

Charles Albert Tindley

the composing minister 1851-1933



Charles Albert Tindley was born on July 7, 1851 (although the year of his birth is sometimes listed as 1859) in Berlin, Maryland and died on July 26, 1933. Tindley's parents were former slaves, so he had to work very hard to achieve all that he accomplished during his life. Tindley taught himself to read and write and he also taught himself how to **compose** music.

Tindley's musical style of composition was greatly influenced by the spirituals he learned from his parents growing up. Eventually, Tindley studied hard enough to become a minister. During his career as a minister, Tindley composed many hymns and other songs for members of his congregation to sing. The lyrics of his songs usually focused on things that were important to African American Christians. The songs often also used a **pentatonic scale** and allowed for rhythmic and lyrical improvisation. In 1901, Tindley became the first African American to publish an original collection of songs. He also formed a group of singers called the Tindley Gospel Singers from members of his congregation. This group traveled throughout the country singing Tindley's compositions.

Very few of Tindley's songs have survived, but those that have are quite well known. Two of his most well known songs are "We'll Understand it Better By and By" and "The Storm is Passing Over," an arrangement of which is performed on track 6 of the *Voices* CD. Many scholars believe that his composition "I'll Overcome Someday" is the song from which the **anthem** of the Civil Rights Movement, "We Shall Overcome," was adopted. While this has never been clearly proven, many people believe that Tindley is the composer of this important theme song of the Civil Rights Movement.

VOCABULARY:

Compose – to write a piece of music

Pentatonic Scale – a scale based on five notes

Anthem – a song acting as a symbol for something else

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. When did Charles Tindley live?
2. What are Tindley's well known songs?
3. What was Tindley's profession?
4. Read the lyrics of "The Storm is Passing Over" on page 24 of the *Voices* book. Since Tindley was not alive during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, what do you think was his inspiration for writing these words?