



James P.
JOHNSON

De Organizer

The Dreamy Kid
(excerpts)

Davis Dunn • Duval

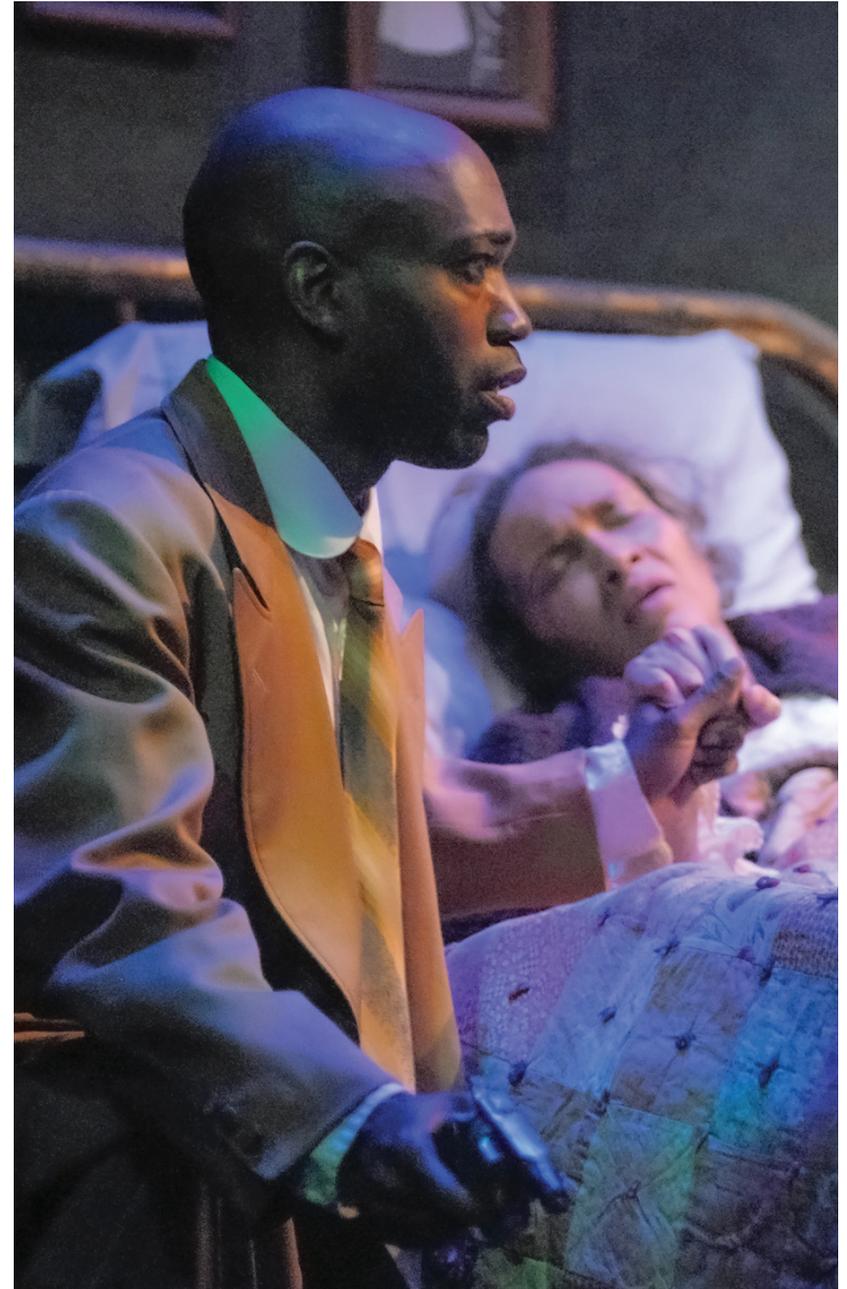
Gray • Hicks • Hood

Ishmel • Kellogg • Spells

Stephens • Woods

University of Michigan
Opera Theatre

Kenneth Kiesler



James P.
JOHNSON
(1894–1955)

De Organizer

Blues opera in one act (late 1930s)
Reconstructed by James Dapogny (1940–2019)
Libretto by Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| De Organizer | Darnell Ishmel, Baritone |
| De Organizer's Woman | Monique Spells, Contralto |
| Old Man | Kenneth Kellogg, Bass |
| A Woman | Rabihah Davis Dunn, Soprano |
| Old Woman | Olivia Duval, Soprano |
| Brother Doshier | Emery Stephens, Tenor |
| Brother Bates | Lonel Woods, Tenor |
| Overseer | Branden C.S. Hood, Bass |

De Organizer Chorus

Soprano: Mutiyat Ade-Salu, Rabihah Davis Dunn, Olivia Duval, Rebecca Eaddy, Kamilah Neighbors
Alto: Elizabeth Gray, Monique Spells, Charis L. Vaughn
Tenor: Brian E. Buckner, Emery Stephens, Lonel Woods
Bass: Jonathan Christopher, Branden C.S. Hood, Kenneth Kellogg

The Dreamy Kid (excerpts)

Opera in one act (1937)
Reconstructed by James Dapogny
Libretto by Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953)

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Mammy | Elizabeth Gray, Mezzo-soprano |
| Ceely Ann | Lori Celeste Hicks, Soprano |
| Irene | Olivia Duval, Soprano |
| Dreamy | Lonel Woods, Tenor |

University of Michigan Opera Theatre
University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra
Kenneth Kiesler, Music Director

University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra

Violin I

Rachel Patrick,
concertmaster
Marie-Elise McNeeley
Danae Witter

Violin II

Mark Portolese,
principal
Lea Detlefs
Karen Jenks

Viola

Megan Mason,
principal
Laurel Borden
Leslie Richards

Cello

Joel Salvo, *principal*
Rachel Hsieh

Bass

Anna Jensen,
principal

Flute

Jacqueline Arrington
Megumi Nomura

Oboe

Dietrich Koch
Timothy Michling

Clarinet

Kevin Shurwan
David Snyder

Bass Clarinet

Sophie Huet

Bassoon

Dana Amann
Matthew Ransom

Saxophone

Will Jackson
Evan Marks
Zachary Shemon
Nicholas Sowul

Horn

Sabrina Hepburn
Kit Weber
William Wiegard

Trumpet

Ben Budish
Alex Fioto
Daniel Nesbitt

Trombone

Ben Allen
Elliott Tackitt

Bass Trombone

Joseph Munoz

Tuba

Matthew Bookert

Percussion

Chad Hochberg

Piano

James Dapogny

| | | |
|----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | De Organizer | 32:21 |
| | The Dreamy Kid (excerpts) | 33:37 |
| 2 | Just like a sunlit heaven needs a cloud (<i>Irene, Mammy, Ceely Ann</i>) | 10:42 |
| 3 | Oh good Lawd (<i>Ceely Ann, Irene</i>) | 2:48 |
| 4 | I knows! I knows! Hit ain't long now (<i>Mammy, Dreamy, Ceely Ann</i>) | 6:44 |
| 5 | Dreamy? – Close dat door! (<i>Irene, Dreamy, Mammy</i>) | 2:47 |
| 6 | Dey won't wait down dere much longer (<i>Dreamy, Irene, Mammy</i>) | 5:07 |
| 7 | Does yo' know I gives you dat name w'en yo's des a baby (<i>Mammy, Dreamy</i>) | 5:27 |

James P. Johnson (1894–1955)

De Organizer (late 1930s) • **The Dreamy Kid** (excerpts) (1937)

African American Life and Music on the Stage: Two Operas of the “Shadow Culture”

Renowned as a jazz performer and composer, James P. Johnson also flourished as a composer of opera and show tunes. Remembered primarily as a ragtime and jazz pianist, he influenced the style of jazz innovators including Art Tatum, Fats Waller, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington. In the late 1930s, he composed two short operas: *De Organizer* and *The Dreamy Kid*. These operas offer two contrasting stories of African American life in the early 20th century, revealing both the incredible hopefulness and the incredible precarity of African American life in the years between the First and Second World Wars. *De Organizer* is a hopeful story of solidarity and resistance – one meant to break the twin oppressions of poverty and racism. *The Dreamy Kid* is a tragedy, marked by police violence in a racially unjust atmosphere. Johnson sets these stories to an eclectic and powerful mixture of musical styles that capture the essence of African American music-making in the early 20th century.

