



American Negro Spiritual Category

Nationally, the American Negro Spiritual Category is offered in odd numbered years and the Hall Johnson Spirituals Competition is offered in even numbered years. The American Negro Spiritual Category is added to *annual region-student auditions with the top five region-winners advancing to the NSA rounds. Chapters are also encouraged to add this competition to chapter auditions. Where applicable, chapter-auditions may serve as qualifying rounds for advancing to region-auditions.*

American Negro Spiritual Audition Terminology

Spiritual Definition	<i>Arrangements in classical style of the North American Negro Spirituals by composers similar in style to the spirituals 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. A more extensive definition is found in NATS FAQ-Student Auditions.</i>
Memorization	<i>All audition selections must be performed from memory.</i>
Diction	<i>Because of the idiomatic nature of the spiritual, diction restrictions will be relaxed. Standard English pronunciations may be observed, i.e. “de” or “duh” may be replaced with “the.”</i>
Transposition	<i>Published transpositions consistent with the NATS Copyright Policy are allowed.</i>
Spirituals in English	<i>English must be the original language of the selection.</i>
Spiritual Classical Performance Style	<i>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 musical theatre, 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</i>
Judicious Cuts	<i>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.</i>
Comments Only	<i>Any registered student may elect to sing for comments only and participate exclusively in a preliminary audition. Adjudicators will not score auditions entered for comments only.</i>

Biennial American Negro Spiritual Categories

(National rounds in this category will be held in odd-numbered years)

Category	Length of Study	Age Limit	Time Limit	Voice Type	Repertoire performed from memory	
AS 3	High School American Negro Spiritual	no limit	14–19	8 minutes	All	THREE American Negro Spirituals contrasting by composer, tempo, and text. See approved spirituals repertoire, p.17
AS 7	First–Third Years post-High School American Negro Spiritual	0–3 years post-high school	23	10 minutes	All	THREE American Negro Spirituals contrasting by composer, tempo, and text. See approved spirituals repertoire, p.17
AS 9	Fourth–Fifth Years post-High School Ages and Graduate Ages American Negro Spiritual	4+ year post-high school	30	12 minutes	All	FOUR American Negro Spirituals contrasting by composer, tempo, and text. See approved spirituals repertoire, p.17

For more information about the Biennial American Negro Spiritual Category, visit:

[https://www.nats.org/American Negro Spiritual Competition.html](https://www.nats.org/American_Negro_Spiritual_Competition.html)

Spirituals not found in the Approved Repertoire List

may be vetted/approved by contacting one of the following NATS members:

Alexis Davis-Hazell adavishazell@ua.edu

Barbara Hill-Moore bhmoore@mail.smu.edu

Everett McCorvey everett.mccorvey@uky.edu

Marcia Porter MPorter@admin.fsu.edu

Clarification

from NSA Student Auditions NATS Website FAQ

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's signing of 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, students should sing what is written in their select arrangement—with only mild deviations from what is written in the music. The goal is to celebrate the music and the meaning of the text without a focus on interpolated histrionics not notated in the music. For a more in-depth discussion of the Gospel music genre, please refer to the Oxford Online Dictionary entry on Gospel music (37.2.5).