

Based on Andrew Ward's epic "Dark Midnight When I Rise," *Steal Away* is the legendary true story of **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 African-American female lead ever onscreen, and an epic soundtrack by multi-Grammy winning composer **Billy Childs**.

For Script, Sides, and Director's Notes, visit StealAwayMovie.com

GEORGE WHITE

Caucasian, 50, the passionate co-leader of the choir and warmly endearing hero of this story.

As the story opens, White is a beloved but failed visionary whom life has dealt harsh blows, including the tragic death of his wife, which still ravages him with guilt. Yet the dreamer in him lives. Tousled and unshaven with faraway eyes and an otherworldly air, White is far too captivated by visions of a world healed by music to think about trifles like grooming.

A misfit among "his own people," White is a beloved father figure to the African-American choir, his only true family.

Though condemned as a blind stargazer, when the forces of supremacist hate wage terrorist warfare on black schools, White and his choir heroically rise up and fight back not with bullets or bombs but sensational songs of faith and freedom... the *spirituals*. Against all odds, they take the country, and world, by storm. And though White will be brutally battered by forces both external and internal, and brought to the brink of destruction, we will witness in this legendary man a towering visionary and triumphal hero whose courage, sacrifice, and passion set the world ablaze and left it forever changed.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Don't base your George White on any performance you've ever seen. Enthrall us with someone fresh and unique, full of nuance, quirks and contradictions. You introduce us to George White.

ELLA and SUSAN
Great men wage war on reality.

Ella and Susan trade looks. Cravath shakes his head.

CRAVATH
Be on *time* for the closure tomorrow.

WHITE
For God's sake, Milo --

CRAVATH
It is finished.

INT. CHOIR ROOM - THAT NIGHT

← **START**

SC 1

Devastated at the news, the singers mill about the room grimly as if in a bomb shelter awaiting the end. Meanwhile, HEAVY WINDS batter the windows insistently as if to get their attention.

White and Ella are off to themselves playing a solemn violin-piano duet. He looks preoccupied, and her playing is too rigid for him.

WHITE
Let it breathe, Sam.

ELLA
She looked at you.

WHITE
Forget the metronome; *feel* the music.

ELLA
You traded looks. Yours said "Have we met?" Hers said "Do dreams count?"

WHITE
(breaks into a sweat)
Sam...

ELLA
Live again, Mr. White. The past is past; what happened with Laura --

The bow drops from his hand. He's hyperventilating.

ELLA
Mr. White!

She swings him onto the bench and helps him --

ELLA
Breathe... breathe...

Steal Away

As White catches his breath, something heavy hangs in the air.

ELLA
The map today, you saw --

WHITE
(deflecting)
Lines.

ELLA
They went north. Then east to New York?

He hesitates, then nods.

WHITE
Would the others come?

ELLA
In a heartbeat.

Then he looks to *her*.

ELLA
You know I've got to wait for her
here. Go.

WHITE
Not without you.

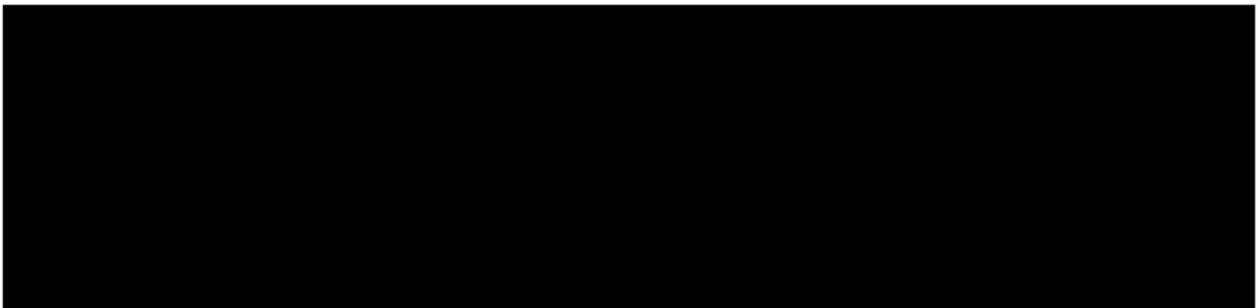
ELLA
It's the only hope.

WHITE
Then there *is* no hope.

Just then - *WHAP!* - a skylight blows open. The wind ushers a ravishing melody into the room.

WHITE
Listen.

