

Poor Rosy

Informant/Performer:
Unknown
Port Royal Islands, SC, before 1865

Source:
William Francis Allen,
C.P. Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison
Slave Songs of the United States (1867)

The musical score is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 2/4. It consists of four lines of music. The first line is a solo part starting with a 'Solo' label, followed by the lyrics 'Poor Ro - sy, poor___ gal;* Poor Ro - sy, poor___ gal;'. The second line is a group part starting with a 'Group' label, followed by 'Ro - sy break my poor heart, Heav'n shall - a be my home.'. The third line features a solo part for the first half ('I___ can - not stay___ in___ hell one day,') and a group part for the second half ('Heav'n shall - a be my home;'). The fourth line also features a solo part for the first half ('I'll___ sing and pray___ my___ soul a - way,') and a group part for the second half ('Heav'n shall - a be my home.'). The score uses various note values including quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and ties. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words underlined to indicate phrasing.

Solo
Poor Ro - sy, poor___ gal;* Poor Ro - sy, poor___ gal;

Group
Ro - sy break my poor heart, Heav'n shall - a be my home.

Solo *Group*
I___ can - not stay___ in___ hell one day, Heav'n shall - a be my home;

Solo *Group*
I'll___ sing and pray___ my___ soul a - way, Heav'n shall - a be my home.

* Poor Caesar, poor boy.

Background Information

...the same tune varied in quickness on different occasions. "As the same songs," writes Miss McKim, "are sung at every sort of work, of course the tempo is not always alike. On the water, the oars dip 'Poor Rosy' to an even andante; a stout boy and girl at the hominy mill will make the same 'Poor Rosy' fly, to keep up with the whirling stone; and in the evening, after the day's work is done, 'Heav'n shall-a be my home' peals up slowly and mournfully from the distant quarters. One woman, a respectable house-servant, who had lost all but one of her twenty-two children, said to me: 'I like Poor Rosy better than all the songs, but it can't be sung without a full heart and a troubled spirit.'

The rests, by the way, do not indicate a cessation in the music, but only in part of the singers. They overlap in singing, as already described, in such a degree that at no time is there any complete pause.

In repeating, it may be observed that the custom at Port Royal is to repeat the first part of the tune over and over, it may be a dozen times, before passing to the "turn," and then to do the same with that.