

# Hold On!

A Traditional Spiritual Work Song

Low Voice



Arranged by  
**Steven M. Allen**

## About the Work

The **Work Song** is perhaps the most indigenous of the African Diaspora. Historically, they were created by slaves who incorporated rhythm, body movement and song into their daily tasks. Heavy accents on alternating beats helped to synchronize the labor at hand.

As Olly Wilson asserts:

*“the process of chopping wood becomes an intrinsic part of the music, wherein the work becomes the music, and the music becomes the work”<sup>1</sup>*

These songs often contained codified messages, stories from the Bible, and words of encouragement to one another. From the fervent cries heard in the fields, or improvised rhythmic chants from workers on the docks, and the voices heard from victims of peonage, America was built from their labor and its history hidden in a Song.

Hold On! is an extension of the traditional Work Song. Constructed by the use of the **Afro-Cuban Son rhythm**, the character in this piece has been battered by the woes of life. He goes to the present-day ‘Noahs’ for consolation, only to find them too preoccupied with their own lives. However, finding *“the link in Mary’s Golden Chain*, he regains the strength to encourage himself, as well as others, realizing those who plow should do so in hope.

This piece is intended to be quite aggressive throughout. The dissonant chordal patterns are indicative, and indeed necessitated to emulate struggle. As well, the text has been set in a vernacular connotation reminiscent of African American cultural underpinnings.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Floyd: **The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States**. p. 50

To Alvy Powell

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♩ = 100

Musical notation for the first system, measures 1-3. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The piano accompaniment features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The first measure starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The second measure continues the melody. The third measure features a forte (*f*) dynamic. The bass line consists of quarter notes and eighth notes.

Musical notation for the second system, measures 4-6. The vocal line begins in measure 4 with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "Keep your hand on a that plow and hold". The piano accompaniment continues with chords and a bass line. The key signature remains Bb.

Musical notation for the third system, measures 7-9. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "on. Bro - ther, No - ah, will you let me come in?". The piano accompaniment features a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The key signature remains Bb.

10

— You've got the doors all fast - en and the win - dows pinned. — I'm keep in' my hand

13

— on that Gos - pel\_ plow, — and I'm try'n to hold on. *p*

16

I've got to hold on! — — — If you're tryin' to get to

19

Hea - ven let me tell you how, — — — you got - ta keep your — — — hand —

21

— fixed on that Gos - pel plow. — If you keep\_ your hand\_ on\_ a that

This system contains measures 21, 22, and 23. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The vocal line includes accents and slurs. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a moving bass line in the left hand.

24

plow, then you'd bet - ter hold\_ on.

This system contains measures 24, 25, and 26. The vocal line continues with a long note on 'on.' The piano accompaniment features a more active bass line with slurs and accents.

27

*f*  
I said you bet - ter hold on!

This system contains measures 27, 28, and 29. The vocal line begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The piano accompaniment has a more complex texture with many chords in the right hand.

30

— Hold\_ On, — I don't care\_ what it looks like. Just keep\_ your hand

This system contains measures 30, 31, and 32. The vocal line continues with a dynamic marking of *f*. The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and chords in the right hand.

33

fixed on that Gos - pel plow and you hold

35

on! You just hold

37

on! Ma - ry, she had her a Gold - en chain,

40

each and e - - very link spelled my Je - sus' name.

42

That's why I'm keep - in' my hand fixed on that Gos - pel plow.

44

I've got to hold on! I'm hold - in' on!

48

And if that plow stays a right in my hand, it will land me

51

straight to that Pro - mised land. I'm keep - in' my hand.

53

fixed on a that plow, I'm hold - in'

55

on! I said I'm Keep-in' my hand fixed on that

58

plow and I'm hold - in' on!

61

Lord, I'm hold - din' on!

64

*ff*

Bass line for measures 64-65. It features a melodic line with slurs and accents, starting on a whole note and moving through half notes and quarter notes.

I'm hold - in' on!

Piano accompaniment for measures 64-65. The right hand has block chords, and the left hand has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. A dynamic marking of *ff* is present.

66

List - en here Bro - ther, don't loose your track.

Musical notation for measures 66-67, including bass and piano parts. The bass line continues the melodic theme, and the piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and a steady eighth-note bass line.

68

Ain't no way you're plow - in' straight, if you're look - ing back.

Musical notation for measures 68-69, including bass and piano parts. The bass line features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the piano accompaniment consists of block chords and a rhythmic bass line.

70

You best keep your hand fixed on that Gos - pel plow, and hold

Musical notation for measures 70-71, including bass and piano parts. The bass line continues with a melodic line, and the piano accompaniment features block chords and a rhythmic bass line.

on!

*p*

*v*

*ff*

Just keep on climb in' and don't you tire.

*ff*

You know e - ve - ry round goes high - er and

high - er. Just keep your hand on that Gos - pel

82

plow\_ and hold\_\_\_\_\_ on! I said you bet - ter hold on, \_

85

\_\_\_\_\_ my Lord.\_\_\_\_\_ You've got - to hold on!\_\_\_\_\_

87

\_\_\_ I don't care\_\_\_\_\_ what it looks like. Just keep\_ your hand\_\_\_ fixed on\_\_\_ a that

90

plow. My Sis - ter keep\_ your hand\_\_\_ on that Gos - pel\_\_\_ plow. Bro - ther, keep\_ your hand

up - on that Gos - pel plow and hold on!

This system contains measures 93, 94, and 95. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: "up - on that Gos - pel plow and hold on!".

You'd best to keep your hand fixed on that

This system contains measures 96 and 97. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The lyrics are: "You'd best to keep your hand fixed on that".

plow and hold on!

This system contains measures 98, 99, and 100. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The lyrics are: "plow and hold on!".

rit. Hold on!

This system contains measures 101, 102, and 103. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The lyrics are: "Hold on!". The word "rit." (ritardando) is written above the vocal line in measure 101 and below the piano line in measure 102.