It is a common practice to divide music into neat stylistic categories like classical, popular, jazz, folk, blues, and opera. *De Organizer* and *The Dreamy Kid* defy these categorizations, both of genre and musical style. In Johnson’s sound world, big band dance tunes, longing spirituals, and *secco* recitative all live side by side. These operas relish unapologetically in the traditions of African American music in the early 20th century, presenting a wide gamut of musical sounds in the context of opera and using them to tell compelling stories about African Americans.

Johnson wrote *De Organizer* to a libretto by the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes. This work presents another fundamental and important aspect of African American life during the Jim Crow period: this opera is hopeful about the ability of African Americans to work together to improve their circumstances. That hope rests in the ability of a small community of Black Southern sharecroppers to exercise power as a collective. The farmers meet in a cabin on a Southern plantation by the cover of night. They have arranged a meeting with the eponymous “organizer,” who will help them form a sharecropper’s union. They hope to stop the exploitation that sends “ten thousand bales of cotton to the landlord,” “ten thousand acres of cane to the big boss,” and “a million watermelons [to] the market” while the sharecroppers sing the “Hungry Blues.” Performed only once, at a convention of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in 1941, the opera valorizes labor unions as institutions for positive economic change for workers.

The libretto and opera make it clear that economic practices have kept sharecroppers – many formerly enslaved or the children of people who were enslaved – in a state nearly indistinguishable from slavery. Johnson amplifies this idea in the music. Early in the opera, the sharecroppers sing a chorus in the lamenting style of a spiritual: “Plantin’, plowin’, hoein’! Wonder where that cotton’s goin’?” It is both an expression of pain and a cry of hope. The sharecroppers meet in secret, working to build “a big strong union...of black and white.” The purpose of this union is to advocate for their “freedom.” In the 20th century, in contrast with many of the New Deal programs that excluded African Americans, Johnson’s opera articulated a vision of Black power and self-determination. In the end, the work is hopeful because the sharecroppers succeed; they unite and create for themselves an organization that will support them against the economic exploitation that they face.

The Dreamy Kid is an adaptation of an existing play by the white playwright Eugene O’Neill. It tells the tragic story of an elderly African American woman as she lies on her deathbed and her grandson who has killed a white man in an altercation. The young man, nicknamed “The Dreamy Kid,” risks his life to see his grandmother one more time before she passes. He is on the run from the police, who act as a looming threat throughout the opera. O’Neill’s play and Johnson’s opera tapped into the real and present threats of mob and police violence for African Americans across the United States.

For African Americans all over the United States, the years after the end of the First World War were among the most dangerous ever. Anti-Black violence erupted in East St. Louis in 1917 and Philadelphia in 1918. The summer of 1919, the year in which O’Neill’s play premiered, was dubbed the “Red Summer” for the massive wave of racial violence that swept across American cities such as Chicago and Washington, D.C. In the waves of racial violence after the First World War, whole communities of African Americans, such as the community of Corbin, Kentucky and Tulsa, Oklahoma were totally or nearly destroyed by white mobs unencumbered by local officials or local police in these “race riots.”

Dreamy finds himself a young Black man in a white-dominated world that has deemed him a threat that must be controlled or eliminated. He knows that the details of his altercation with the white man are unlikely to change his fate. We learn from Dreamy that the white man “was de one lookin’ for trouble” and that the white man boasted to others that he would “get” Dreamy. In 1935, the Black sociologist Kelly Miller captured the relationship between African Americans and Northern police forces, which were often all or predominantly composed of white men:

“Too often the policeman’s club is the only instrument of the law with which the Negro comes into contact. This engenders in him a distrust and resentful attitude toward all public authorities and law officers. None can doubt that such a kindly attitude would go far to convince the Negro of the value to himself and advantage of law obedience and good citizenship.”

The opera ends with Dreamy listening in fear to the sounds of the police climbing the stairs outside his grandmother’s room – presumably awaiting a similar fate to his dying grandmother. Dreamy’s fate unfortunately resonates today with the stories of many others. I am reminded of the circumstances surrounding the death of a young Black woman named Breonna Taylor in March 2020. Like Dreamy and his grandmother, Taylor and her boyfriend Kenneth Walker rested in a bedroom while four white officers from the Louisville Metro Police Department approached outside their apartment door to fatal consequences. It is a chilling image – and one that has persisted for more than 100 years – of the enduring consequences of the persistent racist structures that devalue Black lives.

In the early 20th century, African American music and musicians thrived in what opera scholar Naomi André has called a “shadow culture.” Black Americans were shut out of many institutions in the United States. These included the bastions of American classical music, such as the opera house, the symphony hall, and the conservatory. Despite this exclusion, a culture of Black music-making flourished. Music teachers in predominantly African American schools taught their students to hone their musical skills. Black churches became venues for classical singers to display their artistry. The Black press relayed important news and commented on the musical happenings in cities across the country. Jook joints and dance halls hosted Black musicians and provided spaces for African Americans to socialize and dance. While segregation was often the rule in housing, education, worship, and music-making, the shadow culture provided a respite for African Americans from the hostile, omnipresent clutches of white supremacy. This shadow culture served as the fertile soil in which individuals such as James P. Johnson created the characteristic sounds that today define America’s greatest musical traditions.

Johnson’s operas would not be possible without that shadow culture, and these two operas reflect that shadow culture back onto itself. Johnson employs his formidable skills as a composer and his vast knowledge of African American musical styles to forge a blended musical style. He seamlessly combines the rural and working-class blues with highbrow opera, then-modern jazz with classic spirituals, all into two remarkable short dramatic works that explore complex and meaningful aspects of African American life in the United States.

As we consider the future of American music, an important question remains: How can this shadow culture be brought into conversation with the nation’s musical traditions? While white composers like George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, and Charles Ives often receive a great deal of credit for combining popular and art music into an “American” classical idiom, there was already an established tradition of doing just this among African Americans. Johnson followed a trail blazed by Harry T. Burleigh, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and the many other Black musicians and music teachers. Johnson and his contemporaries, such as William Grant Still, W.C. Handy, Eubie Blake, and J. Rosamond Johnson were writing music that mixed the great diversity of American musical styles together into an artistically rich amalgam, which deserves to be recognized.

Cody M. Jones

Cody M. Jones is a doctoral candidate in musicology at the University of Michigan studying the intersections of music, race, and history in the United States. He received his BA in music from the College of William & Mary in 2017, and currently works as a researcher on the interdisciplinary research project Singing Justice: Recovering the African American Voice in Song, a project of the University of Michigan Humanities Collaboratory.

De Organizer

Setting: A storage shed on a plantation in the South, late 1930s. A group of African American sharecroppers await the expected arrival of a union's organizer. Before he arrives, his associate and companion, The Woman, turns up bringing union leaflets. She invites them to join the union and talks about The Organizer and their vision of a new, brighter future. The Organizer arrives and speaks about the benefits of forming a union. The meeting is interrupted by The Overseer, who tries to intimidate the sharecroppers to discourage them from joining the union, but he is overpowered and the union is established.

The Dreamy Kid

Setting: Mammy Saunder's bedroom in a house just off Carmine Street in New York City's West Village, 1918. Mammy lies on her death bed awaiting a visit from her beloved grandson, Dreamy. She is being cared for by her friend and neighbor, Ceely Ann. Dreamy's girlfriend, Irene, comes looking for him with urgent information, but is asked to leave. Dreamy arrives and confesses to Ceely Ann that he is running from the law, having killed a white man. Mammy is overjoyed at seeing her grandson and makes him promise to stay with her through her last moments on earth. Irene returns to tell Dreamy that the police know where he is. She begs Dreamy to leave with her before it is too late, but Mammy, unaware of Dreamy's predicament, entreats him to stay. Despite Irene's pleading, Dreamy decides to stay with his grandmother and awaits the approaching police.

About the reconstruction of the operas

Perhaps encouraged by Gershwin's 1936 *Porgy and Bess*, James P. Johnson wrote two one-act operas in the late 1930s. The better known of the two is *De Organizer*, with a libretto by novelist, poet, and columnist Langston Hughes, designed from the outset to be sung. The work is about sharecroppers organizing themselves into a union. With eight principal singers, chorus, and orchestra, it is a large-scale and tuneful score. In May 1941 (other reports say 1940), the opera had its only verified complete performance, in Carnegie Hall, and then it vanished. Except for a three-minute recording of the opera's "Hungry Blues," the opera was thought to be totally lost.

