



Based on Andrew Ward's epic "Dark Midnight When I Rise," *Steal Away* is the legendary true story of **George White, Ella Sheppard** and **The Fisk Jubilee Singers**, a spectacular choir of young former slaves fighting the KKK's reign of terror against their schools not with bullets or bombs but sensational 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 Europe as they conquer the world... and must then conquer their own demons.

One of the most breathtaking stories ever known, *Steal Away* will feature a spectacularly diverse international cast, the strongest Black female lead ever onscreen, and a sweeping soundtrack by multi-Grammy winning composer **Billy Childs**.

HIRAM JACKSON

African-American, 40. A beloved preacher, civil rights leader, and champion of the pending Civil Rights Bill whose impassioned sermons electrify the masses.

Hiram has a warm lovefest bond with Ella, White and the Fisk Jubilee Singers choir.

When the forces of supremacist hate unleash a reign of terror against black schools, (the fledgling HBCUs), Hiram runs for political office, becoming the great hope of the cause of freedom... and putting himself in the deadly crosshairs of his rabid enemies.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Though naturally charismatic, Hiram isn't a loud, flashy, caricature of a preacher. He's a caring pastor whose heart, compassion, and warmth for his congregation shine through his every word. As a pastor, he knows his church members personally and cares for their souls. And as a servant of the cause of freedom he bears the deep sorrows, the great hopes, and above all the weighty responsibility of being an agent of change in this dark age, willing to sacrifice everything if need be. All of these qualities powerfully come together in Hiram's eyes - and shine through him like a beacon in this sermon.

A CROSS OF HOPE (SAME TIME)

This emblem of peace towers above a nearby church. Its preacher addresses the thundering *AMENS* we hear coming from Bishop's church:

START →

HIRAM (O.S.)

Listen... the thunder of a raging cross, its daggered beams bearing a bloodthirsty Christ. Him they preach, him they believe; thus the South swelters with the heat of injustice...

"HIRAM JACKSON"
12/14/21

We hear KNOWING GROANS, then CUT INSIDE to --

INT. MOUNTAIN TOP CHURCH

-- a very different church. Here, dynamic preacher HIRAM JACKSON, (African-American, 30s), electrifies his thoroughly integrated congregation - including congressmen, civil rights luminaries, and all of Fisk - with a very different call to arms.

HIRAM (continuing)

Yet here *others* gather. Same Lord's Day, same Holy Book. But we look to Calvary and behold *another* cross - beams of *Hope* bearing a Savior of *Love* with a Gospel of *Peace*. A Great Physician who shed his *own* blood to *heal* his enemies, whose outstretched arms forge from men of every tribe, tongue and nation one people, one family, one object of his blazing love! For throughout these Southern "United" States, there are *two* crosses, and they *are* at war!

Ella accompanies Hiram on organ as her girls stand ready to sing. In the pews, White and the choir sit rapt. Bennie, our aspiring orator, mimics Hiram's speech patterns. Loudin sits uneasily with his beautiful wife and sons as Georgia discreetly eyes him.

HIRAM

And as this war over the Civil Rights Bill plays out and Congress debates just *how* free this "Land of the Free" should be, our hope is alive! For in *our* cross we see the promises of a faithful God. We see Jubilee! Ahh, "What's Jubilee?" You ask good questions on a Sunday morning!

Laughs in the pews. Bennie plucks up his courage, stands to his feet and stammers out --

STEAL AWAY

BENNIE

*L-Leviticus 25: "A-and the L-Lord
said, 'P-proclaim l-l-liberty
throughout the land, and it sh-*

The Twins shout him down --

TOM and IKE

"A-and it sh-shall b-be a J-jubilee!"

-- and impishly snicker. Confirmed: Bennie is a dreadful speaker; we cringe for him as he slumps, humiliated, back to his seat.

HIRAM

Amen, Bennie. Jubilee is the triumph of *Liberty* over the shackles of hate for all people everywhere! The conquest of *Justice* that breaks every chain! We are an army, but our battle cry is *Jubilee!* We're soldiers, but our swords are *giftings and callings* from the armory of the true Cross to storm the gates of hate and set hate's captives free! Cast down strongholds of bigotry! Hew stones of hope from the mountains of despair! THIS is our warfare! THIS is our call to arms!

(SLAMS the pulpit)

BROTHERS! SISTERS! WILL YOU ANSWER THE CALL? WILL YOU LIFT YOUR SWORDS AND PROVE THE GOD OF JUBILEE... OR LET THEM RUST AND PROVE HIM THE MERE PHANTOM OF OUR HOPES?!

Deafening *AMENS!* Ella her girls break triumphally singing *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.*

EXT. TWO CHURCHES - AFTER SERVICE

END

We see that the churches are directly across the street from each other. Their rooftop crosses tower high into the sky, facing off as if warring for the nation's destiny.

Hiram and Myron each greet their exiting parishioners.

AT HIRAM'S CHURCH

White and the choir ply Hiram with warm hugs; it's a lovefest.

HIRAM

How's my favorite choir? You know
I've been dying to join. Wait --