

“This Little Light of Mine”

TRADITIONAL

*Scored for solo mezzo-soprano (approx. 4 minutes).*

“This Little Light of Mine” is a traditional Negro spiritual about the importance of unity in the face of adversity. The first spirituals were inspired by African music even if the tunes were not far from those of Christian hymns. Some of them, called “shouts,” were accompanied by dancing, hand clapping and foot tapping. Drawing on the Bible for inspiration and imagery, most spirituals instruct listeners in how to live with the Spirit of God.

These songs often had multiple meanings. The literal interpretation reflected the personal relationship between the slave singer and God. However, the spirituals also translated to code for slaves looking to escape to the North to freedom. For example, as part of the spiritual’s lyrics, “home” can mean Heaven, but it covertly means a free country and haven for slaves.

The refrain of “This Little Light of Mine” refers to the light inside each individual and how, whether standing up alone or joining together, each little bit of light can break the darkness. The song has since been applied to many struggles. It was especially popular during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s.