

# DARK TRIUMPH



*The life of  
Victoria Lancaster Smith  
Told through Spoken Word and Music  
Music Composed by Cecilia Smith*



*Victoria L. Smith*

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*The Life of Victoria Lancaster Smith  
Through Spoken Word and Music*

Storytelling set to music has an allure all its own. It's no surprise that contemporary composers often embrace this blended art form. And to what better purpose than honoring the life of an extraordinary American? One thinks of Aaron Copeland and his work celebrating Abraham Lincoln. Yet how often has an African American's life been the subject of a major musical tribute? And moreover, how often has that tribute focused on unsung heroes, the everyday people of the black community? Perhaps never.

Until now. **DARK TRIUMPH** is jazz vibraphonist Cecilia Smith's rich and complex musical work which tells the story of an African American woman who dedicated herself to serving others - first as a nurse and later as a volunteer for both the Red Cross and the Peace Corps. The selfless and extraordinary life of one Victoria Smith is richly celebrated here through a deft blend of orchestration and narration.

It is a stunning addition to a select canon. Celebrating what it means to be both black and American, Cecilia has written original compositions that blend modern classical, jazz and contemporary popular music. As such, her arrangements pay homage to an all-American experience, yet are grounded in the specificity of an African-American one.

"I found it very fulfilling to apply certain practicalities used by classically-based composers, but for a subject matter far more familiar to me -- and closer to my heart," explains Cecilia.

From the 17-string ensemble, to the voices of The Boys Choir of Harlem, to the driving rhythm section, to Cecilia's own incomparable vibes, the result is a textured and complex and ultimately inspired work --the perfect musical reflection of a woman whose life story itself inspires.

The work opens at the beginning of Victoria Smith's life, with **"Birth/Spring"**, an evocative piece that introduces the eight-bar melody that weaves its way like silken thread throughout the entire work. That melody and the lyrics that accompany it were composed and written by Miss Victoria -- when she was in eighth grade! A tune this woman carried inside of her for more than 60 years has been powerfully realized here. Note that the clarion voices of The Boys' Choir of Harlem sing the melody in a different key from that of the ensemble music. The result is a lovely, "off-key" dissonance that mirrors Miss Victoria's personal story -- as she was born into a world of chaos and uncertainty, bringing into that world her own unique voice.

**"The Darkest Child/Spring"** opens with a dark, somber harmonic structure, reflecting Miss Victoria's precarious first moments of life; what follows is a subtle repetition in the composition that suggests a questioning. Will this child survive? The texture of the music then shifts, characterized by the Boys Choir of Harlem's voices hitting a high note as they sing Miss Victoria's melody, illuminating her self-discovery and newfound sense of value.

In **"Seating by Color"**, Cecilia addresses the "double consciousness", as W.E.B. DuBois called it, of African-Americans. Given that Miss Victoria was as a child seated according to her dark skin color in all-black classrooms, Cecilia chose to mirror that irony in her choices for this piece. Hence, the music shifts from a classical melodic device to classic jazz. The classical music is itself beautiful, and acknowledges what is European-influenced in all Americans; yet it also offers a playful tongue-in-cheek reference to the irony of African Americans being taught to appreciate western culture while facing daily racism. The straight-ahead section is a counterweight, a response as it were, to that contradictory situation. When Miss Victoria becomes the first black nurse in her workplace and is "constantly scrutinized" by her white superiors and colleagues, she prevails. Hence the celebratory nature of the straight-ahead section, complete with improvisation that offers the listener a reprieve, a chance to fully absorb this woman's tale of triumph over prejudice.



**Too Light a Negro for Me - A Love Song** - is just that, in all its full-blown romanticism, punctuated by the sensuous use of strings. It sets up perfectly the next piece, "**New Births/Spring**", which provides a rearrangement of and elaboration on the recurring melody introduced in the first piece. Here for a change, a woman - (Vocalist) Elon Robin Dixon sings the melody with the Boys Choir of Harlem members, giving the piece a familial feeling. In "**Grief and Disasters**", Cecilia conveys the mixed feelings Miss Victoria grappled with when she became a disaster nurse in the aftermath of her own husband's death. This is achieved through innovative rhythmic concepts: the drums, in double-time, play alongside the half-time of the bass, while the melody does both - hooking up with the drums, then slowing down to meet the bass. The result is a sound that achingly reflects what it must feel like to come to the aid of others in the midst of one's own grief. While the piece is dark and heavy, it pulls us in with its organic, raw quality.

Things lighten up in "**Rio Frio**", which represents Miss Victoria's journey to Costa Rico as a volunteer in the Peace Corps. Here Cecilia mixes it up again, combining the classic Latin grooves of meringue and the characteristic strings used in Costa Rican music with the harmonic structure of contemporary African American-influenced music. Reflecting both cultural influences, the piece works as a perfect backdrop for the experiences Miss Victoria surely had as a black American woman in a South American country.

"**Africa Remembered**" feels like a signature piece. Thick with ideas, it opens with somber vocals that mirror the beauty yet deep strife of the African continent. The rhythmic concepts are African in origin -- a nod to the depth of African music's harmonic and rhythmic structure. Still the piece boasts a rich intricacy -- as with the violin arrangement -- which speaks to the complexity of a continent so vast, so misrepresented, so resonant.



How ironic that Miss Victoria found herself offering refuge to people in the very land from which her own ancestors were stolen. And yet, the piece conveys great exuberance and rejuvenation and transcendence -- a tribute to African peoples, and the human spirit.

