

Always on the lookout for a tune with a Christmas theme, thanks to a Tune of the Week feature by Paul Kirk, Jr. here is one for Christmas Day. Several of us old-time players are interested in the search for old-time tunes just rising to the surface of popularity. Paul's version of *Christmas Time Will Soon Be Over* came from Mississippi fiddler Stephen B. Tucker and was a part of a seminal collection by Herbert Halbert in 1939 called "Great Big Yam Potatoes," now part of the Library of Congress, but coming to the forefront little by little.

Digging deeper, one finds the tune is similar to a 1928 recording by Fiddlin' John Carson and his Virginia Reelers called *Christmas Time in the Morning*, the source for a Jack White performance on the popularized Cold Mountain Soundtrack. Before John Carson's recording, the tune draws a relationship to an African American spiritual called *I Hope I'll be in the Band*, said to have been composed by John Wesley Work II in 1915. It's also been linked more recently to Tex Logan's *Christmas Time's a Comin'*. Check out this [Family Christmas site](#).

It's nice to have a tune linked to an African American spiritual background and I found it interesting to learn about the three generations of John Wesley Work. All three were led to collect, compose, perform and teach music. Fisk University in Nashville came into each one of their lives, though the third John Work was eventually felt unwelcome there and moved on to another college to teach music.

The first John was born a slave in Kentucky and was a choir director at the university, some of whose members sang with the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Fisk University was established in 1871 for former slaves. The singing group was established to preserve slave songs, which became known as African American spirituals, and the group went on tour to raise money.

John Work's son, John W. Work II became a teacher, eventually teaching at Fisk University. He and his brother, Frederic, contributed two major collections of African American spirituals in the early 1900's. He was a known composer as well, and the 1915 date of *Christmas Time in the Morning*, linked below, fits the timeline of his prolific work. One of the songs he collected, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, became famous later in the civil rights era of the 50's and 60's. John was a tenor in the quartette Jubilee Singers, a group reduced in size due to financial hardship. The links below include their version of *I Hope I'll Be in the Band*, recorded in the 20's.

John Work II's son, John W. Work III, graduated from Fisk University in 1923, the year his father left the school, one year before the recordings of the Jubilee Singers were done. Like his father and grandfather, he made significant contributions to African American music. One of the songs in his 1940's collection included *This Little Light of Mine*. He collaborated with Alan Lomax, directed the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and composed and arranged numerous tunes, adding grand substance to African American's cultural heritage. Information and musical samples are in this link from [Nashville Classical Radio](#). Here's a good musical sampling of the Work family: [John Wesley Work, 3-generation history](#).

Stephen Tucker recorded our tune at age 80 in 1939. Different commentators attribute parts of the tune to Ed Haley's Cuckoo Nest in the 20's and to the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1915. John

Carson's *Christmas Time Will Soon Be Over*, recorded when John was 60, is most similar to our TOTW, perhaps influencing Stephen Tucker.

With much background to ponder for this TOTW, I welcome any related versions you may play, whether it's an old spiritual or a frolicking version with secular lyrics. Personally, I like *Christmas Time's a Comin'* a la Bill Monroe from Tex Logan's composition, another tune which may have been influenced by this week's TOTW.

Happily, I was able to find some modern-day recordings of the tune in addition to Paul's TOTW with our BHO member friend Stephen Rapp.

[Paul Kirk, Jr & friends](#)

[Jack White's version for Cold Mountain](#)

[Oakwood Aeolians sing John Work's I Hope I'll Join the Band](#)

[Fisk Jubilee Singers](#)

[Norfolk Jazz and Jubilee Quartets, early 20's](#)

[Fiddlin' John Carson, 1928 w/lyrics](#)

[John Carson lyrics](#)

[Joe Huff on banjo and John Meade on fiddle](#)

[Tim Rowell & friends](#), a crooked version

For my recording I chose two of the verses I liked, one from John Carson's rendition and one from the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

Merry Christmas on this 25th of December. It shall soon be over indeed, but let's hold onto its joyfulness throughout the New Year!