Lifeline

MUSIC OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

SonoruS

Arian Jansen,
executive producer

YARLUNG RECORDS
BOB ATTIYEH, PRODUCER

Lifeline

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1	*If I Can Help Somebody*	2:50
2	*Steal Away To Jesus*	3:24
3	*Canaan's Land - Fare Ye Well* Medley	3:22
4	*Wade In The Water*	2:28
5	*Talk About A Child*	3:57
6	*Hold On To The Gospel Plow*	3:00
7	*Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen* (Ola's Song)	2:24
8	*Down By The Riverside*	2:55
9	*Motherless Child*	3:43
10	*Ain't Goin' To Let Nobody - Joshua Fit De' Battle*	2:23
11	*Deep River*	2:43
12	*Saints'* Medley	2:54

Executive producer Arian Jansen of SonoruS Audio is a hero to our musicians at Yarlung Records. We are incredibly grateful to friends and sponsors like Arian, whose generosity has allowed us to make so many of our recordings available. Thank you Arian. Arian serves not only as executive producer on this album but also worked with me as my recording engineering partner.

SonoruS has become well known as the maker of one of the finest tape players in the world. But even if you have not heard of Arian's company before, you have surely benefited from Arian's designs in other arenas. Your cellphone charger was most likely made for your cellphone company by Flextronics, using one of Arian's many energy-saving patents. If you have an iPhone, the charger uses Arian's technology. Microsoft's original Xbox gaming console uses Arian's power supply and cooling solutions. (Arian's son Victor "helped" Arian with this development as one of the first Xbox players in the world. Victor was five years old at the time and his enthusiasm for this particular video game console remains unabated to this day). If you have been treated in a hospital, it is possible that the monitoring system uses Arian's designs. Plasma scalpels used in hip replacement surgeries and Cesarean section sometimes utilize Arian's technology.

Many audiophiles have heard Arian's SonoruS equipment in various rooms at CES, The Show at Newport, Rocky Mountain, and AXPONA audio conventions. His all-tube Sonorus preamplifier and monoblocks feed electrostats directly coupled to the output tubes (no transformers) using Y867 tubes running at 7,000 volts. The results inspire awe. Yarlung collaborated with SonoruS at The Show a few years ago, and debuted some of the tapes in this collection. Our music won an Audio Oasis Award from the esteemed reviewer David W. Robinson at PFO.

Thank you, Arian, for the care you take designing SonoruS equipment. Our musicians and our listeners appreciate you.

Bob Attiyeh, producer

LIFELINE: Music of the Underground Railroad

Human slavery, part of human history from the beginnings of our civilizations on earth, remains one of the worst aspects of our story on this planet. We live with the wounds from slavery every day, particularly in the United States, where African slaves powered the plantation industries in the South before the Civil War. These wounds heal overtime, but with scar tissue. 156 years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation declaring the end of slavery in the South, inequality of opportunity and achievement for people from different ethnic backgrounds remains a serious problem in modern society.

Lifeline: Music of the Underground Railroad celebrates spirituals from the Civil War era and before. Michelle Mayne-Graves arranged these songs for her Lifeline Quartet as a tribute to Harriet Tubman and the thousands of unsung heroes who escaped slavery for Pennsylvania, Ohio and later for Canada. Escape routes to the North were nicknamed "The Underground Railroad," and Tubman was one of its most celebrated "conductors." As she is reported to have said, "I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger." This album celebrates some of the spirituals that were adopted by the Underground Railroad and served as memory aides and morale boosters for escaping slaves. These songs were usually biblical in nature and would have been sung in church. They would have been heard as such by slave owners. But in addition to their religious content, these spirituals contained hidden clues, navigational instructions and are therefore known as code songs. Harriet Tubman

herself was reputed to use *Wade in the Water* to remind escaping slaves where they should walk in rivers and streams to avoid the scent hounds of the slave catchers. Harriet was a resourceful pioneer and one of America's greatest heroes from before and during the Civil War. She escaped slavery herself in 1849 and then returned to escort at least 70 and possibly as many as 300 other people to freedom in the North. After the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which enabled escaped slaves in free areas to be returned to the South, Tubman shifted gears and started taking people to Canada ("Canaan's Land") where laws prevented slavery and repatriation to the US. In 1863, Harriet became a spy for the North, organizing and running an espionage network instrumental in providing the Union Army with information about Confederate Army supply routes.

While it is not a code song, Michelle begins this album with *If I Can Help Somebody*, a tribute to Harriet Tubman's ingenuity and generosity of spirit. Michelle laughs self-effacingly when I point out that she also lives a life of dedication. Michelle could be singing about herself. In addition to directing choirs, performing spirituals and helping to coordinate and lead veterans singing groups, with whom she has performed in the Rose Parade, on television and on tour, Michelle supervises a team and works as the RN Case Manager for Housing Homeless Veterans at the Veterans Administration in Los Angeles.

Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa invited us to present this concert in the beautiful intimate acoustics of Samueli Theater, where Yarlung has held concerts and made recordings with Sibelius Piano Trio, soprano Laura Strickling, pianist Mika

Michelle Mayne-Graves

Sasaki, and Colorfield Quartet. Lifeline Quartet is made up of my friends Michelle Mayne-Graves, Quinton Fitzgerald, Walter Penniman II, and Michael Fitzgerald.

My interest in working with Michelle and Lifeline Quartet to create this album came from two complementary directions. Yarlung special advisor and associate producer Billy Mitchell and I had long wanted to celebrate the great tradition of American spirituals before they die out. As Billy educated me, unaccompanied spirituals, often performed by quartets, were the musical backbone of Black Churches in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. This music evolved from the fertile combination of African rhythms and cadences with the sorrows and hopes expressed in slave songs. Broadly speaking, the spiritual tradition was eventually supplanted with hymns in black churches. These appealed to more conservative black congregations interested in assimilating into mainstream American culture. Overtime, African American congregations missed the rhythm and swing they recollected from an earlier church-going generation.[1] In response to what one might uncharitably describe as "boredom with the hymns," a pioneer named Thomas Dorsey created Gospel Music, which again incorporated African rhythms and a more flamboyant performance style. More conservative black congregations were of course shocked and rejected Gospel Music as degenerate. Singers like the great Willie Mae Ford Smith and The Barrett Sisters performed in this new Gospel style and it has gradually taken over. It is the rare black church today that offers spirituals in church services.

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1 My apologies. I acknowledge that this Reader's Digest version of the story is overly simplistic and leaves out decades of overlap in these liturgical styles.

While we are both fans of Gospel Music, Billy and I wanted to celebrate the earlier spirituals and focus primarily on those code songs that aided people escaping slavery. It is Michelle's hope and ours that this music will help liberate all of us from whatever imprisonment in which we may find ourselves, whether physical slavery, psychological slavery or drug addiction. We can use the power of these code songs to remind ourselves that there is a way out and there are people to help us get there. Michelle Mayne-Graves and Lifeline Quartet indeed do "Help Somebody," including those of us fortunate enough to listen to them on recording or even better, in live performance.

The second inspiration for this project came from my first mentor in things audio, Gustavo Hidalgo from

Quinton Fitzgerald

Uruguay. He introduced us to the album *Standing in the Safety Zone*, by the famous Fairfield Four. I fell in love with these gentlemen. Founded in Nashville in 1921 and originally successful in the era of 78s, this quartet (or quintet as they were on occasion) regrouped when the men were late in life and started another international career. The Fairfield Four continues to this day with different singers. The song *Roll Jordan* stuck in my brain and I've wanted to release an album paying homage ever since.

More important than any of these influences, however, is the magical transformation that can happen when people take miserable experiences and translate them into high art and liberation through music. Who would have thought that the bone-crushing torment and inhumanity of slavery could give birth to this

Michael Fitzgerald

Walter Penniman II

magnificent musical tradition, one that continues to uplift and inspire today? Just as great opera helps us metabolize tragedy, perhaps spirituals such as performed by Lifeline Quartet can help us realize the beauty and sacredness of human life. These songs aspire toward earthly freedom as well as toward the divine.

Let me offer you a list of some of the code words used in Underground Railroad communications which were designed to make interception by slave catchers less damaging to the movement. These come from the Harriet Tubman Historical Society website.[2] Then we'll discuss the songs on this recording in a little more detail.

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2 http://www.harriet-tubman.org/underground-railroad-secret-codes/

Agent	*Coordinator, who plotted courses of escape and made contacts*
Baggage	*Fugitive slaves carried by Underground Railroad workers*
Bundles of wood	*Fugitives who were expected*
Canaan	*Canada*
Conductor	*Person who directly transported slaves*
Drinking Gourd	*Big Dipper and the North Star*
Flying bondsmen	*The number of escaping slaves*
Forwarding	*Taking slaves from station to station*
Freedom train	*The Underground Railroad*
French leave	*Sudden departure*
Gospel train	*The Underground Railroad*
Heaven	*Canada, freedom*
Stockholder	*Those who donated money, food, clothing*
Load of potatoes	*Escaping slaves hidden under farm produce in a wagon*
Moses	*Harriet Tubman*
Operator	*Person who helped freedom seekers as a conductor or agent*
Parcel	*Fugitives who were expected*

Patter roller	*Bounty hunter hired to capture slaves*
Preachers	*Leaders of and spokespersons for the Underground Railroad*
Promised Land	*Canada*
River Jordan	*Ohio River*
Shepherds	*People who encouraged slaves to escape and people who escorted them*
Station	*Place of safety and temporary refuge, a safe house*
Station master	*Keeper or owner of a safe house*

