



CMP Teaching Plan

Matthew Sheppard, 2021

COMPOSITION

Deep River, based on an African American spiritual
Arr. Carrie Lane Gruselle (University of Wisconsin, Stevens-Point; WI CMP committee member)

Editions

Numerous settings, including:

- Vocal and choral: *The Story of the Jubilee Singers: With Their Songs* (J.B.T. Marsh, 1876); *Deep River*, voice and piano (Henry “Harry” Burleigh, 1916, multiple settings)
- Instrumental: *24 Negro Melodies*, op. 59 for piano (Samuel Coleridge Taylor, 1905); *Deep River*, violin and piano (Maud Powell, 1905)
- Ensemble: set in *A Child of Our Time* (Michael Tippett, 1941)

ANALYSIS

BROAD DESCRIPTION

This arrangement of *Deep River*, set for string orchestra by Carrie Lane Gruselle, builds on the long tradition of arrangements, transcriptions, and interpretations of one of the most well-known African American spirituals.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Compositional style

Gruselle composes and arranges repertoire for beginning and developing string players. As a string specialist and educator in Wisconsin, she brings a specific and practical understanding of how to both engage and teach through quality arrangements and original works. Her experience and training in ensemble education, Suzuki method, and CMP, gives her a wide range of tools and techniques to make quality literature available to developing string players.

Compositional output

Gruselle has composed, arranged, and transcribed nearly 100 works for student ensembles. While her works range from grade 1-5 and include some full orchestra pieces, the majority of them are grade 1-3 for string orchestra specifically. Her output includes transcriptions of folk and traditional music, arrangements of classical works and their themes, and original compositions.

Immediate context

Composed in 2005 for string orchestra and rehearsal piano, this setting of *Deep River* draws on the traditions of earlier settings while charting its own way through textural, timbral, and formal techniques. Gruselle sets the entirety of the famous tune, and she also references to the influential settings by Samuel Coleridge Taylor and Harry Burleigh without simply transcribing them for string orchestra.

The earliest extant written setting of *Deep River* is in the collection *The Story of the Jubilee Singers: With Their Songs* by J.B.T. Marsh (1876). The Jubilee Singers were the school chorus of Fisk University, founded in Nashville in 1866 as the Fisk Free Colored School to help educate freed slaves after the Civil War. In 1871, the chorus began traveling across the United States and Europe to raise both visibility and funding for the school. Successful in both regards, the tours also helped bring to the broader public consciousness—particularly the white public consciousness—the power and strength in the traditions of African American spirituals.

In 1913, Harry T. Burleigh solidified *Deep River* in the tradition of art songs as one of his *Two Spirituals*, and in later publications and arrangements for solo voice and piano. Burleigh, whose grandfather was a slave who had paid

for his own freedom in 1835, attended the newly-founded National Conservatory of Music of America in 1892—the same year that Antonín Dvořák began as director. About their relationship, Burleigh said “I sang our Negro songs for him very often, and before he wrote his own themes, he filled himself with the spirit of the old Spirituals.”¹ Burleigh went on to teach at the conservatory, and in the early 20th century, he was the leading voice of teaching, performing, and arranging African American spirituals, and his students went on to further his work in the popular, classical, folk, and operatic traditions.

The text of *Deep River* is:

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
 Deep river, Lord,
 I want to cross over into campground. (2x)

Oh don't you want to go to that gospel feast?
 That promised land where all is peace?
 Deep river, Lord,
 I want to cross over into campground. (2x)

Knowledge of the text and how it corresponds to the notes is critical to the understanding and shaping of the music, particularly in the form and architecture of Gruselle's setting. Of this spiritual, Howard Thurman wrote that

*Deep River is perhaps the most universal in insight, and certainly the most intellectual of all the spirituals. In a bold stroke it thinks of life in terms of a river. Of course, it must be added that to these early singers—slaves as they were—practically the river may have been for many the last and most formidable barrier to freedom...But let us reflect in a deeper meaning here. To think of life as being like a river is a full and creative analogy.*²

ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

Form

Song	A section Deep river, my home is over Jordan, Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.	8 measures 4 4
	B section Oh don't you want to go to that gospel feast? That promised land where all is peace? Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.	12 measures 4 4 4

Gruselle's arrangement Intro → A → A' → B → B' → Coda

Introduction	A (a + a')	A' (a + a')	B (b + a'' + a')	B' (b + a' + a')	Coda
6 measures	8 (4 + 4)	8 (4 + 4)	12 (4 + 4 + 4)	12 (4 + 4 + 4)	5

¹ Synder, Jean. "'A Great and Noble School of Music': Dvorak, Harry T. Burleigh, and the African-American Spiritual." In *Dvorak in America, 1892-1895*. Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1993, 123-148.

² Hawn, C. Michael. "History of Hymns: 'Deep River'." Discipleship Ministries. <<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/history-of-hymns-deep-river>> (April, 2021).

The forms of both the song and Gruselle's arrangement, while quite clear, are not as straightforward as a simple "song" form might suggest. Rather than employing a strophic or symmetrical ABA form, both works utilize simple seed ideas—four measure units—that are woven together, overlapping and tying together the A and B sections to create unity. It is a remarkable achievement: the music is both well-defined in four measure phrases and totally unified into one ceaselessly flowing work.


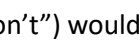
The opening **A section** uses two sub-phrases of four measures each (**a** and **a'**) in which the opening half (five notes, pitches and rhythms) are identical; only the final half of each phrase is different, with the second more conclusive. In Gruselle's setting, the formal structure of the A section is repeated a second time, with variations in texture, dynamics, and rhythm. Both times, it is the expected 8 measures in total.

The more active **B section** uses not two but three sub-phrases of four measures each for twelve measures in total. (This too is true in both Gruselle's setting and the traditional tune.) The opening of the B section is new music: the **b** theme is a more active four measure phrase than anything we've heard to this point. But almost immediately, the music "returns" to music we've almost heard before—"a'" with an ending that allows it to elide again into the more conclusive **a'** we heard at the opening. Gruselle's arrangement repeats this B section (varied, again) before closing with a Coda that extends the final **a'**. Built from only two core thematic ideas, *Deep River* is a masterwork of unity and architecture.

Rhythm

In 4/4 and marked *Larghetto* at $\text{♩} = 60$, Gruselle's *Deep River* employs conservative vocabulary, using little beyond the rhythms traditionally established by Burleigh and the Jubilee Singers. Beats *without* movement are as common and perhaps more impactful than beats *with* movement, and even with this simple vocabulary, Gruselle creates powerful moments of both sound and silence, particularly through agogic accents. Just as the flow of the river may ebb and flow, the rhythmic pulse can and should fluctuate throughout, with changes employed to amplify the emotion and character of the music. Gruselle offers guidance with *ritardando* and *A tempo* as appropriate, and the dynamics can help guide the more flexible rubato.

The **A section** opens with harmony moving in half notes while the melody ties across these movements (measure 1 beat 3) or resonates/echoes after them (measure 2 beat 2). Though each rhythmic layer itself is simple, the interplay between them creates remarkable sense of depth, unity, and flow.

The **B section** utilizes these same ideas: in the second and third parts (derived from the A section's music) the treatment is almost identical, whereas in the first part (new music), the rhythmic interlocking and syncopation increases in intensity, moving from alternating quarters and half notes to syncopated eighths and quarters. Of particular interest is the opening measure, which begins . This syncopated rhythm is an unusual start: an alignment of the rhythms that immediately derails into swirling syncops. Were it written as the more traditional and expected pickup of , the second note ("don't") would be likely to stop short—to have a strong and articulated metric accent that tapers off. Written as it is, the second note *carries* across the syncopated second beat to the third, drastically heightening the energy and drama of the music here at the **B section** where we encounter new music (**b**) for the first time. This swirling, syncopated energy can then be channeled and released at the arrival of the **a'** section, when all of the parts again align with a powerful metric accent on the first note.

