JOHN the REVELATOR

Commissioned by the Culpeper College Alumni Choir
Paul Shengban, Music Director
for the ACHA Central Division Convention, March, 1990

Traditional Gospel Blues
arr. Paul Caldwell / Sean Ivory

Who x 3

John the Revelator (ten.)
John the Revelator (ten.)

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John the Revelator (ten.)

John the Revelator (ten.)
John the Revelator (ten.)

who is that wot - tin? O tell me who is that wot - tin? O tell me

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John the Reve-la-tor, writin' in the book of seven seals.

who is that writin'? the book of seven seals. O tell me

"What" x 3

'bout the Reve-la(tion) 'bout the Reve-la(tion)

what is he writin'? O tell me what is he writin'? O tell me
b'bout the revelation, writin' in the book of seven seals...

what is he writin'?

John looked o-ver.Cal-va-ry's hill,

like a chariot wheel.

John looked o-ver. Cal-va-ry's hill,

heard a rum-blin' chariot wheel.

John looked o-ver. Cal-va-ry's hill,
Tell us, John, what did you see?
Tell us, John, what did you see?
Tell us, John, what did you see?
Tell us, John, what did you see?
Tell us, John, what did you see?
I saw a beast rising from the sea! Tell me

"Who" x 3

John!
John!
John the Reve-l-a-tor,
John the Reve-l-a-tor,
John the Reve-l-a-tor,

who is that wri-tin'? O tell me who is that wri-tin'? O tell me
John the Revelator, writin' in the book of seven seals.

who is that writin'?

the book of seven seals. O tell me

"What" x 3

'b'bout the Revelator, 'bout the Revelator

what is he writin'? O tell me what is he writin'? O tell me
Oh 'bout the Revelation, writin' in the book of seven seals.

what is he writin'? O

the book of seven seals.

Talk to us, John! What's the good news? The crippled can walk; the dumb are singin' the blues.

Talk to us, John! What's the good news? The crippled can walk; the dumb are singin' the blues.

Talk to us, John! What's the good news? Oh

Talk to us, John! What's the good news? Oh
John, in the grave-yard, wha-da-ya see? The dead are dan-cin' all a-round me.

John, in the grave-yard, wha-da-ya see? The dead are dan-cin' all a-round me.

John, in the grave-yard, wha-da-ya see? dan-cin' round me.

John, in the grave-yard, wha-da-ya see? The dead are dan-cin' round me.

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4x "Who"
declarative...loud...gospel style

Tell us: Who is wri-tin'? Tell us: Who is wri-tin'?

Tell us: Who is wri-tin'? Tell us: Who is wri-tin'?

Tell us: Who is wri-tin'? Tell us: Who is wri-tin'?

Oh, tell us who is wri-tin'? Tell us: Who is wri-tin'?
Tell us what he's writ-tin'
Tell us what he's writ-tin'
Tell us what he's writ-tin'
Tell us what he's writ-tin'
Tell us what he's writ-tin'

Tell us: Who is writ-tin?  
Tell us: Who is writ-tin?  
Tell us: Who is writ-tin?  
Tell us: Who is writ-tin?  
Tell us: Who is writ-tin?
Tell us why he's writin',
Tell us why he's writin',
Tell us why he's writin',
Tell us why he's writin',
Tell us why he's writin',
Tell us why he's writin',

Tell us: Who is writin'? Tell us: Who is writin'? Tell us: Who is writin'? Tell us: Who is writin'? Tell us: Who is writin'? Tell us: Who is writin'?

* the Main Choir continues the low clapping while a small ensemble adds the high-clap.
Tell us: Who is writing?

Tell us: Who is writing?

Tell us: Who is writing?

Time for revelation and for jubilation.

Time for revelation and for jubilation.

Time for revelation and for jubilation.
Tell us what you're writin'—
read it to us, John!

Tell us what you're writin'—
read it to us, John!

Tell us what you're writin'—
read it to us, John!

Tell us what you're writin'—
read it to us, John!

John, in that (book) John.

John, in that (book) John.


Juh John, write it down for us in that book. Juh John, write it down for us in that book.

Well, just tell it in your precious book, John, Well, just tell it in your precious book, John,

mf
Performed in a myriad of arrangements by gospel groups throughout the South, *John the Revelator* seems to have been first recorded between 1927 and 1930 by Blind Willie Johnson: Texan; street-corner evangelist; and self-taught master of the slide guitar. A decade later, the piece turned up as a regular staple in the repertoire of Delta Blues legend Son House. Both men authored most of their recorded material and Johnson’s recordings even credit him as the composer of *Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning*. But neither artist claimed *John the Revelator* as his own. Both men identified it as traditional.

Both Blind Willie Johnson and Son House were practitioners of a charismatic tradition, a religion that used music to lift worshipers into an ecstatic, trance-like state of mind. These periods of holy delirium allowed followers to gain brief glimpses into the world described by John in the book of Revelation. More importantly, they offered respite and hope to an African-American population trapped in webs of physical and economic hardship.

To hear their re-released performances of *John the Revelator*, listen to Blind Willie Johnson’s “Dark Was the Night” and Son House’s “The Original Delta Blues.” Both discs are issued on the Mojo Workin’ label. Their renditions are sparse and uncomplicated. Son’s is downright monodic, accompanied only with occasional handclaps.

In our arrangement, we have tried to make optimal use of the precious Blues scales employed by Johnson and House. Harmonically and texturally, our piece is more closely related to the work of Son House’s musical children, the next two generations of American Blues pioneers.

Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory
September, 2001

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