It's the spiritual *Steal Away* being sung by distant voices. White is in raptures; bewitched, he drifts upstairs as if drawn by a siren. The others trade knowing looks and follow him up to the: **← END**



Steal Away

EXT. SCOTLAND GRAND THEATRE - GALA RED-CARPET EVENT - NEXT DAY

A star-studded media frenzy; celebrities and royalty enter the theatre as fans and reporters throng the streets.

Ella scans the scene from a stage door, then zeroes in on Gladstone - he's approaching the theatre with Vetter and a massive ARMY OF COPS.

Susan swoops in and intercepts him.

SUSAN

Mr. Gladstone. Susan Gilbert, AMA...

Ella crosses her fingers. Then her eyes snap to another man, an impeccably dressed black Englishman. Reporters are swarming him, clamoring to know what Bennie's surprise announcement will be and how *The Liberator* got the scoop. Ella growls.

CUT TO:

INT. SCOTLAND GRAND THEATRE - BACKSTAGE

Tension is thick as the choir awaits curtain in factions. White sweats bullets as he peers out at the packed house - he sees the cops taking up positions as Susan urgently chats up Gladstone.

Suddenly, the door **BLASTS OPEN**. Ella charges in and confronts Ike, Loudin, and a squirming Bennie. **← START**

SC 2

ELLA

So it's war.

IKE

You taught us the art.

ELLA

Sabotage, conspiracy, defamation...
You'd better have expensive lawyers
and a penchant for small cells.

WHITE

What's this??

ELLA

A coup. Curtain rises, we take our bows, then they step forward with shocking news of the AMA's mortal sins, witnessed by Benjamin Holmes, which the public can read all about in *The Liberator*.

LOUDIN

(applauds)

Brava.

Steal Away

WHITE
(realizes)
The scandal takes us down, leaves them
the choir, and paints them as victims
in Vetter's eyes. Whatever you've got,
it's dirt!

IKE
Mud, and the avalanche buries you.

The MANAGER enters.

MANAGER
All seated; the house is yours.

LOUDIN
(confident)
Let's do this.

ELLA
Hold it. You're in bed with a hustler.
Jonas Stone is setting you up.

BENNIE
The Liberator is a crusader for justice.

ELLA
The Liberator doesn't exist, anymore.

BENNIE
We were there.

ELLA
And took the bait. Ever read an issue,
or see one on a newsstand? When *The
Liberator* did exist, it was a sleazy
soft-porn *tabloid* so notoriously lawless
that Vetter shut it down and locked
Stone up for criminal libel, which is
why the print room on Brick Lane is in
cobwebs. After doing time, Stone
grifted from Damascus to DC looking for
money to restart the paper, but no one
would fund a felon. Then lo...

(indicates them)
Paydirt. Wake up! Stone knows the AMA
would unleash its lawyers to crush your
conspiracy, making for the showdown of
the century. And guess who's got the
inside scoop? "*The Jubilee Singers
Mutual Destruction*" is the exclusive that
resurrects *The Liberator*. Stand down,
Bennie. We're almost there; just three
weeks and you're feeling those bricks.

Steal Away

Never a rebel at heart, Bennie sighs. The Manager reenters.

MANAGER
They're restless.

ELLA
(confident)
Let's do this.

CRAVATH (O.S.)
HOLD IT!

The door **BLASTS OPEN**. In blows Cravath with a **QUINTET OF BLACK SINGERS** in overcoats. No one can believe their eyes; it's --

MINNIE
The Blackfoots!

CRAVATH
Dressing rooms, hurry!

The Blackfoots exit. Everyone freaks out.

WHITE
You brought *them* here?!

CRAVATH
Straight from New York. Fresh blood,
a stable full. They've got your songs
down to the last note; they're joining
this tour.

TOM
You grind us to dust then freshen up
the act with *minstrels*?!

CRAVATH
This tour will never again be held
hostage to sickness... or treason.

Suddenly, Cravath totters then catches himself. True to Susan's words, he looks sickly and unstable.

The Blackfoots return in costume looking like Jubilee clones, only fresh and perky. The sight sickens everyone.

CRAVATH
Splendid. Miss Sheppard?

Incredulous eyes turn to Ella.

MINNIE
Y-you knew about this?? You're taking
them onstage?!

Steal Away

CLOSE ON ELLA - Her hands shake, her mortified face beads with sweat. We sense her sanity and strength cracking, but she pulls back from the brink and calls to the rafters.

ELLA

Mr. Dunham, we need two more keylights.
Fire up four and seven...

