



Based on Andrew Ward's epic "Dark Midnight When I Rise," *Steal Away* is the legendary true story of **Ella Sheppard** and **The Fisk Jubilee Singers**, a spectacular choir of young former slaves fighting the KKK's reign of terror against their schools not with bullets or bombs but sensational songs of faith and freedom. *Steal Away* follows the choir's titanic rise from the darkness of slavery to the glittering ballrooms and throne rooms of Europe as they conquer the world... and must then conquer their own demons.

One of the most breathtaking stories ever known, *Steal Away* will feature a spectacularly diverse international cast, the strongest African-American female lead ever onscreen, and an epic soundtrack by multi-Grammy winning composer **Billy Childs**.

For Script, Sides, and Director's Notes, visit StealAwayMovie.com

JONAS STONE

Black, British, 45-55, written as male but could be female. Publisher of an activist newspaper in London.

Well-spoken, sleekly attired, and impeccably groomed, Stone is polish personified. His magnetic eyes shimmer like crystal pools.

Stone presents himself to the Jubilee Singers as a fellow crusader in their civil rights cause, promising that his pro-Black, power-to-the-people newspaper will liberate them from their oppression under the AMA. Quoting Scripture, he presents himself as an angel of light they can trust.

So why does Stone somehow unsettle us?

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In reading Stone, avoid shallow or superficial characterizations - he mustn't come off as an obvious deceiver. Subtlety and nuance are the key to nailing Stone.

Though polished and well-spoken, we detect a raw, earthy edge in Stone, as if he came up from a hard-knock life. There's clearly more to Stone than meets the eye, yet when he speaks we believe him. Those hypnotic, mesmerizing eyes tell us he's truthful, trustworthy, even fatherly in his apparent care and protectiveness for the choir.

Only that's not the full story.

Steal Away

BENNIE
Come on.

LOUDIN
Come on! That slave-driver working us day and night like dogs, and stealing Maggie's big moment with the Queen?! White dictating our every move and publicly flogging us last night?! And our portrait - forcing himself onto it front and center like massah! That devil --

BENNIE
That devil *saved* our music when we left it to die; the portrait's the only way he gets remembered.
(then, conceding)
Yeah, it's gotten rough; but we're partners in this. The AMA pays us.

LOUDIN
To *blind* us. Open your eyes! They rape and bleed this music out of our people then copyright and sell tickets to it?! They're stealing our treasure and the world is blind to the crime! Why? Because they've *bought* eight smiling Negroes as their frontmen! Jubilee Hall is *their* cause; the tour, the money - *that's* ours. We're taking it back.

BENNIE
Martiny.

IKE
Recovery.

Bennie can't believe his ears.

BENNIE
So what, the AMA's going to just hand over the choir to you??

GEORGIA
That's where *The Liberator* comes in. Isn't that right, Mr. Stone?

START → We PAN to reveal the other party to this cabal - JONAS STONE, the black Englishman we met at the White House.

STONE
Quite.

CUT TO:

INT. *THE LIBERATOR* NEWSPAPER PRINT ROOM - JUST AFTER

A cavernous, echoey space. Oddly, the place is dead - no workers, the machinery idle. Still, Stone shows off the printing presses.

STONE

*How great a forest a little fire
kindles.*

BENNIE

And these "force the AMA's hand" how?

Stone hands Bennie the draft of an article. His eyes widen at the title:

"BIGOTRY, BRUTALITY, CRIMINAL ABUSE: THE AMA'S SHOCKING NEW SLAVERY"

It's a tell-all exposé. He reads the lead paragraph:

BENNIE

"Cash-strapped Missionaries prey on the lives of eight black students, including a fourteen year-old minor, their treasurer and music professor sending them cross-country into violence-plagued territory without provisions or protection from bloodthirsty vigilantes, subjecting them to sickness, starvation and near-slaughter on a deadly moneymaking mission the AMA director himself called reckless."

Thunderstruck, Bennie breaks off. Ike shrugs uneasily.

IKE

"Truth is a mist."

STONE

The cornerstone of journalism. This hits the stands, the fallout is fatal. Cravath, White, the Sheppard girl --

BENNIE

They're crucified.

IKE

We inherit the kingdom. The scandal forces them to surrender the choir.

Bennie is floored, disturbed yet torn. He paces, processing it all.

BENNIE

So why am *I* here?

Steal Away

STONE

The Prime Minister loves you as a son -
hell, he's all but adopted you. You
have his ear *and sword*; you cry foul,
his wrath puts us all behind bars.

IKE

Your endorsement bulletproofs us;
The Liberator can't run it without
you.

Pacing, thinking, Bennie looks around.

BENNIE

Where is everyone?

STONE

Church, if they know what's good for
them. We shut down for Holy Week.

Stone's eyes draw Bennie's gaze. Stone's face is coarse, but his
crystal blue eyes, rare for a black man, glisten like hypnotic
pools. Bennie wrests himself from their pull.

BENNIE

What's our fate to you?

GEORGIA

Bennie! *The Liberator* is a crusader
for justice!

STONE

(defending Bennie)

Now, now, we're to be *wise as serpents* --

BENNIE

-- *and harmless as doves*. You're a man
of Scripture.

STONE

Oh my father was a great preacher.
The Jubilees are the pride of our
people, but your oppression sets
back the race.

(holds up the exposé)

This is an axe, but it takes one to
break the chains of injustice. *The
Liberator* stands with you in the
struggle, to give you hope and a
future.

BENNIE

(chastened, his head swimming)

Right... sorry... I'm just trying to...

Steal Away

STONE

Figure it all out, I know. You have been all your life, wondering where you belong, how you fit in.

Bennie's eyes go misty; Stone's eyes sweep his soul.

STONE

I see you, son; your faith is frail, beaten down by empty prayers and promises. You bow the knee day and night crying, "*Use me, please use me!*" But heaven's silence mocks your tears. Truth is, you'd end the torture today if you could be sure you were worth the funeral. *Hope deferred makes the heart sick --*

BENNIE

But longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

STONE

Amen, Amen. The world worships a victim; expose their abuse and become a living martyr on the world stage, high and lifted up. *You think you're famous now...* Get off those knees! Take to the mountaintop and claim your Jubilee!

Stone's words stir Bennie. Everyone holds their breath as he wrestles his thoughts. But in the end...

BENNIE

We promised the world a monument to freedom; I won't rest until I touch those bricks.

He takes a breath, owns his decision, and exits. The others seethe.

STONE

(hands Loudin the exposé)
Not to worry, sweetness, he'll come around. When his cage gets too tight, this is the key. Cable me and I'll bring the world to your feet. Remember, *I am with you always.*

They shake on it. Then ominously...

← END

LOUDIN

Meanwhile, if it's fireworks they want, let's start the show.