Larghetto (♩ = 60)

One of the most powerful rhythmic elements of Gruselle’s work is when the pulse is hidden. After launching out of the gate with a powerful near-rhythmic unison opening measure, the second measure abandons the pulse: only the energy of the first measure carries the listener—and the performer—successfully to the downbeat of measure three.

Similarly, from the fourth to the fifth measure Gruselle creates tension and arrival not by more sound, but by a solo violin 1 beat four during which all other parts drop out, only to return and “reset” the rhythm to prepare for the main melody in measure 7. (below)

Throughout, Gruselle employs rests to similar effect. Properly aligned,

the rests in measure 12 create a breathless sense of gravity at work: the feeling of being suspended in air for the briefest of moments before landing—comfortably and gently—on the following downbeat. Similar techniques are used at the closing of each **A section**. But the most impactful example of this, the power of silence and suspense in such a heartfelt piece, is in the Coda. Gruselle employs rests, a beautifully placed fermata and caesura, and then a rhythmic augmentation of the *a'* closing theme to create an intimate, still, and peaceful end to the piece. It is the rare ending in which not a soul on-stage or watching from the audience can move—or barely even breathe, until that final sigh of peace after the sound dissipates.

Melody

Taken directly from the spiritual, the melody of Gruselle’s *Deep River* is simple and song-like, which is appropriate given its origin. The three notes most frequently employed in the melody are D, F#, and B—three perfect choices to allow for near constant pivots between D major and B minor. Repeated pitches are frequent and intimately tied to the agogic and syllabic accents of the text.

Only twice does the melody move in intervals beyond a perfect fourth—and in fact, the perfect fourth is only used once as well. The majority of movement is stepwise or at the third, with the usual corrections after large intervals. This is expected: as a spiritual, the “singability” of the music is paramount, so that all can join in.

And this makes the moments that break even more powerful.

The first moment is the third measure of the **A section**, in a dramatic octave leap from D to D. This occurs after three of the same pitch (D) on the words “My home is...” followed by the higher octave D on the first syllable of “...over Jordan.” It is a powerful moment: the three repeated notes heighten the expectation and contrast of an octave leap, even as in a string arrangement the text painting isn’t an obvious performance factor.

The second moment takes place in the emotional climax of the piece: the B section. After the first instances of new music (*b*), we would expect new music to continue—and in fact, Gruselle builds the music up to do this using other elements. But then, in conjunction with the return of *a'*, a leap of a major sixth catapults us to the downbeat, underlining the realignment of rhythm, harmony, and form on the return of the text “Deep river...” These springly

used large intervals contribute mightily to the power and affect of any performance.

Harmony

As alluded to earlier, Gruselle's *Deep River* lives between D major and B minor, with D major being the main canvas of harmony and B minor being the added color. While the melody, rhythm, and form of *Deep River* are well established and fairly consistent across traditional interpretations and settings, the harmony is often an element of difference. Gruselle is relatively conservative, but still adds frequent color notes and chromatic passages, drawing out lingering lines, smoothly and seamlessly connecting from one voice or phrase to the next, and heightening the poignancy of specific moments.

Unsurprisingly, the chromatic pitches of 1) A# and 2) G# appear frequently for 1) dominant in B minor and 2) secondary dominant in D major. Unexpectedly, F natural plays a significant role as well—a rarer choice as a color note in either key. It adds a surprising darkness to D major harmonies, and an even darker diminished quality to B minor chords. As early as the third measure, Gruselle uses it to expand the color palette and allow her to pivot between the two keys: a b^o chord needs only a G# to turn toward D major as a type of secondary dominant: G#^{o7}, but with more flavor and poignancy than the more standard E⁷.

Outside of these colors, Gruselle also invokes a religious atmosphere, particularly in the Coda, with both 4-3 suspensions and plagal cadences, stretched out in a slower harmonic rhythm.

Timbre

Using a string orchestra creates both possibilities and challenges that aren't as available for the traditional soloist (voice or instrumental) plus accompaniment (piano or orchestra). Gruselle utilizes the sonic similarities to create unity and smoothness in the interlocking rhythms, as well as allowing each string voice to take a turn at the melody.