In 1997 I found a partial score of *De Organizer* in the University of Michigan's Eva Jessye Collection. This unusual manuscript score contained only the sung notes of the opera. Using this score and material supplied by Barry Glover, Sr., Johnson's grandson and head of the James P. Johnson Foundation for Music and the Arts, I restored the opera. In 2002, with musical forces from the University of Michigan School of Music, conducted by Kenneth Kiesler, *De Organizer* was given two unstaged concert performances.

Examining James P. Johnson manuscripts and papers in the care of their curator, Barry Glover, I was initially focused on *De Organizer*. But as I looked through the material, I found music from *The Dreamy Kid*, Johnson's first opera, written in 1937. Having to stay focused on the large task of finding the scattered, usually unlabeled, fragments of *De Organizer*, I had little time to examine *The Dreamy Kid*.

Once I had completed the restoration of *De Organizer*, I asked Glover's permission to work on *Dreamy*. The opera is a setting of the 1918 play of the same name by Eugene O'Neill. Setting the play virtually word for word, Johnson froze the action at four points for three arias and a duet by the play's four characters.

A first draft of the entire opera, a score with the voice roles and a two-stave version of the instrumental music exists. Sketchy at points, it contains several notes to himself by Johnson about projected alterations – "transpose to E major" – and orchestration details, with less and less specificity as the piece goes on. Some measures are either left blank – "add eight bars for stage action" – or left with only a sketch of melody. A second draft, completed for only the first half of the entire work's 1800 measures, carries out these compositional plans. In addition, Johnson completed an orchestration of the first 150 measures of the piece, an overture, a before-the-curtain aria, and the very beginning of the action. Apart from two arias from the opera performed in a concert devoted completely to Johnson's concert works in 1942, the opera remained unperformed. Johnson had hoped to present these rather different one-act operas paired in a single evening. We realized Johnson's hope with the fully staged, premier performances of *The Dreamy Kid*, and fully staged performances of *De Organizer* in 2006.

James Dapogny

About the creators

James P. Johnson

Considered the “Father of the Stride” piano, James Price Johnson was born on 1 February 1894, New Brunswick, New Jersey. His tune *Charleston*, which debuted in the 1923 Broadway show *Runnin’ Wild*, was arguably the definitive dance number of the Roaring Twenties, with other hits including *You’ve Got to Be Modernistic*, *Keep Off the Grass* and *Old Fashioned Love*. Symphonic works include *Yamekraw: A Negro Rhapsody*, *Tone Poem*, and *Harlem Symphony*. Johnson served as mentor to Fats Waller, and was also an influence on pianists Count Basie, Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Art Tatum, and Thelonious Monk. Johnson often recorded with Bessie Smith, and was reportedly her favorite pianist. From the 1930s, Johnson suffered several strokes, intermittently retiring. He began performing again in the early 1940s, leading a small swing group and appearing regularly with Eddie Condon. He permanently retired from performing after a severe stroke in 1951, and passed away on 17 November 1955 in Jamaica, New York.

James Langston Hughes (Librettist – *De Organizer*)

James Langston Hughes (1 February 1901, Joplin, Missouri – 22 May 1967, New York City) published his first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, in 1926 (Alfred A. Knopf), graduating from Lincoln University, Pennsylvania three years later. In 1930 he was awarded the Harmon gold medal for literature for his first novel, *Not Without Laughter*. At the center of the Harlem Renaissance, jazz had a large influence on his writing, and he is known for his vivid representation of Black life in America from the 1920s to the 1960s. As well as a vast corpus of poetry, Hughes wrote eleven plays and the popular “Simple” books. He edited the anthologies *The Poetry of the Negro* and *The Book of Negro Folklore*, co-wrote the play *Mule Bone* with Zora Neale Hurston, and penned an autobiography, *The Big Sea*.

Eugene O’Neill (Playwright – *The Dreamy Kid*)

Born in a hotel on Broadway in 1888, Eugene O’Neill was the son of Ella Quinlan O’Neill and the actor James O’Neill. In 1916 he began an association with the experimental Provincetown Players, which produced *The Dreamy Kid*. His first major success came with *Beyond the Horizon* in 1920 which won the first of his four Pulitzer Prizes. Following this, O’Neill wrote prolifically over a span of 23 years, including Pulitzer Prize-winners *Strange Interlude* and *Anna Christie*, and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936. He completed *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* between 1939 and 1944, before a neuromuscular disorder increasingly impeded his ability to write. He died on 27 November 1953, having left instructions that *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* should not be published until 25 years after his death. His wife had it published in 1956. It opened the same year on Broadway and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

James Dapogny (*Reconstruction*)

James Dapogny (1940, Berwyn, Illinois – 2019, Ann Arbor, Michigan) was a jazz musicologist, pianist, composer, arranger, bandleader, and educator. Dapogny studied at the University of Illinois with Robert Kelly, Hunter Johnson and Ben Johnston. He maintained an active nationwide career as pianist-bandleader, arranger and recording artist with James Dapogny’s Chicago Jazz Band, and was the editor of *Ferdinand ‘Jelly Roll’ Morton: The Collected Piano Music*. He also edited *Jazz Masterworks Editions*, a series initiated by Oberlin College and the Smithsonian Institution. He was a beloved professor of music at the University of Michigan from 1966 until his retirement in 2006. In the 1980s he served as accompanist to the singer Sippie Wallace, performing with her at New York’s The Bottom Line and other nightclubs, and his Chicago Jazz Band accompanied her on her 1982 album, *Sippie*. His recordings include *The Piano Music of Ferdinand ‘Jelly Roll’ Morton*, *Back Home in Illinois*, *Laughing At Life*, *Original Jelly Roll Blues*, *Hot Club Stomp*, *On the Road*, and *Rhythm Club*.

De Organizer

1 Scene

Interior of a cabin on a backward plantation in the South. Night. Lanterns and flashlights. The room is full of ragged sharecroppers, men and women.

WOMEN

Where is that man?

MEN

He ought to be here now!

CHORUS

De Organizer! Organizer!

WOMEN

Where is that man?

MEN

He ought to be here now!

CHORUS

De Organizer! Organizer!
Where is that man? He ought to be here now!

OLD WOMAN

Brother Doshier, it's gettin' late.

BROTHER DOSHER

Sit down, sister, you got to wait.

OLD WOMAN

Brother, I'm tired o' waitin'.
He ought to be here now.

DOSHER

You might be tired o' waitin'
But we's got to wait anyhow!
You didn't get your freedom in one day
You can't get a union by hurryin' this a way

OLD WOMAN

Well, then, where is that man?

CHORUS

He ought to be here now.

BROTHER BATES

Yes, where is that man?

CHORUS

He ought to be here now.

BATES

Organizing a union is all right,
But damn if I can organize all night!

OLD WOMAN

Yes, where is that man?

CHORUS

He ought to be here now!
The good Lawd knows,
He ought to be here now.

BATES

Yes he ought to be here now!
(End of opening chorus)

DOSHER

Don't worry! He'll be here.
He's a sharecropper, too,
Just like me and you.

OLD MAN

Sharecropper!

OLD WOMAN

Sharecroppers! ... Oh!

CHORUS

(Chants)
Plantin', plowin', hoein'!
Gettin' up early in de mornin'.
Plowin', plantin', hoein'!
Out in de fields at dawnin'.

Always watchin' cotton growin'.
Plowin', plantin', hoein'!
Wonder where that cotton's goin'?
Plantin', plowin', hoein'!
Wonder where my life is goin'?
Plowin', plantin', hoein',
Wonder where my life is goin'?

OLD MAN

Just poor sharecroppers,
That's all we is:

CHORUS

Plantin', plowin', hoein'!
(End of chant)

DOSHER

(Blues)
Just poor sharecroppers, yes!
But we ain't gonna be always.
We gonna get together
And end these hongry days.
Folks, I've got them hongry blues –
And nothin' in this world to lose.
People's tellin me to choose
'Tween dyin',
and lyin',
and keepin' on cryin' –
But I's tired o' them hongry blues.
Listen! Ain't you heard de news?
There's another thing to choose:
A brand new world, clean and fine,
Where nobody's hongry and
There's no color line!
A thing like that's worth
Anybody's dyin' –
Cause I ain't got a thing to lose
But them dog-gone hongry blues!

