

NATS American Negro Spiritual Category

Beginning in the fall of 2020, The American Negro Spirituals Category will be added to regularly scheduled regional student auditions with the top five regional winners advancing to the NSA rounds, as with all other NSA-eligible categories. The American Negro Spirituals Category will alternate with the Hall Johnson Spirituals Category nationally, with the Hall Johnson Category offered in even numbered years.

Although most of the composers of the spirituals we now sing are unknown, the melodies and lyrics have been arranged by hundreds of arrangers in many different styles. The spirituals approved for performance in NATS auditions are the classical arrangements of the North American Negro Spirituals and arranged by classical North American composers. The terminology for singing in the American Negro Spirituals category is outlined and defined in the classical Audition Terminology.

While the American Negro Spirituals' geneses are of and by African Americans, they tell the stories in music of the history of our country. **NATS encourages all singers to explore, study, and perform these beautiful songs.**

What is the NATS' Definition and Terminology of American Negro Spirituals?

The American Negro Spirituals are the folk songs created by the enslaved Africans after their arrival in North America between 1619 and 1860. Although slavery ended with Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation, which went into effect January 1, 1863, the enslaved people in Texas did not receive the notice until June 19, 1865, hence the Juneteenth Celebration.

The songs created and sung by enslaved women, men and children were born in North America and recant with dignity, resolve and sometimes joy, their stories of life, death, faith, hope, escape, and survival. These melodies and stories have been passed down orally from generation to generation in the plantation fields, in churches and in camp meetings and have presently taken their places on concert hall stages and recital series around the world.

Although most of the composers of the spirituals we now sing are unknown, the melodies and lyrics have been arranged by hundreds of arrangers in many different styles. The spirituals approved for performance in NATS auditions are the classical arrangements of the North American Negro Spirituals and arranged by classical North American composers. The terminology for singing in the American Negro Spiritual category is outlined and defined in the classical Audition Terminology.

While the American Negro Spirituals' geneses are of and by African Americans, they tell the stories in music of the history of our country. **NATS encourages all singers to explore, study and perform these beautiful songs.**

What is the difference between a Spiritual and a Gospel selection?

The American Negro Spirituals category is only for classical renditions of American Negro Spirituals in the classical art song tradition. Gospel, Contemporary Christian, Jazz and Blues selections are not allowed in this category. In addition, student should sing what is written in the particular arrangement they are using, with only mild deviations and interpolation to what is written in the music. The goal is to celebrate the music and the meaning of the text and not to focus on interpolated histrionics not written in the music. For a more in-depth discussion of the Gospel music, please see the Oxford Online definitions of Gospel music, please refer to the Oxford Online Dictionary entry on Gospel music (37.2.5).

American Negro Spiritual Audition Terminology

Spiritual Definition	Arrangements in classical style of the North American Negro Spirituals, by composers similar to the style of Hall Johnson, R. Nathaniel Dett, Florence Price, Moses Hogan, Edward Boatner, Undine Smith Moore, James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson, Margaret Bonds and others. The classical style excludes Gospel, Blues and Jazz music. More extensive definition in NATS FAQ-Student Auditions
Memorization	All repertoire must be sung from memory.
Diction	Because of the idiomatic nature of the spiritual, diction restrictions will be relaxed and standard English pronunciations may be observed. (“de” or “duh” may be replaced with “the” for instance).
Transposition	Published transpositions consistent with the NATS Copyright Policy are allowed.
Spirituals in English	English must be the original language of the art song
Spiritual Classical Performance Style	The word “classical” in this context refers to singing spirituals in the classical style with only mild deviations and interpolation to what is written in the music and without music theater, pop, gospel, contemporary Christian, soul, jazz, rhythm and blues expressions or vocal technique. See the NATS FAQ-Student Auditions for the difference between Spirituals and Gospel Songs
Judicious Cuts	Piano introductions, piano interludes, piano music after the vocal solo is completed, and internal cuts of spiritual selections are allowed as in common performance practice. Cuts of a verse or verses of selections are not allowed. In the case of strophic pieces, all verses should remain that are traditionally included.
Comment Only	Any student may register to sing for comments only and participate in the preliminary audition round.

American Negro Spirituals Category – Biennial Audition Category

The American Negro Spirituals Category will be added to regularly scheduled regional student auditions with the top five regional winners advancing to the NSA rounds, as with all other categories. Chapters are also eligible and encouraged to add this competition to chapter auditions. Where applicable, Chapter auditions serve as qualifying rounds for advancement into region auditions. The American Spiritual Category will alternate with the Hall Johnson Spiritual Category nationally, with the Hall Johnson Category offered in even numbered years.

Category Number and Title	LENGTH OF STUDY	AGE LIMIT	TIME	Voice Type	*REPERTOIRE: all repertoire is sung from memory
16 High School American Negro Spiritual	No limit	14--19	8 minutes	All	Three American Negro Spirituals contrasting by composer, tempo and text. *See publications list
17 First Through Third Year College Age American Negro Spiritual	0--3 years post high school	23	10 minutes	All	Three American Negro Spirituals contrasting by composer, tempo and text. *See publications list
18 Fourth/Fifth Year College Age and Graduate Age American Negro Spiritual	4+ years post high school	30	12 minutes	All	Four American Negro Spirituals contrasting by composer, tempo and text. *See publications list

https://www.nats.org/American_Negro_Spirituals_Competition.html