

Music Blurbs for February 9, 2020 – Siyahamba

News and Notes

This week we'll sing "Christ whose glory fills the skies," "City of God," "I want to walk as a child of the light," and "Siyahamba." The choir will sing a jazzy arrangement of "This Little Light of Mine" by George Mabry.

Sunday bulletins

The song "Siyahamba" probably originated as a Zulu folk song. Andries Van Tonder, an elder of the Judith Reformed Church in Natal, is given credit for writing the tune down in 1952. It is likely that Van Tonder, like many rural Afrikaaners, was fluent in Zulu and was exposed to their music. It is also likely that he heard the chorus sung at a local mission church or a Sunday afternoon service for black workers. According to Prof. Olivier from the Music Dept. of the University of Praetoria, "I have a gut feeling that this could be a song from a mission or a Christianized black community, which, as a matter of course and in the absence of knowledge of musical notation, had never been written down until Van Tonder's time."

In 1978 a Swedish choral group, Fjedur, was touring South Africa when the director Anders Nyberg heard and recorded the song at a girl's school in Appelsbosch, Natal. He arranged it in a four-part setting and included it in his 1984 songbook: *Freedom Is Coming: Songs of Protest and Praise from South Africa*. The booklet was handed out at that year's Lutheran Federation's Conference at the time that the Church was pushing to isolate South Africa's apartheid regime and South Africa was a hot topic. The book and especially this song took off to become a worldwide choral standard of church and school choirs. By 1994 GIA Publications included the song in the standard US Roman Catholic hymnal *Gather Comprehensive*. It has continued to find its way into new denominational hymnals ever since, including our own 1997 hymnal supplement *Wonder, Love, and Praise*.