CHORUS

We ain't got a thing to lose
But them dog-gone hongry blues!

OLD WOMAN

I done washed so many clothes
My hands is white as snow.
Done got to de place that I
Don't want to wash no more.
I'm going up to heaven,
Say, good Lawd, here am I!

BATES

But Sister Mary, de Lawd's gonna say:
You can't come in here till you die.

CHORUS

You can't come in here till you die!

OLD WOMAN

Well, I've got them hongry blues.

CHORUS

But nothin' in this world to lose!

DOSHER

Folks, ain't you heard de news.
There's another thing to choose:
A brand new world, clean and fine,
Where's nobody's hongry and
There's no color line –
A thing like that's worth
Anybody's dyin' –

CHORUS

Cause we ain't got a thing to lose
But them dog-gone hongry blues!
(End of Blues)

OLD WOMAN

Where is that man? He ought to be here now.

OLD MAN

Yes, where is that man?

BATES

Where is that man?

OLD MAN

Maybe I better go and take a look once more.

DOSHER

Shade de light, brother, 'fore you open de door.

OLD WOMAN

Yes, shade that light, so's the boss won't see.

BATES

And when you hits de pike, walk quietly.

OLD MAN

I'll walk quietly.

But that man, which way'll he come?

From de East or from de West?

DOSHER

He's comin' from de West,

Where de union's best.

(A WOMAN'S voice giving the password outside)

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Jerico! ... Jerico!

CHORUS

Shsss-ssss-ss-s! Who can that be?

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Jerico!

DOSHER

One!

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Jerico!

DOSHER

Two!

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Jerico!

DOSHER

Three!

Then she's due to be!

Open de door, let's see.

(The OLD MAN opens the door. DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN enters, bringing leaflets.)

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Folks, it's me!

DOSHER

Yes, she's due to be!

She brings us news about that man.

And something here for us in her hand.

CHORUS

Strange woman, where is that man?

OLD WOMAN

That organizing man?

CHORUS

Yes, where is that man?

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

That man is comin' by a secret way.

That man is comin' all alone.

That man is like little David

What threw that mighty stone –

Cause he's de organizer!

CHORUS

He's de organizer! He's de organizer!

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

That man he travels on de wings of song.
He travels on de air.
He travels like a cloud by night.
That man is everywhere. –
Cause he's de organizer!

CHORUS

He's de organizer! Organizer!

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

He's gonna help us build a union,
Build it of white and black,
Cause de people that works in de fields all day
Is tired of de landlords on our back.

CHORUS

Yes, we's tired of de landlords on our backs.
(End of Song)

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Folks, I bring you leaflets!
Folks, read 'em well.
This little bit of paper here's
got a lot to tell.
It says: (Recitative)
Ten thousand bales of cotton to de landlord!
How much was ours?
Ten thousand acres of cane to de big boss!
How much was ours?
A million water melons on de market!
How much was ours?
How can we get them things
That should be ours?
Here, take this little leaflet, folks,
And read it well.
This little bit of paper's got
A lot to tell.

OLD MAN

What does it say?

CHORUS

How can we get them things that should be ours?

OLD WOMAN

Which is de way?

BATES

Them things we plant and plow and hoe for
Underneath these southern skies?

DOSHER

How can we make a living?

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Organize!

CHORUS

Organize! ... Organize!

OLD WOMAN

This here little leaflet says, Organize!

CHORUS

Organize! ... Organize!
O-R-G-A-N-I-Z-E!
O-R-G-A-N-I-Z-E!

OLD MAN

Who ever wrote this paper sure must be wise!

CHORUS

Cause this here little leaflet says ORGANIZE!

OLD WOMAN

But where is our man?

BATES

Yes, where is that man?

OLD MAN

Maybe something's happened to our man?

OLD WOMAN

Woman, now you tell us where is that man?

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

He'll be here soon.

He travels on de air.

DOSHER

He travels like a cloud by night.

That man is everywhere.

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

He'll be here.

OLD WOMAN

He's your man?

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Yes, he's my man. I love him, too.

OLD WOMAN

But ain't you scared for your man? Ain't you?

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

No, he'll be here soon. He's coming to you.

He's helping us all. And I can't be selfish

About him. Of course,

Sometimes I miss him because

My man's an organizer.

My man's an organizer

He moves from place to place.

I guess I wouldn't be human

If I didn't miss his loving face.

So I admit:

Sometimes I'm lonely when he's gone away,

But I keep thinking there will come a day.

When this man of mine will do

All the things he wanted to,

And the better world he's dreamed of will come true.

Then what will it matter all these

Days we've spent apart,

There'll be a future bright with joy

Blooming in my heart,

All the poor folks in the world

Will be poor no more,

For my man's an organizer and

That's what he's working for.

And although I'm lonely when he's gone away from me,

Tomorrow he'll be with me and tomorrow we'll be free,

You and I, my man and me, we'll be free!

OLD WOMAN

I believes you. You sure do love him.

But when's he coming here.

OLD MAN

We can't wait! It's gettin' late!

BATES

We got to go. Where is that man?

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Listen!

(A MAN'S voice heard without giving the password)

ORGANIZER

Jerico! . . . Jerico!

DOSHER

Now, I reckon you'll stay.

BATES

Yes, I'll stay! Get out o' my way.

ORGANIZER

Jerico!

DOSHER

One!

ORGANIZER

Jerico!

DOSHER

Two!

ORGANIZER

Jerico!

DOSHER

Three!

It's de organizer! Glory be!

CHORUS

It's de organizer! Yes, it's he!

It's de organizer! Thank God a-Mighty!

It's de organizer! Lawd! De organizer!

Thank God a-Mighty! It's de organizer!

(The door opens and the ORGANIZER enters)

DOSHER

Jackson, where you been so long?

ORGANIZER

I been organizing.

DOSHER

Where you been organizing?

ORGANIZER

Been way cross Mississippi organizing.

DOSHER

Who you been organizing?

ORGANIZER

I been organizing black folks!

And organizing white folks!

And organizing peoples on de land!

I been tellin' everybody

In de cotton and de cane fields,
Been tellin' everybody they's a man!

OLD MAN

And de white folks, what they sayin'?

ORGANIZER

De poor white folks is with us.

De rich white folks is mad.

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

But, baby, how you feelin'?

ORGANIZER

Lawd, I'm feelin' mighty glad!

CHORUS

Mighty glad! Mighty glad!

ORGANIZER

Oh, I'm feelin' mighty glad!

(As he mounts a box to speak)

CHORUS

(Swing shout)

De organizer's here and

We's feelin' mighty glad!

Mighty glad! Mighty glad!

Yes, de organizer's here and

We feelin' mighty glad!

*(Mighty glad! Mighty glad! continues softly as
DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN lifts her voice in praise
and love.)*

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Oh! Ma man is like John Henry.

Ma man is big and strong.

Nothin' in this world can scare him.

Nothin' makes my man do wrong.

Yes, ma man is like John Henry.

He's a hero in de land.
And folks deep in troubles
Comes lookin' for ma man.
Yes, they comes lookin' for ma man,
Cause ma man is like John Henry 'cept he's
Put his hammer down.
Now, just like John Henry, he
Goes from town to town.
Oh! Ma man is like John Henry, but he
Don't drive steel no more.
What ma man is doin' now is
Organizin' de poor
And when he gets done organizin' we
Can take this world in hand.
Cause ma man is like John Henry and
John Henry was a man!

CHORUS

John Henry was a man, Lawd!
John Henry was a man!
(End song)

ORGANIZER

(Begins Organizer)
Folks, you is hongry!
Folks, you need bread!
What you gonna do, folks?

CHORUS

Get mad! Get mad!

ORGANIZER

Folks, that ain't de way!
Folks, that ain't right.
The way to get what we all need's
Unite! ... Unite!
You don't get mad at de rain, do you?
You don't get mad at de sun?
Ain't no use to get mad then
At a big boss with a gun!
De rain you stores in cisterns.
De sun gives de berries their juice.

De union can rake any old boss
And turn him every way but loose!
When we got a big strong union, folks,
A union of black and white,
There'll be more difference in this old South
Then there is twixt day and night.
So to organize is right!

CHORUS

Yes, to organize is right!
Right! ... Right! ... Right! ... Right!
Yes, to organize is right!

ORGANIZER

Sharecroppers all over Dixie,
Farm hands and tenants as well,
De union is de only way
To free ourselves from hell.