**"Confusion To Order - DARK TRIUMPH!"**, the final piece, suggests an ultimate message conveyed through Victoria Smith's extraordinary life. She found her purpose, and with that came a kind of euphoria - captured here in the voices of The Boys Choir of Harlem. From a beginning fraught with confusion over identity and skin color, she triumphed, becoming a whole and giving individual. The graceful melody in this piece celebrates that triumph of order over chaos, moving as it does toward its satisfying finale.

Take your time to absorb and appreciate DARK TRIUMPH, as it is not only a fitting musical tribute to the incredible life of a great woman. It is an historic first.

--Bridgett M. Davis

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Narration  
**Victoria Lancaster Smith**

Composer

**Cecilia Smith**

Executive Producer

**Victoria L. Smith**

Producers

**Cecil Bridgewater & Cecilia Smith**

Narration Edited by

**Cynthia Simmons**

Liner Notes

**Bridgett M. Davis**

Concept

**Cecilia Smith**

Copyist

**Cecil Bridgewater**

Recording Engineer

**Lawrence Manchester**

**Musicians:**

Piano/Keyboard

**Carlton Holmes**

Acoustic Bass

**Lonnie Plaxico**

Drums

**Montez Coleman**

Vibraphone

**Cecilia Smith**

Soprano Saxophone

**Bruce Williams**

Percussion

**Farai Malianga**

Vocalists and Voice Over


**Elon Robin Dixon**

Boy Sopranos

Members of the Boys Choir of Harlem:

**Elijah Eagle, Joshua White, Shane Jerman, Joshua Smith, Corey Warren**






**Strings**

Conductor  
**Cecilia Smith**

1st Violin

- 1. Gwen Laster (contractor)**
- 2. Belinda Whitney**
- 3. Philip Payton**
- 4. Evelyn Estava**
- 5. Marlene Rice**
- 6. Jon Kass**
- 7. Gayle Dixon**



2nd Violin

- 1. Duane James**
- 2. Brenda Vincent**
- 3. Judy Spokes**
- 4. Stanley Hunte**
- 5. Ann Marie Bedney**


Viola

- 1. Maxine Roach**
- 2. James Coleman**
- 3. Audrey Mitchell**



Cello

- 1. Eileen Folson**
- 2. Garfield Moore**



## Pieces

### 1. Birth/Spring (2:42)

Composers Birth - Cecilia Smith - Spring - Victoria Lancaster Smith

### 2. Spring/The Darkest Child (5:15)

Composer - Spring - V. L. Smith - The Darkest Child - C. Smith

### 3. Seating by Color (4:30)

Composer - Cecilia Smith

### 4. Too Light A Negro for Me - A Love Story (2:57)

Composer - Cecilia Smith

### 5. New Births/Spring (3:56)

Composer - V. L. Smith & By Cecilia Smith

### 6. Grief and Disasters (8:10)

Composer - Cecilia Smith

### 7. An African American in Rio Frio Costa Rico (4:24)

Composer - Cecilia Smith

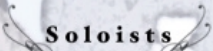
### 8. Africa Remembered (4:46)

Composer - Cecilia Smith

### 9. From Confusion to Order/Spring DARK TRIUMPH! (3:25)

Composer - Cecilia Smith - Spring - V.L. Smith

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## Soloists

### Birth/Spring

Bruce Williams - Soprano Sax

Boy Sopranos - Members of the Boys Choir of Harlem:

Elijah Eagle, Joshua White, Shane Jerman, Joshua Smith, Corey Warren,

### The Darkest Child/Spring

Boy Sopranos - Members of the Boys Choir of Harlem:

Elijah Eagle, Joshua White, Shane Jerman, Joshua Smith, Corey Warren,

**Seating By Color** - Bruce Williams - Soprano Sax, Carlton Holmes Piano,  
Cecilia Smith - Vibes

### Too Light a Negro for Me

Gwen Laster - Violin

**Pictured Here:** Elon Robin Dixon. Cecil Bridgewater. Ms Victoria. Cecilia Smith

### **New Births/Spring**

Maxine Roach - Viola, Elon Robin Dixon - Vocalist  
Boy Sopranos - Members of the Boys Choir of Harlem:  
Elijah Eagle, Joshua White, Shane Jerman, Joshua Smith, Corey Warren

### **Grief and Disasters**

Bruce Williams - Soprano Sax, Carlton Holmes - Piano  
Cecilia Smith - Vibes

### **An African American in Rio Frio CR**

Carlton Holmes - Keyboard/Harp Cecilia Smith - Vibes

### **Africa Remembered**

Cecilia Smith - Vibes

### **From Confusion to Order/Spring**

Cecilia Smith - Vibes  
Boy Sopranos - Members of the Boys Choir of Harlem:  
Elijah Eagle, Joshua White, Shane Jerman, Joshua Smith, Corey Warren

### **Special Thanks**

Charles Smith (1928 - 1980) - Devoted Father, Husband and Best Friend  
Victor and Karl Smith - for their continued loyalty and devotion  
Kamau R. Kenyatta - for his continuous encouragement to tell my life story

Cecilia Smith, Cecil Bridgewater, Cynthia Simmons

The Staff at RIGHT TRACK STUDIOS and STERLING SOUND

Dr. Walter Turnbull - Director/Founder of the Harlem Boys Choir

The Child Life Dept. of  
The Johns Hopkins Hospital - Baltimore, MD  
Jerriann Willson - Director

Where Ms Victoria worked as a volunteer for 10 years.

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1966 Detroit, Mich.



Family Pic - 1965 Detroit



Costa Rica - 1989-92



Nursing - Malawi 1993



Northern Tanzania 1994  
Refugee Camp Burigi



Crossroads - Niger 2003