WHITE

Have you sold your soul?!

ELLA

(shutting out the voices)
Stipple lenses, pale amber frost...

Loyal until now, Tom LUNGES up to Cravath.

TOM

Three weeks my ass, Cravath! When does
this end?!

CRAVATH

Get on that stage.

TOM

I asked you a question!!

CRAVATH

You're not being paid to demand answers!
Gutless hypocrites! You call yourselves
soldiers then faint when the wind blows!

TOM

(GRABS HIM by the collar)
You bastard! We've been in these
trenches from Day One! We've fought,
fallen, then dredged ourselves from
gurneys to fight on! Bennie won't
see another birthday! When's enough
enough for you, when we're all laid
out at the morgue?!

CRAVATH

Not even then! This choir will outlive
every one of you!

TOM

(CLUTCHES his throat)
HEARTLESS PRICK! LAST CHANCE - WHEN
DOES THIS DAMNED TOUR END?

CRAVATH

(choking)
J-Jubilee H-hall is almost buil--

Steal Away

Steal Away

MINNIE
You want our smiles, you devil?!

CRAVATH
I WANT YOUR DENTURES!! God help me
that curtain's about to rise, and
I'll be damned if it reveals a band
of sniveling weaklings!

MINNIE
And what will it reveal?!

CRAVATH
STAND DOWN, TATE!

MINNIE
Answer me!

CRAVATH
JUST WHAT I BOUGHT!

MINNIE
And what's that, you shit, you tyrant
piece of shit! Just what did you "buy"?!

CRAVATH
A GLOWING, RADIANT CHOIR - VIBRANT AS
SPRING, FRESH AS WINTER'S WIND! AND ON
HER CUE, YOU WILL OPEN THOSE INFERNAL
MOUTHS AND PRODUCE HEAVENLY SOUNDS -
FACES SHIMMERING, EYES GLEAMING, YOUR
WHOLE WRETCHED ESSENCE EXUDING JOY! HOW
YOU ACHIEVE THAT EFFECT OR HOW EXTRINSIC
IT IS TO YOUR NATURE OR CIRCUMSTANCES I
COULDN'T CARE LESS! YOU WILL RAISE THAT
ROOF, BRING DOWN THE HOUSE, THEN WHILE
MISS GILBERT CHARMS THE STING OUT OF
GLADSTONE MAKE A BEELINE FOR THE
GREENROOM AND BLITZ THOSE REPORTERS WITH
A BATTERY OF WINSOME INTERVIEWS IN WHICH
EVERY WORD OUT OF THOSE CANTANKEROUS
THROATS REVERBERATES WITH THE HARMONY OF
EDEN AND A MENDELSSOHNIAN CHORUS OF
PRAISE FOR THE AMA, AFTER WHICH YOU WILL
DRAG THOSE WHINY BACKSIDES TO THE HOTEL,
PACK, AND AT FOURTEEN HUNDRED HOURS BOARD
THE *SS SCHWITZEN* FOR THE CONTINENT!

WHITE
You son of a bitch! I won't let you --

CRAVATH
(to SECURITY)
GET HIM OUT!

WHITE
What's the meaning of this?!

CRAVATH
You *have* no meaning - you've been out
of a job all year! Ask Miss Sheppard!

WHITE
Ella??

Ella flushes with horror. White's eyes beg her to refute it, but she can't even look at him.

CRAVATH
NOW! I'M PAYING FOR THIS!

Ella SHRIEKS as guards SEIZE and HAUL White out to the curb. As the door SLAMS SHUT, he furiously POUNDS and SHOUTS --

WHITE (O.S.)
ELLA! ELLA! ELLA!!

← **END**

Cravath's glare turns to Ella.

CRAVATH
Start this show, Miss Sheppard.
But Ella is dying. Destroyed inside and out, she clutches herself
fetally on the floor, her mind and body gravely deteriorating.

Cravath circles his prey.

CRAVATH
Up, Ella! She expects great things
of you; don't crawl back with empty
hands!

ELLA
(CLUTCHING her head)
STOP!! STOP!!

CRAVATH
(points to the curtain)
All the world is out there! Conquer
the world and even *she* can't deny
your worth!

Swooning with vertigo, Ella CLUTCHES HER HEAD as if shrapnel were
blasting through it.

AMERICA
LEAVE HER ALONE!

She runs to Ella, but Cravath grabs a STEEL PIPE and BEATS HER BACK

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