In the more peaceful **A section**, Gruselle keeps the strings close: there are rarely more than three octaves between the highest and lowest voices, creating a unified, hymn-like sound. But within the first three beats of the heightened drama of the second **B section**, she amplifies and accentuates the differences, stretching the space to more than four octaves for the first time—and staying there until reaching almost five octaves at the climax at measure 39. By saving the highest register of the upper strings and lowest of the low strings for this moment, she adds to the feeling of relief and release as the music soars.

Pizzicato is used sparingly: in fact, only once at the first **B section**. Here, the bass pizz serves as a weaker foundation initially—a seemingly strange choice for the more dramatic and moving music. However, the reason becomes clear at the second and more powerful **B section**, where the bass is again arco (and profoundly deep.) By reserving arco for the second section (as she did for the timbral extremes of the instruments), she heightens the climax.

Texture

Spirituals are typically homophonous to leave the primary focus on the melody and text. With no text, Gruselle's setting adds fabulous new layers of texture in and around the melody and harmony.

Wisely and effectively, the opening iteration of the melody is near homophonous, with as little accompaniment movement as possible to change the harmonies. Expectedly, the first violins carry the melody. The second **A section** sees the melody in the cello section, but more interestingly adds more movement and variety in the upper accompaniment: added chordal notes, passing tones, etc. It stirs up a bit more energy, a bit more movement, serving as a sort of variation on a theme we've heard once already.

In the **B section**, Gruselle more or less reuses this formula: simple and understated first time through, and more swirling movement, countermelodies, passing tones, and arpeggiations in the second time. The amplitude is significantly increased: nearly each beat now has a moving eighth note in some line from two beats before 35 to

the third of 40. At this point, the energy slowly drops: the textures move toward homophony in conjunction with the decreased range between notes, softer dynamics, and slowing tempo.

The Introduction and Coda show Gruselle's most thoughtful orchestration. The opening shows not only near-rhythmic unison for the first four measures, but even *pitch* unison on the first three notes (excepting the bass, reading down an octave). What a powerful, dramatic opening statement, and a remarkable contrast from the traditional arpeggiated and gentle opening memorialized in Burleigh's arrangements. And, in the Coda, Gruselle uses space to create the opposite effect: one of gentleness and peace. As the violin 1 melody stretches and lingers on the final notes, the accompaniment places the harmonies, then gently disappears. It would have been simpler and more natural for these harmonies to simply sustain through—but Gruselle's choice creates a restfulness far beyond that of melody and accompaniment. After the tumult of the **B section** journey, we arrive at peace...at tranquility...at rest.

Dynamics

Gruselle's dynamics make clear the architecture that she builds through other elements. The opening introduction is a powerful *f*, fading away into a gentle *mp* melody with a *p* accompaniment for the first iteration of the melody. Gentle $\langle \rangle$ gestures help guide the phrasing, and Gruselle is highly attentive to balancing the timbres and textures of five string sections. The dynamics are perfectly aligned to the structure of the piece: the opening **A section** is soft, while the second is slightly stronger; the opening **B section** is *mf* while the second one is appropriately *ff* as the climax of the piece. (Though even here, she is attentive to balance and student needs: the second violin melody is marked *ff* while the other voices are *f*.)

Equally important to the climax of the piece is the point of lowest energy: the gentlest and most transparent moment before the final few measures. Brilliantly, Gruselle places this after the dramatic middle phrase of the first **B section**. This helps create a shocking stillness in the music...a stillness that amplifies the drama of the climax to come only 8 measures later, which burns brightly before fading into the gentle *p* and *pp* coda. Young string players have the chance to create musical and dramatic magic with their final phrase and notes: a stillness in the *ppp* fermata that can linger in the air even as the last vibrations have faded away...

THE HEART STATEMENT

The heart of *Deep River* is the ever-changing texture, ebbing and flowing in both density and viscosity to drive the affective power of the arrangement.