CHORUS

To free ourselves from hell!
Yes, to free ourselves from hell!
(End song)

ORGANIZER

Then, Brother Doshier, take de chair,
And let's get de meetin' started here.

OLD WOMAN

Yes, lee's get de meetin' started here.

OLD MAN

Brother Doshier, I wans de floor.
I has a word to say

DOSHER

Wait a minute, Brother John,
Till de meetin's underway

OLD MAN

(Recitative)
Well, when de meetin's underway,

I has a word to say. And it is this:

The sooner we on this plantation organizes,
the better, because the way things is going now,
if we don't organize, we is gwine to get put off.
and if we get put off we's got no place to go,
and no work, and to get relief is hell, and I
don't want relief nohow! I likes to work, so
let's get together and organize and perfect ourselves
and these here fields and this here state
and our country, because ...

(Loud shots are heard outside)

OLD WOMAN

Uh-oh! That's de overseer!

BATES

De overseer!

DOSHER

Put out that light!

ORGANIZER

Keep quiet! Don't run!
Lee him in if he knocks!
We might as well face him now
And tell him what we've made up our minds to.

CHORUS

Face him! Tell him! Yes, that's true!

(A commanding voice is heard outside)

OVERSEER

You John! ... You Mary!
You must think I can't see that light!
You'll hold no meeting here tonight!

OLD WOMAN

That's de overseer!

OVERSEER

You-all croppers think you're wise,
Sneaking off to the woods to organize!
(Knocking loudly)
Open up that door!

OLD MAN

Come in, if you want to come in!

OVERSEER

(Kicking in door)
I'll come in all right!
What's going on in here tonight?

ORGANIZER

We's organizing!

OVERSEER

What? ... That's a damned disgrace!
You'll have no union on this place!
Don't you know
The landlord don't allow no organizing here?

CHORUS

What?

OVERSEER

The landlord don't allow no organizing here!
I've got my whip and I've got my gun –
And you'll get no organizing done!
The landlord don't allow no organizing here!

CHORUS

But there's gonna be some organizing here!
Yes, there's gonna be some organizing here!
We don't care what de landlord don't 'low
We gonna organize anyhow.
There's gonna be some organizing here!

OVERSEER

What? What's that? What's that I hear?

CHORUS

We said there's gonna be some organizing here!

ORGANIZER

In spite of your whip
And in spite of your gun,
We gonna get some organizing done!

CHORUS

There'll be some organizing here!
Yes, there'll be some organizing here!

OVERSEER

Who are you dogs? Say!
Who's talking back to me?

CHORUS

(Swing)
Look in Alabama, man, and you will see!
Look in Mississippi! Look in Tennessee!
Take a look at Dixieland and you will see!

ORGANIZER

(Lighting up his face with a flash-light)
Take a look at me!

(Others light up their faces, too, until the OVERSEER is surrounded by a sea of faces glowing in the night.)

OTHERS

And me!
And me!
And me!

OVERSEER

(Cracking his whip angrily)
But I said there'd be no organizing here!
I mean there'll be no organizing here!

CHORUS

You may crack your whip!
You may shoot your gun –

But we's made up our minds
To get some organizing done.

OVERSEER

I said NO!

(He shoots four times. Quickly, the SHARECROPPERS surround him and take his gun.)

ORGANIZER

All the bullets in the world
Can't shoot me!

OTHERS

Nor me!
Nor me!
Nor me!

CHORUS

We're four million croppers
Determined to be free!

(The keep up refrain of "Be free!" in the background)

OLD MAN

Mary, take that gun and put it on de shelf.
(To the OVERSEER)
If you want to 'tend this meeting,
You behave yourself!

ORGANIZER

We've got too much business here tonight
To be interrupted by outsiders
Who want to start a fight.
Brother John, while you're over in that corner,
Bring the flag along.

OLD MAN

I will.
This here flag I carried up San Juan Hill.
My son followed it in France when he was killed.

ORGANIZER

It's your flag, Mister Overseer,
And my flag, too.
So listen what us croppers have
to say to you:

A WOMAN

(Syncopated chant)

I've chopped de cotton all my life long.

CHORUS

So to want a little freedom now can't be wrong.

A WOMAN

I've worked in de sun all day long,

CHORUS

So to want a little freedom now can't be wrong.

A WOMAN

I've plowed with old Jennie all my life long.

CHORUS

To want a little freedom now can't be wrong.

A WOMAN

I got up at sunrise all my life long.

CHORUS

To want a little freedom now can't be wrong.

A WOMAN

Plowing, planting, hoeing, all life long.

CHORUS

To want a little freedom now can't be wrong.
(End song)

OVERSEER

You-all say freedom?
Don't look at me.

I work for the landlord, too.
I ain't free!

DE ORGANIZER'S WOMAN

Then take this little leaflet.
Read it and be wise.
If you want to be free,
Organize!

CHORUS

Organize! Organize!
If you want to be free
Organize!

OVERSEER

How many's in this union?

CHORUS

Everbody's here!

OVERSEER

I'm going back and tell the landlord.

OLD WOMAN

Huh! We don't care!

ORGANIZER

(Shout)

All we want is, be sure to get it right.
Tell him we organized a UNION here tonight!

CHORUS

Yes, we organized a union here tonight!

OVERSEER

Lemme out of here!
(He rushes out)

CHORUS

We organized a union here tonight!

(Everybody dances, joins hands, exultant with joy. Happy movement. Large signs are lifted, SHARECROPPERS UNION.)

MEN

Fight! ... Fight!

WOMEN

Fight! ... Fight!

CHORUS

We organized a union here tonight!

Curtain

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The Dreamy Kid

Scene

Mammy Saunders' bedroom in a house just off of Carmine Street, New York City. The left of the room, forward, is taken up by a heavy, old-fashioned wooden bedstead with a feather mattress. A gaudy red-and-yellow quilt covers the other bedclothes. In back of the bed, a chest of drawers placed against the left wall. On top of the chest, a small lamp. A rocking-chair stands beside the head of the bed on the right. In the rear wall, toward the right, a low window with ragged white curtains. In the right corner, a washstand with bowl and pitcher. Bottles of medicine, a spoon, a glass, etc., are also on the stand. Farther forward, a door opening on the hall and stairway.

It is soon after nightfall of a day in early winter. The room is in shadowy half-darkness, the only light being a pale glow that seeps through the window from the arc lamp on the nearby corner, and by which the objects in the room can be dimly discerned. The vague outlines of Mammy Saunders' figure lying in the bed can be seen, and her black face stands out in sharp contrast from the pillows that support her head.

2 Just like a sunlit heaven needs a cloud

IRENE

Just like a sunlit heaven needs a cloud
Just like a busy corner needs a crowd
Just like a baby needs to cry aloud
What's the need to being proud, Oh!
I need my man, Just like a driver needs the traffic light ...
Just like the day time needs to follow night
Love can't be so wrong when it feels so right,
What could be a sweeter plight? Oh! I need my man.

Tho' he's not good to me ... he's my necessity
There's not another no not one perhaps he's needin' me ...
But Lord he neednt be ...
I'll wait for him till Kingdom come.

Just like a moonlit evening needs a moon
Just like a tuneful lyric needs a tune
And just like evry Summer needs a June
Gee he can't come back too soon Oh!
I need my man.

MAMMY SAUNDERS

(weakly) Ceely Ann! *(with faint querulousness)* Light de lamp, will you? Hits mighty dark in yere. *(after a slight pause)* Ain't you dar, Ceely Ann?

MAMMY

Dat you, Ceely Ann?

CEELY ANN

(huskily) Hit ain't no yuther, Mammy.

MAMMY

Light de lamp, den. I can't see no whars.

CEELY ANN

Des one second till I finds a match.
(She wipes her eyes with her handkerchief—then goes to the chest of drawers and feels around on the top of it pretending to grumble) Hit beat all how dem pesky little sticks done hide umse'fs. Shoo! Yere dey is. *(She fumbles with the lamp.)*

MAMMY

(suspiciously) You ain't been cryin', is you?

CEELY ANN

(with feigned astonishment) Cryin'? I clar' ter goodness you does git the mos' fool notions lyin' dar.

MAMMY

(in a tone of relief) I mos' thought I yeard you.

CEELY ANN

(lighting the lamp) 'Deed you ain't.

