “When I get to heab’n I’m goin’ to put on my robe I’m goin’ to shout all ovah God’s Heab’n” – then the song concludes with a warning very rarely found in the spirituals – probably intended not only for their own flock, but for their masters who also professed faith in Christianity: “Ev’ry body talkn’ bout Heab’n ain’t goin’ dere!”

After listening to the men sing their song, both sides go back to their own singing, and we hear the songs simultaneously, as though across a field from each other. But then the groups decide to listen more closely to each other, and take turns teaching each other their songs – by the end, they’re singing together in full voice “I’m goin’ shout all over God’s Heab’n!”

After getting caught up in the enthusiasm of their combined singing, the groups begin to retreat back to their own sides – as they do, the leader of each group sings the song they’ve learned from the other. At the end, the free white singers ask the question of their song again: “Who shall wear the robe and crown? Show me the way...” in response to which the singers from the slave community remind them again of their common humanity with the words, “I got a robe” – if only that invitation could have been fully heard and accepted by those in power then, or even truly understood again today, how much sorrow and injustice could be allayed! – *Thomas Lloyd*

# Camp Meeting

(Down in the River to Pray / Shout all Over God's Heaven)

traditional, arr. Thomas Lloyd

$\text{♩} = 60$

Women *solo*



As I went down in the ri-ver to pray, stu-dy-ing a - bout that good ol' way and who shall wear the robe and

W. *tutti*




crown? Good Lord show me the way! O si - sters let's go down, let's go

W.



down, let's go down, O si - sters let's go down, down in the ri-ver to pray. —

M. *solo* *tutti [bring out the melody in T2]*



18 (Men) I got a robe, you got a robe, all o'God's Chil-lun got a robe. When I get to Heab'n I'm goin'to

M.



put on my robe, I'm goin'to shout all o - vah God's Heab'n\* Heab'n Heab'n

M.



Ev-'ry-bo-dy talk - in' 'bout Heab'n ain't go - in' dere; Heab'n, Heab'n, Lord, I'm goin'to shout all o - vah God's

W. *solo*



As I went down in the ri-ver to pray, stu-dy-ing a - bout that good ol'

M.



Heab'n I got a robe, you got a robe, all o'God's Chil-lun got a

\* always go right to the [n] and sustain it

38

W. way and who shall wear the robe and crown? Good Lord show me the way!

M. robe. When I get to Heab'n I'm goin'to put on my robe, I'm goin'to shout all o - vah God's

42

W. O si - sters let's go down, let's go down, let's go down, O si - sters let's go

M. Heab'n\_ Heab'n\_ Heab'n\_ Ev-'ry-bo-dy talk-in'"bout Heab'n ain't go-in' dere;

48

W. down, down in the ri-ver to pray. As I went down in the ri-ver to

M. Heab'n, I'm goin'to shout all o-vah God's Heab'n!

54

W. pray, stu-dy-ing a - bout that good ol' way

M. As I went down in the ri-ver to pray, stu-dy'ng a-bout that

59

W. you got a robe, all o' God's Chil-lun got a robe.

M. good ol' way; I got a robe, you got a robe, all o' God's Chil-lun got a robe.

64

W. goin'to put on my robe, Good Lord show me the way! O

M. When I get to Hea-b'n and who shall wear the robe and crown?

70

W. Bro-thers let's go down, let's go down,

M. let's go down, down, When I get to Heab'n I'm goin'to

75

W. I'm goin'to shout all o - vah God's Hea-b'n Heab'n Heab'n

M. put on my robe, Hea-b'n, Hea-b'n, Heab'n

80

W. Ev-'ry-bo-dy talk-in' 'bout Heab'n ain't go-in' dere; Heab'n, I'm goin'to shout

M. Ev-'ry-bo-dy talk-in' 'bout Heab'n ain't go-in' dere; Hea-b'n, Lord. I'm goin'to shout,

85

W. I'm goin'to shout all o - vah God's Heab'n!

M. I'm goin'to shout, shout all o - vah God's Heab'n! As I went down in the ri-ver to

*solo*

91 *solo*

W. I got a robe, you got a robe, all o' God's Chillun got a

M. pray, stu-dy-ing a - bout that good ol' way and who shall wear the robe and crown? Good Lord

96 *(solo)*

W. robe.

M. *tutti* When I get to Heab'n I'm goin' to put on my robe, I'm goin' to shout all o-vah God's

show me the way! *(hum)* \_\_\_\_\_

101

W. Heab'n, O bro-thers! Let's go down, down in the ri-ver to pray;

M. *solo* O Sis-ters! Let's go down, down in the ri-ver to pray. *tutti (hum F#/B)*

106 *tutti* *4'*

W. Show me the way, show me the way.

M. *pp poco rall.* Show me the way; I got a Robe!

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