Michelle suggested a few additional codes from Professor Eileen Guenther.[3]

Pharaoh or Satan	*Slave owners or people who mistreated slaves*
Pharaoh's Army	*Slave patrollers*
Israelites	*Enslaved people*
Jesus or King Jesus	*People who had a slave's best interest at heart*
The Promised Land	*Africa, the North, Canada, Canaan, or heaven*
Egypt, Babylon, or Hell	*The land of enslaved people, or being sold South*

3 Dr. Eileen Guenther, *In Their Own Words (Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals)* p. 358

Thoughts on the music

Michelle opens with a solo performance of Alma Bazel Androzzo's ***If I Can Help Somebody***, made internationally famous by Dr. Martin Luther King and Mahalia Jackson. In Michelle's view, this song epitomizes the sentiments she imagines in Harriet Tubman's mind and dedicates this performance to her. Not only was Tubman one of the great "conductors" as she put it, on the Underground Railroad, but she worked tirelessly on women's right to vote after the Civil War. Like Michelle, Harriet was a nurse and put much effort into care for the aged.

The composition of ***Steal Away To Jesus*** is credited to Wallace Willis, born in Mississippi. Wallace was a freed slave previously owned by the wealthy plantation owner Britt Willis, who was half Irish and half Choctaw, originally from Princeton New Jersey. The song was later transcribed by Alexander Reid, who had served as a minister at Willis' Choctaw boarding school. *Steal Away* became one of the famous code songs for the Underground Railroad. In addition to indicating pending escape to the North, the song meant a great deal to Nat Turner, who allegedly used this song to summon his followers to meet and plan the Southampton Virgina slave rebellion in 1831.[4]

Michelle's medley of the traditional spirituals ***Canaan's Land*** and ***Fare Ye Well*** combines the code song *Canaan's Land*, referring to the route to freedom in Canada,

4 Dating spirituals can be tricky; "composers" often heard the songs in church, decades before they were published. Willis (born about 1820) allegedly wrote *Steal Away to Jesus*. We believe Nat Turner used it in 1831, so Willis would have been eleven when he "wrote" the song?

and *In That Great Gettin' up Morning, Fare Ye Well*, which refers jointly to the end of days in Revelation and a direct reference to the last days "here" before departure.

Tradition suggests that Harriet Tubman sang ***Wade In The Water*** herself, and used it to help her escaping riders of the underground railroad evade the bloodhounds of slave catchers. In addition to masking scent, the water here signifies the Ohio River; after crossing the Ohio, one was in the free North. "See those men all dressed in red... Well it must be the ones that Moses led" is a direct reference to Tubman herself, who was known as the "Moses of her people."

Talk About A Child is not a code song, but I love it and it was one of the first songs I heard Michelle sing. I asked Michelle if she would arrange it for Lifeline Quartet and she kindly obliged. Michelle sang this when she first sang for me, and she included it on a prior demo recording of solo material accompanied by herself on piano. Michelle and I met on July 3rd, 2018, a day I will long remember. My parents joined us for dinner on the Fourth of July. I jubilantly told them about this person whom I had just met, and played them *Talk About A Child*. When my mother burst into tears at the beauty of this song and of Michelle's singing I knew we should include it in this album if possible. Thanks Michelle!

Hold On To The Gospel Plow remains one of my favorite songs in this collection. Michelle and Lifeline Quartet sang this for me at our first rehearsal. In the text, "how to get to heaven," sometimes sung as "how to get to freedom," indicated Canada. I can almost hear an Underground Railroad Conductor whispering "Hold

on and keep up your stamina. Keep going. We will reach freedom eventually" and using this song to help instill determination in the escaping slaves.

Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen *(Ola's Song)* was first published in 1867 as one of 136 spirituals in *Slave Songs of the United States*. It was also a favorite in black schools in Charleston as early as 1865, sung then as *Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Had*. Michelle has an additional personal connection to this tune. Her dear friend Morgan Ames Thomas deeply loved Ola Young, who worked for Morgan's family. Ola took the young Morgan to church with her on at least one occasion and Ola would hold Morgan and sing this song to her while she worked as a maid in the house.

Down By The Riverside explores the theme of crossing into the Promised Land in a pure state (and crossing the Ohio River to freedom) after discarding aggression. The singer puts on new clothing (signifying a new life, baptism and escape from this world's woes) and crosses the water. Yarlung's Adam Gilbert (who performed with members of Lifeline Quartet for a Yarlung New Year's Eve concert in 2018) has been teaching me a little bit about shape note hymns and the "White Spiritual" tradition of the South. It turns out that the spiritual *Down By The Riverside* may be related to *We'll Wait Till Jesus Comes*, published in 1868 in *The Revivalist* in New York. Given the overt antiwar sentiment, this spiritual became popular all over again during the anti-Vietnam War movement in the 20th Century.