CEELY ANN

(with attempted cheeriness) Bless yo' soul, I ain't got nothin' to cry 'bout. Yere. Lemme fix you so you'll rest mo' easy. *(She lifts the old woman gently and fixes the pillows.)* Dere. Now ain't you feelin' better?

MAMMY

(dully) My strenk don' all went. I can't lift a hand.

CEELY ANN

(hurriedly) Dat'll all come back ter you de doctor tole me des now when I goes down to de door with him. *(glibly)* He say you is de mos' strongest 'oman fo' yo' years ever he sees in de worl'; and he tell me you gwine ter be up and walkin' agin fo' de week's out. *(As she finds the old woman's eyes fixed on her she turns away confusedly and abruptly changes the subject.)* Hit ain't too wo'm in dis room, dat's a fac'.

MAMMY

(shaking her head – in a half whisper) No, Ceely Ann. Hit ain't no use'n you tellin' me nothin' but de trufe. I feels mighty poo'ly. En I knows hit's on'y wid de blessin' er God I kin las' de night out.

CEELY ANN

(distractedly) Ain't no sich a thing! Hush yo' noise Mammy!

MAMMY

(as if she hadn't heard – in a crooning sing-song) I'se gwine soon fum dis wicked yearth – and may de Lawd have mercy on dis po' ole sinner. *(after a pause—anxiously)* All I'se prayin' fer is dat God don' take me befo' I sees Dreamy agin.

③ Oh good Lawd

CEELY ANN

(lamenting querulously) Oh good Lawd, I knowed it! I knowed with all his carryin's-on wid dat passel er tough young niggers – him so uppity 'cause he's de boss er de gang – sleepin' all de day 'stead er workin' an' Lawd knows what he does in de nights – fightin' wid white folks, an' totin' a pistol in his pocket – *(with a glance of angry resentment at Irene)* – an' as fo' de udder company he's been keepin' –

IRENE

(fiercely) Shut your mouth, Ceely! Dat ain't your business.

CEELY ANN

Oh, I knowed Dreamy'd be gittin' in trouble fo' long! De lowflung young trash! An' here's his ole Mammy don' know no dif'frunt but he's de mos' innercent young lamb in de worl'. *(in a strained whisper)* What he do? Is he been stealin' somep'n?

IRENE

(angrily) You go ter hell, Ceely Ann! You ain't no fren' of de Dreamy's, you talk dat way, and I ain't got no time ter waste argyin' wid your fool notions. *(She goes to the door.)* Dreamy'll go ter his death sho's yo' born, if I don't find him an' tell him quick!

CEELY ANN

(terrified) Oh Lawd!

IRENE

(anxiously) He'll sho'ly try ter come here and see his ole Mammy befo' she dies, don't you think, Ceely?

CEELY ANN

Fo' Gawd I hopes so! She's been a-prayin' all de day –

IRENE

(opening the door) You hopes so, you fool nigger! I tells you it's good-bye to de Dreamy, he come here! I knows! I gotter find an' stop him. If he come here, Ceely, you tell him git out quick and hide, he don't wanter git pinched. You hear? You tell him dat, Ceely, for Gawd's sake! I'se got ter go – find him – high an' low – *(She goes out leaving Ceely staring at her in speechless indignation.)*

4 I knows! I knows! Hit ain't long now**MAMMY**

(sadly and very weakly) I knows! I knows! Hit ain't long now. *(bursting into a sudden weak hysteria)* Yo' stay heah, Dreamy! Yo' stay heah by me, yo' stay heah – till de good Lawd takes me home. Yo' promise me dat! Yo' do dat fo' po' ole Mammy, won't yo'?

DREAMY

(uneasily) 'Deed I will, Mammy, 'deed I will.

MAMMY

(closing her eyes with a sigh of relief – calmly) Bless de Lawd for dat. Den I ain't skeered no mo'. *(She settles herself comfortably in the bed as if preparing for sleep.)*

CEELY ANN

(in a low voice) I gotter go home fo' a minute, Dreamy. I ain't been dere all de day and Lawd knows what happen. I'll be back yere befo' ve'y long.

DREAMY

(his eyes fixed on Mammy) Aw right, beat it if yuh wanter. *(turning to her – in a fierce whisper)* On'y don' be long. I can't stay here an' take dis risk, you hear?

CEELY ANN

(frightenedly) I knows, chile. I come back, I swar!

(She goes out quietly. Dreamy goes quickly to the window and cautiously searches the street below with his eyes.)

MAMMY

(uneasily) Dreamy. *(He hurries back and takes her hand again.)* I got de mos' 'culiar feelin' in my head. Seems like de years done all roll away an' I'm back down home in de ole place whar yo' was bo'n. *(after a short pause)* Does yo' 'member yo' own mammy, chile?

DREAMY

No.

MAMMY

Yo' was too young, I spec'. Yo' was on'y a baby w'en she tuck 'n' die. My Sal was a mighty fine 'oman, if I does say hit my se'f.

DREAMY

(fidgeting nervously) Don' you talk, Mammy. Better you'd close yo' eyes an' rest.

MAMMY

(with a trembling smile – weakly) Shoo! W'at is I done come ter wid my own gran' chile bossin' me 'bout. I wants ter talk. You knows you ain't give me much chance ter talk wid yo' dese las' years.

DREAMY

(sullenly) I ain't had de time, Mammy; but you knows I was always game ter give you anything I got. *(a note of appeal in his voice)* You knows dat, don' you, Mammy?

MAMMY

Sho'ly I does. Yo' been a good boy, Dreamy; an' if dere's one thing more'n nother makes me feel like I mighter done good in de sight er de Lawd, hits dat I raised yo' fum a baby.

MAMMY

Dreamy oh Dreamy, it's time to be sleepin' night's falling fast an' de shadows is creepin' Bed time is past an' de sandman is peepin'. Dreamy Dreamy time. Dreamy Dreamy time. Yo' eyes is closin' it's time to be dozin'. Sleepy sleep fo' yo' Mammy.

Dreamy oh Dreamy when you grows to manhood you'll have a wife and some kids like a man should, but for the present you'll sho' have to sleep good.

Dreamy dreamy time. Dreamy dreamy time. You'll grow up maybe and still be my baby, sleepy sleep Dreamy time. Dreamy oh Dreamy it's time to be sleepin'. Hmmmmm. Bed time is past an' de sandman is peepin'. Hmmmmm. Yo's eyes is closin' it's time to be dozin'. Sleepy sleep fo' yo' Mammy.

Dreamy oh Dreamy when you grows to manhood, you'll have a wife and some kids like a man should, but for the present you'll sho' have to sleep good.

Dreamy dreamy time. Dreamy dreamy time. You'll grow up maybe and still be my baby, sleepy sleep Dreamy time.

5 Dreamy? – Close dat door!

IRENE

(not seeing him calls out questioningly) Dreamy?

DREAMY

(lowering his revolver and rising to his feet roughly) Close dat door!

IRENE

(whirling about with a startled cry) Dreamy!

DREAMY

(shutting the door and locking it – aggressively) Shut yo' big mouth, gal, or I'll bang it shut for you! You wanter let de whole block know where I is?

IRENE

(hysterical with joy – trying to put her arms around him) Bless God, I foun' you at last!

DREAMY

(pushing her away roughly) Leggo o' me! Why you come here follerin' me? Ain't yo' got 'nuff sense in yo' fool head ter know de bulls is liable ter shadow you when dey knows you's my gal? Is you pinin' ter git me kotched an' sent to de chair?

IRENE

(terrified) No, no!

DREAMY

(savagely) I gotter mind ter hand you one you won't ferget! *(He draws back his fist)*

IRENE

(shrinking away) Don' you hit me, Dreamy! Don' you beat me up now! Jest lemme 'xplain, dat's all.

MAMMY

(in a frightened whimper) Dreamy! Come yere to me. Whar is yo'? I'se skeered!

DREAMY

(in a fierce whisper to Irene) Can dat bull or I'll fix you. *(He hurries to the old woman and pats her hand.)* Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY

Who dat yo's a-talkin' wid?

DREAMY

On'y a fren' o' Ceely Ann's, Mammy, askin' where she is. I gotter talk wid her some mo' yit. You sleep, Mammy? *(He goes to Irene.)*

MAMMY

(feebly) Don' yo' leave me, Dreamy.

DREAMY

I'se right here wid you. *(fiercely to Irene)* You git the hell outa here, you Reeny, you heah – quick! Dis ain't no place for de likes o' you wid ole Mammy dyin'.

