



Based on Andrew Ward's post-Civil War epic "**Dark Midnight When I Rise**," *Steal Away* is the legendary true story of **The Fisk Jubilee Singers**, a sensational young **warrior choir** fighting the KKK's reign of terror against their schools - **the newly-founded HBCUs** - not with bullets or bombs but electrifying songs of faith and freedom. *Steal Away* follows the choir's titanic rise from the darkness of slavery to the **glittering ballrooms and throne rooms of England** as they conquer the world... and must then conquer their own demons.

A music-filled epic, *Steal Away* will feature a spectacularly **diverse cast** (Bridgerton, Hamilton), **towering characters** with sweeping dramatic arcs, the **strongest Black female lead ever onscreen**, and a soundtrack by multi-Grammy-winning legend **Billy Childs**.

For Director's Notes and the full script, please visit [RealMPictures.co/DirectorsNotes](https://RealMPictures.co/DirectorsNotes)

# BENNIE HOLMES

African American, male, 18-19, a Fisk Jubilee Singer.

Sharp, bookish, and intellectual savvy, Bennie is an aspiring orator whose dream is to follow in Frederick Douglass' footsteps and change the world. But his crippling insecurity - he stammers with stage fright and is blinded by sweat when speaking - makes Bennie his own worst enemy.

As civil war rages within the choir, each side fights for Bennie's loyalty, harrowing him with the decision of whether to defend the choir's leaders or join the mutiny that will destroy them. And when he is tragically struck with the illness that brings him face-to-face with his own imminent death, it appears all hope is lost that Bennie will ever realize his dream.

Until something unexpected thunders from within...

[LEAD]

"Bennie  
Holmes"  
0/27/22

ELLA  
(gasps)  
Mamma!

It is Sarah. She's mortified to be there.

SARAH  
M-Myron came for me.

MYRON  
More like kidnapped.

Sarah hugs Myron without a trace of spite. But flushing with shame, she can barely look at Ella.

SARAH  
Samuella, I-I just don't want to be  
in your way.

ELLA  
In my way? I need you!

Overwhelmed with emotion, they search each other's eyes, fumbling for words but barely able to breathe. In the end, it's just --

ELLA  
Oh Mamma!

SARAH  
Precious baby!

They clutch each other deeply, desperately, as if never again to let go. Having prayed for them, the people break out in applause.

Then as the field stirs with excitement, a bold voice THUNDERS OUT:

Scene 1 Start →

BENNIE

Friends, we came today to bury a great man, and a dream. The Knights will rise; hate will reign; our blood will flow. By any measure, this is the death of hope.

(eyes White)

But another great man taught us to reach past what is, to the beyond; to walk by faith and not by sight! Friends, this is no burial, but a *baptism* - a beginning! For we are hard-pressed but not crushed, struck down but not destroyed! Freedom was crucified, but we believe in the resurrection! The Dream is not in that casket, it lives on in us!

Loud *AMENS!* Bennie has found his voice, and it's powerful. Fervor sweeps the field as he transforms the funeral into a REVIVAL.

1/3

Steal Away

BENNIE

We may not ~~greet~~ the Dawn of Freedom, but if we don't fight through the night, neither will our children. We are an army! But our weapons are not bullets or bombs or the invective of hate, lest in our righteous rage we become the devil we decry! For children of the God of Peace must neither bow to tyranny nor take up her mantle! Our swords are *giftings and callings, talents and abilities* to break the chains of hate and set hate's captives free! Heal hearts of pain and rage! Make hatemongers peacemakers the world over until every village and hamlet thunders with the cry of *Jubilee!* And we cannot fail, for we fight with light, and the light *shines* in darkness, and the darkness shall never extinguish it. *This* is our combat! *This* is our warfare!

DEAFENING AMENS! The crowd is electrified. White beams for Bennie.

BENNIE

"But brother ~~Ben~~, that dawn is a long way off. What lights our path when hope fades and we've lost our way?" Well, last I checked there's supposed to be a TEMPLE right around here! A MONUMENT TO FREEDOM! A BEACON TO THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN!

(points to the pit)

AH, THERE IT IS! DO YOU SEE IT?! DO YOU SEE IT?! I SAID DO YOU SEE IT?!

← END

EARTH-SHATTERING CHEERS. The BLACK CLOUDS BREAK, bathing the field in a blazing heavenly light that sets Jubilee Hall's steel beams aglow as if bringing them to life. All eyes fire with a BRILLIANT MAJESTIC VISION towering high above the pit.

Recharged and purpose-driven, the Jubilees trade winks.

LOUDIN

Looks like it's time to root, hog or die.

#### INT. BISHOP'S CHURCH - SUNDAY SERVICE

As Bishop leads his choir in singing of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," the ground begins to QUAKE. We hear the THUNDERING of an approaching choir:

2/3

OWNER

All right, all right - you got me by the sack. Gotta distract those hicks with something. I'm going to pay for this, but you're on in twenty.

Ella hands her a thick folder.

ELLA

Spotlight cues and gel changes. And the piano was tuned late today, per my cable?

The Owner looks at her diabolically then exits freaking out.

OWNER

Damn me to dust!

CUT TO:

# INT. MARIGOLD THEATER, AUDITORIUM - LATER

A sleazy, rowdy dive. As White eggs Bennie on, he nervously faces the drunken crowd.

Scene 2

Start →

BENNIE

HELLOOOOOOOO C-CINCINNATI!!

(crickets)

W-we've g-got a gripping s-saga for you t-tonight, right from the p-pages of scripture! O-one request: O-out of r-reverence, p-please refrain from drinking, s-smoking, and curs--

**SMASH!** A hurled beer bottle EXPLODES beside him, drenching the choir in suds. That settles that.

End

FLASH FORWARD TO:

## A FULL-SCALE RIOT

The performance: Decked out in gaudy thrift-store costumes, the choir slogs through the dreadful *Esther*. White directs with his usual flair. Ella flogs the toothless cadaver impersonating a piano. Maggie and Loudin sing out with their stunning voices --

MAGGIE (as Esther)

Alas, thou knowest to go unto the King unbidden is death! Death! Deaaaaaath!

LOUDIN (as Mordecai)

Go unto the king and make supplication for our people. Go! Go! Go!

3/3