Motherless Child was a "sorrow song." Slave owners often separated families by selling family members, often young children, to different plantation owners. These

separations were usually permanent. This wrenching apart of a nuclear family, with babies taken from their mothers, became identified in sorrow songs with the wrenching of a people away from their Motherland, which was Africa. Sorrow songs also connect the sufferings of these family tragedies with the sufferings of Jesus.

In ***Ain't Goin' To Let Nobody - Joshua Fit De' Battle***, Michelle combines songs of resilience, perseverance and jubilation. Joshua conquered the City of Jericho using music as his primary weapon, indicating that God favored the apparent underdog in this conflict.

Deep River, another sorrow song, alludes directly to the Ohio River. The singer will finally feel at home and will finally taste freedom after crossing the Ohio River and "crossing over into Campgrounds," or Canada.

Michelle arranged our ***Saints' Medley*** from *Oh When The Saints Go Marching In*, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot,* and *Bye and Bye*. The first is one of the famous "happy songs," or Songs of Jubilee. It is unclear when "Saints" first originated, but it was made internationally famous in the 20th Century by Louis Armstrong. "Swing Low" indicates traveling south, and the "Sweet Chariot" is a code for a horse-drawn cart with a hidden compartment in which a slave could hide while being transported to freedom: "coming for to carry me home." *Bye and Bye* is another Song of Jubilee; life's worst struggles will finally be over "in freedom land" at a new dawn.

Personally, the Underground Railroad connection with many of our favorite

spirituals makes them even richer for me. Some recent scholars have argued that this "code song" idea is a romantic fabrication of the late 20th Century, and that while expressing hope, these songs did not in fact include memory aids for escape to the North. In counter argument, Sarah Bradford published her *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* in 1869, and quotes Tubman as saying she used code songs to communicate information to her escaping slaves.

We sometimes think of slavery as something that disappeared in North America after the Civil War. As we listen to this music it is important to remember that slavery was part of Ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Middle Eastern and Asian societies and was built into the fabric of these governmental systems. It was "normal." Unfortunately, slavery still exists today in multiple forms and in many countries. Depending on your definition of slavery, human bondage still exists in developed nations as well, including the United States. Sex workers may be the majority of slaves in the modern world, children coerced into this business without the ability to leave it. In addition to prostitutes in the United States, illegal migrant workers are sometimes lured by the promise of work and then forced into service, living without pay or freedom to leave their "employers." These people live under the threat of being turned over to the police or ICE if they cause trouble. The US territory of Saipan in the Mariana Islands of the western Pacific Ocean houses economic refugees from China working as indentured servants in sweat shops producing clothing labeled "Made in the USA" in conditions many would liken to slavery. Public outrage has reportedly decreased this indentured servitude on Saipan and it has fallen out of the news. It is not clear that this life is better than the life these people have left

in their home countries. Reports vary, but even in the United States the number of slaves may be as high as 60,000 people in 2019. Unknown numbers of political prisoners in Tibet and China work in forced labor camps.

Worldwide, slavery is estimated by different studies to include between 40 and 70 million people in 2019, with the highest numbers in India. To put this into perspective, the country of France has a population today of just over 65 million people. Let us remember these people as we enjoy Lifeline Quartet and this extraordinary music of liberation.

Phyllis Parvin spearheaded our fundraising for Lifeline Quartet and was generously joined by Chip & Sharyn Moore, Raulee Marcus, Stephen A. Block and Carol & Warner Henry as our underwriters.

Aaron Egigian, Judy Morr and Tom Lane at Segerstrom Center for the Arts made us feel so welcome during our concert and recording session and the beautiful acoustics of Samueli Theater proved the perfect ambiance for Lifeline Quartet. Yarlung recording engineer Arian Jansen and I captured the recording on Agfa 468 analog tape with the SonoruS ATR12, DSD using a Merging Technologies HAPI and PCM using the Sonorus DAC, in both stereo and surround sound formats using SonoruS Holographic Imaging technology. Microphone preamplifiers by Elliot Midwood. Ted Ancona graciously allowed us to use his AKG C24 and two Schoeps M222 vacuum tube microphones.

--Bob Attiyeh, producer

Recorded live in Samueli Theater at Segerstrom Center for the Arts, on October 27th, 2018

Recording Engineers: Bob Attiyeh & Arian Jansen
Mastering Engineers: Steve Hoffman & Bob Attiyeh

Tube Microphones: Ted Ancona
Microphone Technician: David Bock
Microphone Preamplification by Elliot Midwood

Photography: Cooper Bates
Graphic Design: Yanina Spizzirri

Lifeline: Music of the Underground Railroad
was made possible by generous support from

Arian Jansen
Phyllis Parvin
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Carol & Warner Henry

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