IRENE

(with a horrified glance at the bed) Is she dyin' – honest?

DREAMY

Sssh! She's croakin', I tells yo' – an' I gotter stay wid her fo' a while – an' I ain't got no time ter be pesterin' wid you. Beat it, now! Beat it outa here befo' I knocks yo' cold, git me?

6 Dey won't wait down dere much longer

DREAMY

Dey won't wait down dere much longer. Dey'll be comin' up here soon. *(prayerfully, with a glance at the bed)* I hopes she's croaked by den', fo' Christ I does!

IRENE

(as if she couldn't believe it) Den you ain't gwine save youse'f while dere's time? *(pleadingly)* Oh Dreamy, you can make it yet!

DREAMY

De game's up, I tole you. *(with gloomy fatalism)* I s'pect it hatter be. Yes, suh. Dey'd git me in de long run anyway – and wid her curse de luck'd be agin me. *(with sudden anger)* Git outa here, you Reeny! You ain't aimin' ter get shot up too, is you? Ain't no sense in dat.

IRENE

(fiercely) I'se stayin' too, here wid you!

DREAMY

No you isn't! None o' dat bull! You ain't got no mix in dis jamb.

IRENE

Yes, I is! Ain't you my man?

DREAMY

Don' make no dif. I don' wanter git you in Dutch more'n you is. It's bad 'nuff fo' me. *(He pushes her toward the door)* Blow while you kin, I tells you!

IRENE

(resisting him) No, Dreamy! What I care if dey kills me? I'se gwine stick wid you.

DREAMY

(gives her another push) No, you isn't, gal. *(unlocking the door – relentlessly)* Out wid you!

IRENE

(hysterically) You can't gimme no bum's rush. I'm gwine stay.

DREAMY

(gloomily) On'y one thing fo' me ter do den.
(He hits her on the side of the face with all his might knocking her back against the wall where she sways as if about to fall. Then he opens the door and grabs her two arms from behind.)
Out wid you, gal!

IRENE

(moaning) Dreamy! Dreamy! Lemme stay wid you!
(He pushes her into the hallway and holds her there at arm's length.)
Fo' Gawd's sake, Dreamy!

MAMMY

(whimperingly) Dreamy! I'se skeered!

IRENE

(from the hall) I'se gwine stay right here at de door. You might s'well lemme in.

DREAMY

(frowning) Don' do dat, Reeny. *(then with a sudden idea)*
True Love

IRENE

All our sorrows will

DREAMY

Fate can't always rule

IRENE

In a world full of strive

DREAMY

There is a happier life.

IRENE

We've a future shining for two alone. True love.

DREAMY

Will the shadows soon displace

IRENE

Clouds can't linger long.

DREAMY

It you dry all your tears

IRENE

and dispel all your fears

DREAMY

There is a rainbow shining

IRENE

in the sky for our true love. Darling

DREAMY

Nothing matters Darling Trouble scatters

IRENE

Love will

DREAMY

Triumph over sorrows.

IRENE

My heart never had a single doubt, was strong in me

DREAMY

and you never regret

IRENE

not a single tear yet

DREAMY

Love like yours I cherish

IRENE

till I perish our true love

DREAMY

What's the matter love, are you worried

IRENE

Lonesome

DREAMY

I'll be with you dear

IRENE

Dear my own

DREAMY

For our true love will shadows soon displace, clouds can't linger long

IRENE

If I try all my tears,

DREAMY

And dispel all your fears

IRENE

There is a rainbow shining in the sky for our true love

DREAMY

Will you love me, dear? Then I'll never fear. Love.

**6 Does yo' know I gives you dat name
w'en yo's des a baby**

MAMMY

Does yo' know – I gives you dat name – w'en yo's des a baby – lyin' in my arms –

DREAMY

Yes, Mammy.

MAMMY

Down by de crik – under de ole willow – whar I uster take yo' – wid yo' big eyes a-chasin' – de sun flitterin' froo de grass – an' out on de water –

DREAMY

(takes the revolver from his pocket and puts it on top of the chest of drawers) Dey don' git de Dreamy alive – not for de chair! Lawd Jesus, no suh!

MAMMY

An' yo' was always – a-lookin' – an' a-thinkin' ter yo'se'f – an' yo' big eyes jest a-dreamin' an' a-dreamin' – an' dat's w'en I gives yo' dat nickname – Dreamy – Dreamy –

DREAMY

Yes, Mammy. *(He listens at the crack of the door—in a tense whisper)* I don' hear dem – but dey're comin' sneakin' up de stairs, I knows it.

MAMMY

(faintly) Whar is yo', Dreamy? I can't – ha'dly – breathe – no mo'. Oh Lawd have me-rcy!

DREAMY

(goes over to the bed) Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY

(speaking with difficulty) Yo' – kneel down – chile – say a pray'r – Oh Lawd!

DREAMY

Jest a secon', Mammy. *(He goes over and gets his revolver and comes back.)*

MAMMY

Gimme – yo' hand – chile.

(Dreamy gives her his left hand. The revolver is in his right. He stares nervously at the door.)

An' yo' kneel down – pray fo' me.

(Dreamy gets on one knee beside the bed. There is a sound from the hallway as if someone had made a misstep on the stairs – then silence. Dreamy starts and half aims his gun in the direction of the door. Mammy groans weakly.)

I'm dyin', chile. Hit's de en'. You pray for me – out loud – so's I can heah. Oh Lawd! *(She gasps to catch her breath.)*

DREAMY

(abstractedly, not having heard a word she has said) Yes, Mammy. (aloud to himself with an air of grim determination as if he were making a pledge) Dey don't git de Dreamy! Not while he's 'live! Lawd Jesus, no suh!

MAMMY

(falteringly) Dat's right – yo' pray – Lawd Jesus – Lawd Jesus –

(There is another slight sound of movement from the hallway.)

The curtain falls.

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Darnell Ishmel

Darnell Ishmel is an accomplished, world-traveled opera singer. Having earned two degrees at the University of Michigan, he made his professional debut with Cincinnati Opera and has performed nearly two dozen roles and in five different languages. He has been a featured soloist with orchestras throughout the United States and abroad. His recording of Hampson Sisler's *Music in the Soul*, under Marlon Daniel with the Prague Sinfonietta, was accepted in three categories for consideration for the 54th Annual GRAMMY Awards. Ishmel is a flexible vocalist and an innovative recitalist who constantly explores programming to enhance the recital tradition, attract new audiences, and preserve the art form.

Monique Spells



Currently serving on the Vocal Music Department staff at Duke Ellington School of the Arts, mezzo-soprano Monique Spells completed her Doctoral degree in vocal performance at the University of Michigan. As a classical singer she has toured in Germany, Italy, Trinidad, and Barbados. Formerly serving as chair of the vocal music department at Duke Ellington, she continues to teach vocal technique, and serves as a voice consultant and member of the Sphinx Organization vocal ensemble Exigence. She received her Bachelor degrees in vocal performance and music education from the University of Northern Iowa and her Master's degree from the University of Michigan.

Kenneth Kellogg



Kenneth Kellogg is an international opera singer born and raised in Washington, D.C. He began his musical journey in the public school system and went on to train at Ohio University, University of Michigan, Academy of Vocal Arts, San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship, and Washington National Opera. He has received praise for his commanding stage presence and portrayal of traditional bass roles, and has gained a renowned reputation for being involved in the creation of new works and artist advocacy.

www.kennethkellogg.com

Rabihah Davis Dunn



Soprano Rabihah Davis Dunn has appeared as Leïla in Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* and in the title roles of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Lucrezia Borgia* with Pocket Opera. Oratorio appearances include *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Vivaldi's *Magnificat*, Verdi's *Requiem* and, with the Pro Arte Orchestra of London, Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass* and *Stabat Mater*. She holds degrees from the University of Southern California, University of Michigan and the Royal Academy of Music in London. She is currently the soprano section leader of the Exigence Vocal Ensemble, a professional ensemble for Black and Latinx singers within the Sphinx Organization in Detroit.

