Steal Away
“The trumpet sounds within my soul”

Today, the expression “steal away” means to sneak away or hide, but spirituals have hidden codes, with messages for slaves to run away on their own, or with the Underground Railroad.

The words had a double meaning: "Steal away to Jesus” on the surface, meant dying and going to heaven, but also symbolized escaping to freedom.

This song was used by many people who helped lead slaves to freedom. Harriet Tubman and Nat Turner were both leaders who used it as a means of gathering people who were headed to freedom and keeping them unified in their journeys. Harriet Tubman was sometimes referred to as “Moses”, likening her Moses who led the people to the mountain. (Exodus 19:16-23).

The words and music of “Steal Away to Jesus” were created by Wallace Willis, a slave who became a Choctaw freedman in Hugo, Oklahoma (now once again part of the reservation of the Choctaw Nation, thanks to the Supreme Court ruling of July 9, 2020). The hymn can be interpreted as an expression of spiritual longing to be united with Jesus.

Check out this performance from the Fisk Jubilee Singers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wo0AOf9b6fU