

In church

by [D. Keith Naylor](#) in the [March 10, 2021](#) issue

Pew-bound at nine in a midwestern Black Baptist church,  
I, whose childhood fidgeting was, in part, a longing for a wider world,  
listened to the congregation of sisters and brothers humming.  
They abandoned the well-worn words to the songs of faith  
for the spiritual splendor of sounds welling up in human bodies,  
sounds beyond or prior to soprano, alto, tenor and bass,  
harmonizing melody and moan, connecting themselves to each other  
and to their God, like electric current.

As the preacher urged the gathered to tarry in the Spirit,  
I heard round after round of humming, which seemed to usher  
seated folks, who faced enduring trouble in the land,  
toward a deep cavern, that embraced them with walls  
vibrating their own sounds back to themselves,  
a sacred site that matched their own depth.  
That cavern of sounds, lush, organic, expansive yet settling,  
drew me in, surpassing my Sunday School instruction,  
and I could hear myself humming.