INTRODUCING THE PIECE

- What's in a title? (What might a piece titled "Deep River" sound like?)
- Why is slow music harder than fast music? (Think, share, and list reasons)
- The song! ([Jessye Norman @ Carnegie Hall](#))
- Think of a song... (Think of a song that you hold dear in your heart. What makes it special to YOU?)

FRICION POINTS

- "It's too easy"
- Text and context associations
- Requires soft, slow, and focused playing
- Concentration
- Contextual and appropriative challenges

TAKE OUT THE PIECE...

- Arranged by Carrie Lane Gruselle
- Based on an African-American spiritual
- That demands most finesse in bow apportionment
- In which the arranger uses extreme dynamics
- With a melody that's been arranged by many different performers and composers

OUTCOMES, STRATEGIES, AND ASSESSMENT

SKILL OUTCOME

Students will recognize and refine the bow control techniques needed to perform with a rich and even tone at a variety of bow speeds and dynamics.

A. Strategies

- a. *Scale warm-ups*: Play frog-tip/tip-frog bows on D major/B minor on 2, 4, and 8 counts, with special attention to evenness of tone. Transition into 4-3-2-1 beats per note, necessitating faster adjustments in apportionment/arm weight/contact point.
- b. *Sit down/stand up*: Stand up, sit down...then over 4 seconds, 8, 16, etc. Which is harder, and why? Make the connection to bow speed and control required in slow music.
- c. *Weighted bows*: Have a partner hold the tip of your bow as you draw steadily and evenly—feel for horizontal resistance, allowing for string crossings. Try reversing direction and partners.
- d. *Change the tempo*: Play *Deep River* at multiple tempos, aiming to adjust only the bow speed and still use the same amount of bow. How does the sound change?
- e. *Scrolls to the walls*: With a partner for safety, put the scroll against the wall and leave the left hand relaxed. Draw long bows, and report back to your partner about how the scroll-assist changed your right hand technique.
- f. *What can you adjust?* With a classmate, experiment with how many to play the same pitch differently, changing only your right hand technique.
- g. *Mrs. Doubtfire*: Sing *Deep River A section* in Mrs. Doubtfire voice, 1) sing-songy, 2) phrased. How does your breath compare to the bow?

B. Assessment

- a. *Scale warm-ups*: Sit down; stand up if you stop making sound/run out of bow (informal)
- b. *Weighted bow*: Share how it worked with your partner, then trade. (informal)
- c. *Change the tempo*: Have individual students watch specific sections and give feedback (informal)
- d. *What can you adjust?* Present what you've done to change the pitch—lightning round.
- e. Informal assessment of student skills through success in strategies and performance.

KNOWLEDGE OUTCOME

Students will investigate how arrangers manipulate timbre, texture, form, and rhythm to create aesthetic impact.

A. Strategies

- a. *Score study*: Long-term study exploring what is revealed when you look at this instead of your part.
 1. Compare and contrast 7-14 with 15-22, identifying changes in timbre, texture, and rhythm.
 2. Compare and contrast 23-30 with 35-42, identifying changes in timbre, texture, and rhythm.
- b. *Different arrangements*: Share different versions of *Deep River*, exploring the different choices of arrangers in timbre, texture, and rhythm. As a group, compare two arrangements. Then, students will choose one to compare with our arrangements, identifying different choices made by each arranger.
 1. [Jessye Norman](#)
 2. [Maud Powell](#)
 3. [Bessie Griffin](#)
 4. [Michael Tippett](#)
 5. [Paul Robeson](#)
- c. *Let's mess it up/Bad composer*: what happens when we change specific elements of form, timbre, texture, and rhythm? Flip it around: do the second A first, etc., or put the melody in the basses instead of the cellos (Distribute "re-written" version). How *doesn't* this work?
- d. *Your turn!* Using the melody only of *Deep River*, students will create their own arrangement, employing differences in timbre, texture, form, and rhythm.
- e. *Who has the melody at...?* Call out measures—who has the melody at these spots? Lightning pace questioning—reminders throughout the rehearsal process.