Olivia Duval



Soprano Olivia Duval has performed with the San Francisco Opera Center, Merola Opera Program, Kentucky Opera, and at Louisville and Chautauqua. She has sung leading roles in *Suor Angelica*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *La Bohème*, *La tragédie de Carmen*, *Rendezvous with Destiny* (world premiere), *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, and *De Organizer*. She has appeared as soloist in Britten's *War Requiem* and *A Ceremony of Carols*, Verdi's *Requiem*, and Haydn's *The Creation*. Duval is also an advocate for non-canonic works. She has worked with Shirley Verrett, Hilda Harris, Lotfi Mansouri, Joseph Colaneri, Mikael Eliassen, Régine Crespin, Warren Jones and Martin Isepp, among others.

Emery Stephens



Baritone Emery Stephens is a member of the music faculty at St. Olaf College. He has performed with Abridged Opera, Arbor Opera Theater, Wilmington Symphony Orchestra, Michigan Philharmonic, Ann Arbor Symphony and Boston Lyric Opera; at Detroit Jazz Festival and Boston Early Music Festival; and for the Handel and Haydn Society, Hampsong Foundation at Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, and the Michigan Opera Theatre's Education Program. Additionally, he has performed works by American composers, such as Dave Brubeck's *The Gates of Justice* with jazz pianist Jason Moran and his trio The Bandwagon, Jodi Goble's *True Witness: A Civil Rights Cantata*, and *The Passion of John Brown* by Jesse Ayers.

Lonel Woods (1967–2021)



A performer of opera, oratorio, and musical theatre, tenor Lonel Woods appeared with companies such as Michigan Opera Theater, Washington National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Toledo Opera, and Houston Grand Opera. He also performed in Hal Prince's Tony Award-winning revival of *Show Boat*. Dr. Woods served as a member of the faculty at the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam where he chaired the Diversity and Inclusion Action Committee and won multiple service awards. He was a graduate of DePaul University, the Catholic University of America, and the University of Michigan.

Branden C.S. Hood



Branden C.S. Hood has recently appeared in Ellington's *Sacred Concert* and *Black, Brown and Beige*, and *Stinney: An American Execution* (Opera Grand Rapids). He is program coordinator for the education department at Detroit Opera and assistant director of The Boys of Detroit: Detroit Youth Choir. Hood has worked with Lyric Opera Studio Weimar and Opera MODO, and received the Angel Scholarship from Detroit Opera to attend the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. He has also received awards from The Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the Mario Lanza Educational Foundation. He studied at the Boston Conservatory and the University of Michigan.

Elizabeth Gray



Elizabeth Gray is a justice-centered crossover artist, educator, and advocate, whose professional artistic experiences include collaborations with Yo-Yo Ma, Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and a range of musical theatre, operatic and concert productions throughout the United States and abroad. Gray appeared as a soloist with the Saginaw Bay Symphony Orchestra in Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music*, and multiple productions honoring Fats Waller's *Ain't Misbehavin'*. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan, where she currently serves as lecturer in the department of musical theatre. She is also a recent recipient of the King-Chávez-Parks fellowship from Eastern Michigan University where she is pursuing a PhD in educational studies.

Lori Celeste Hicks



Lori Celeste Hicks is a classical singer, composer, arranger, vocal coach, professor, clinician, lecturer, director, arts administrator, and entrepreneur. As the owner of LCH Studios and creator of the “5S Voice Method”, she is dedicated to vocal education, performance, production, and pedagogy of healthy singing in all styles. Currently associate professor of voice at Kentucky State University (her alma mater), Dr. Hicks has taught at the University of Dayton, Central State University, and Claflin University. Her innovative projects include *From The Black Church To The Opera Stage* and *The Black Women Composers Summit*. A native of Detroit, she holds degrees from Kentucky State University, Bowling Green State University, and the University of Michigan.

University of Michigan Opera Theatre



The University of Michigan Opera Theatre is part of the Department of Voice of the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance. The Department of Voice retired the name University of Michigan Opera Theatre in 2020, yet continues its decades-long practice of producing two operas a year, in various languages, in the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre and the Power Center for the Performing Arts on the University of Michigan campus, as part of its various training programs. Performers include both undergraduate and graduate students. Physical productions are created and realized by the students and staff of University Productions, Jeffrey Kuras, Director. Members of the Vocal Arts Division who trained the vocalists for *De Organizer* and *The Dreamy Kid* include George Shirley (chair), Timothy Cheek, Caroline Helton, Martin Katz, Stephen Lusmann, Joshua Major, Carmen Pelton, John Pierce, Melody Racine, Rico Serbo, Martha Sheil, Shirley Verrett, and Daniel Washington. The University of Michigan Opera Theatre has previously released recordings of opera scenes by David Amram (8.559420), David Schiff (8.559450), Abraham Ellstein (8.559424), and Paul Schoenfield (8.559418), conducted by Kenneth Kiesler, on Naxos.

Kenneth Kiesler



Kenneth Kiesler, GRAMMY nominee and winner of the American Prize in Conducting, has led over 100 orchestras across five continents, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center, the orchestras of Utah, Detroit, Jerusalem, Queensland, Osaka, São Paulo, the chamber orchestras of Chile and Houston, and the Chamber Orchestra of Paris. He was acclaimed for his conducting of Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Rossini's *Il Turco in Italia* at the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Bright Sheng's *The Silver River* in Singapore. As music director of the Illinois Symphony Orchestra (1980–2000), he appeared at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, and was named Conductor Laureate for life. Kiesler has given dozens of premieres, founded MORE (Michigan Orchestra Repertoire for Equity), and his discography includes Darius Milhaud's *L'Orestie d'Eschyle*, which was nominated for a GRAMMY for Best Opera Recording in 2014 (8.660349-51). Kiesler's teachers have included Carlo Maria Giulini, Pierre Boulez, Erich Leinsdorf, John Nelson, Fiora Contino, Julius Herford, and James Wimer. One of the world's most highly regarded conducting pedagogues, he leads the renowned orchestral conducting program at the University of Michigan, and is director of the Conductors Retreat at Medomak.

www.kennethkiesler.com

Recorded: 8–10 May 2006 at Hill Auditorium, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan USA

Executive producer: Kenneth Kiesler

Producers: Kenneth Kiesler, Andrew George • Engineer and editor: Jason Corey

Assistant conductors: Benjamin Rous [1](#), Benjamin Vickers [2](#)–[7](#)

Chorusmaster: John Trotter • Orchestra personnel managers: Nikolas Caoile, Benjamin Vickers

Production assistance: David Aderente, Roger Arnett • Post-production assistant: Luca Antonucci

The staged performances were presented on 23 and 25 March, 2006

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University of Michigan General Counsel's Office; Scott Hunter, Yale University

James P.
JOHNSON
(1894–1955)

De Organizer (late 1930s)
Reconstructed by James Dapogny
(1940–2019)

Libretto by Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

De Organizer Darnell Ishmel, Baritone
De Organizer's Woman Monique Spells, Contralto
Old Man Kenneth Kellogg, Bass
A Woman Rabihah Davis Dunn, Soprano
Old Woman Olivia Duval, Soprano
Brother Doshier Emery Stephens, Tenor
Brother Bates Lonel Woods, Tenor
Overseer Branden C.S. Hood, Bass

The Dreamy Kid (excerpts) (1937)*

Reconstructed by James Dapogny
Libretto by Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953)

Mammy Elizabeth Gray, Mezzo-soprano
Ceely Ann Lori Celeste Hicks, Soprano
Irene Olivia Duval, Soprano
Dreamy Lonel Woods, Tenor

University of Michigan Opera Theatre
University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra
Kenneth Kiesler

A full track list and recording details
can be found inside the booklet.



The libretti are included in the booklet, and may also
be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/669041.htm

Booklet notes: Cody M. Jones, James Dapogny

Cover: Lonel Woods as Dreamy and Elizabeth Gray
as Mammy in *The Dreamy Kid* • Photo: Peter Smith



AMERICAN OPERA CLASSICS

Renowned as an influential jazz pianist, James P. Johnson also flourished as a composer of opera and of show tunes in the 1920s and 1930s. His two short operas *The Dreamy Kid* and *De Organizer* offer contrasting stories of African American life at that time, revealing both its incredible hopefulness and precariousness in the inter-war years. *The Dreamy Kid* is a tragedy, marked by police violence in a racially unjust atmosphere, and *De Organizer* is a hopeful story of solidarity and resistance meant to break the twin oppressions of poverty and racism. Johnson sets these stories to an eclectic and powerful mixture of jazz, swing, blues and ragtime that capture the essence of African American music-making in the early 20th century.

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Time:
66:01