- f. *Draw this piece*: Draw the shape of specific phrases in the air. Try to draw the whole piece—what do you notice?

B. Assessment

- a. *Score study*: on-going identification and assessment; scores can be collected upon completion. (formal)
- b. *Draw this piece*: Try at the board or at seats—are we in alignment? (informal)
- c. *Different arrangements*: Using their Listening Journals, students will identify different arranging techniques in other settings of *Deep River*. (formal)
- d. *Your turn*: students will share (written or performance) their arrangements. (formal)
- e. Informal assessment of student skills through success in strategies and performance.

AFFECTIVE OUTCOME

Students will reflect on what it means to be courageous, as a musician and in the wider world.

A. Strategies

- a. *Why is slow music harder than fast?* List 5 reasons—land at concentration. How do you have to be brave to commit entirely to playing together?
- b. *The Jubilee Singers*. Share the text of *Deep River*, and a bit of its history and context. Prepare for sightreading in the spirit of their courage, and after sightreading respond to these prompts:
 - 1. How does playing a piece together for the first time require courage?
 - 2. What is a river you need courage to cross, in your own life?
- c. *Silence IS courage*. Play 7-14, and 43-end. Examine and reflect: how does 43-end require more courage?
- d. *Fishbowl*. Students perform 43-end. Celebrate their courage, then ask them to share: how did it feel to know you had to be brave on those notes/silences?
- e. *Noting courage*: Distribute notecards for students to carry with them. Look for small examples of courage—silent or spoken—through the day, and jot them down to share.
- f. *Extremes!*
 - 1. Play and explore 35-43: why do we shy away from extremes?
 - 2. Is your tendency to be a leader or a follower? How is recognizing and counteracting that tendency courageous?
 - 3. Journal: For you personally, does it take more courage to be silent or to speak up? Share a time that you showed courage, either by speaking up or remaining silent.
- g. *Concert Day*: Take out the notecard on which you wrote about how playing a piece together for the first time requires courage. How have you shown courage in studying and performing this piece?
- h. *Singing and volunteering*: throughout the cycle, recognize and celebrate the courage of volunteer speakers and singers.
- i. *Don't give up the note!* 1) m2, 2) before the rest at m12, 3) m35-43, and 4) m47-end, hang on to the ends of notes for exactly the right length. Don't give up! What difference does that make? Foster this conversation. Where do you have to be courageous in this music?

B. Assessment

- a. *The Jubilee Singers*: two written prompts. (formal)
- b. *Fishbowl*: individual student performances demonstrating courage, as well as reflection on the feeling. (informal)
- c. *Noting courage*: student will share notecards/results. (formal)
- d. *Don't give up the note!* Student assessment: how did we do on that? (informal)
- e. *Extremes!* In-class discussion followed by journal prompts. (formal)

MUSIC SELECTION

Deep River is one of the most enduring and powerful African American spirituals, and this setting by Carrie Lane Gruselle is true to the melody, interacts with the traditions that came before it, and brings new insights to the traditional spiritual. With textural variety, a gorgeous melody shared throughout the parts, vibrant and interesting

accompaniment parts, and a near-perfect combination of the energy of both sound and stillness, this is a powerful and compelling setting for any string orchestra.

RESOURCES, REFERENCES, AND FURTHER READING

Gruselle, Carrie Lane. *Deep River*. Florida: The FJH Music Company Inc., 2005.

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Thurman, Howard. *Deep River and the Negro Spirituals Speak of Life and Death*. Indiana: United Friends Press, 1975.

- Library of Congress (LOC.gov) [biography of Harry T. Burleigh](#)
- IMSLP (IMSLP.org) for settings of *Deep River*, including those by Coleridge Taylor, Powell, and Burleigh
- Recordings:
 - [Jessye Norman](#)
 - [Paul Robeson](#)
 - [Bessie Griffin](#)
 - [Marian Anderson](#)
 - [Maud Powell](#)
 - [Michael Tippett](#)
 - [Carrie Gruselle](#)