

A Bigger Table Music Reviews

Choral Reviews

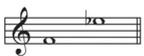
El Cenzontle

Music and Text by Pamela Mayorga

Two-part with piano (4:00)

Self-published by composer*

Parts I and II



Composer Pamela Mayorga was born in Mexico City and has written extensively for young singers; her output includes a number of accessible children's songs about Mexican culture and life. "El cenzontle" is an elegantly constructed call-and-response song celebrating the Mexican mockingbird. This piece begins with a folk-like opening theme, which is well voiced for elementary singers; it moves stepwise upward through the middle voice to support the development of a clear and free treble production. The repetition of alternating minor thirds in the soaring second theme can help

build tonal memory in young singers and lends itself to game-style teaching or teaching by solfège. For smaller ensembles, or ensembles developing part independence, this piece could be sung entirely in unison or in alternating call-and-response style as notated.

Crotales, claves, and a tambourine are indicated in the score. These parts are suitable for student players and could be easily replaced with any available Orff instruments for an engaging and instructive performance. The Spanish text in this piece is accessible, short, and repetitive, making it attainable and rewarding for singers of all levels. While clearly written for elementary-aged singers, beginning treble choruses at the middle- and high-school levels would find this piece rewarding and fun as well. Thematically, this piece offers opportunities to share with singers the diversity of wildlife outside of the United States, and the relationship between music and the natural world.

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Director of Community Engagement

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We Shall Overcome

Arr. Robert T. Gibson

Walton Music

SSAATTBB with solo (4:30)



Robert T. Gibson's "We Shall Overcome" is a stirring and thoughtfully crafted unaccompanied arrangement of the iconic Civil Rights anthem. Designed to honor the song's historical significance, this setting combines rich choral textures with a prominent solo line, resulting in a work that is both intimate and powerful.

Gibson opens this piece in E^b major with the core harmonic unit on the refrain "We shall, we shall overcome," immediately establishing a warm, resonant foundation. The verses unfold through a sustained choral hum, allowing the soloist's expressive line to take center stage. This structure mirrors the communal roots of the song, with the choir providing steady harmonic support while the solo voice delivers the message with conviction and clarity. The third verse involves the whole choir singing "We shall live in peace" before the solo line returns for the final verse's "We are not afraid," powerfully transposed up to G^b major.

The vocal writing is accessible yet deeply expressive, making it suitable for high school, collegiate, and community choirs. The harmonic language is grounded in the traditional simplicity of the original, and dynamic indications contribute to emotional depth. Though the score includes a piano part for rehearsal purposes, the arrangement is designed to be performed unaccompanied, emphasizing the raw power of the voices.

With its historical resonance and well-crafted vocal setting, "We Shall Overcome" provides singers and audiences with a deeply moving and meaningful experience for any concert setting.

W. Aaron Rice

Director of Music

First Presbyterian Church of Granada Hills

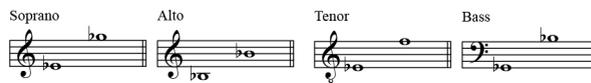
Pastoral (Mu Ge)

Traditional Mongolian Folk Song

Arr. Qu Xixian

Alliance Music Publications

SATB (2:55)



"Mu Ge" (Pastoral), arranged in 1954 by Chinese composer Qu Xixian (1919–2008), is a choral adaptation of a traditional Mongolian folk song. It encapsulates the expansive beauty of the Mongolian grasslands and the simple yet profound emotions of its people. Qu Xixian, a graduate of the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music, was widely recognized for her contributions to choral music during her lifetime, particularly for her innovative approach to blending traditional Chinese musical elements with Western classical techniques. "Mu Ge" is a cornerstone of Chinese choral repertoire and exemplifies this approach.

"Mu Ge" employs a melody derived from a traditional Mongolian folk tune. It is characterized by simplicity and features a lyrical quality. The arrangement introduces rich choral textures, enhancing the emotional depth of the original folk song while preserving its authentic character. This setting features close vocal harmonies and occasional contrapuntal passages, adding complexity and depth. The rhythmic patterns are straightforward, mirroring the natural cadence of the grasslands. The texture is predominantly homophonic, with the choir performing in unison or close harmony, fostering a sense of unity and cohesion. Mongolian musical elements are integrated into the choral writing. Among these are traditional vocal techniques, which contribute to the cultural authenticity of the work. The text vividly depicts the beauty of the grasslands through imagery of green grass, blue skies, and free-roaming horses. The choral writing blends lyrical beauty with emotional depth, creating a vivid musical landscape.

"Mu Ge" requires technical proficiency and musical sensitivity. The choral parts are challenging. Conductors must balance the piece's elements to achieve a unified performance, emphasizing the emotional and narrative content of the text. A successful perfor-

mance relies on the choir's ability to convey the profound emotions embedded in the text through their vocal expression. "Mu Ge" has garnered critical acclaim for its successful fusion of traditional Mongolian elements with Western classical techniques. Audiences have responded positively to its emotional resonance, and the work has been performed internationally, inspiring composers and performers to explore cross-cultural musical fusion. As a significant contribution to the choral repertoire, "Mu Ge" stands as a testament to the power of cross-cultural musical synthesis and Qu Xixian's enduring legacy in the field of choral music.

Translation:

Emerald green on the pasture, white sheep run,
sheep like pearls spread on green velvet.
The boundless pasture is our homeland, white clouds
and blue sky are our tents.
Morning glow welcomes me, freely singing, life is so
happy and joyful.

An IPA pronunciation guide is included with the octavo.

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Sulpitia Cesis

Motetti Spirituali, 1619
Cappella Artemisia
Candace Smith, director
Tactus TC 570101 (2009; 1:05:18)

Cappella Artemisia—an all-female ensemble dedicated to performing music from Italian convents in the six-

teenth and seventeenth centuries—skillfully illuminates a collection of motets and other pieces by Sulpitia Lodovica Cesis (1577– c.1619). Cesis was a nun at the convent of San Geminiano in Modena, northern Italy, an institution well known for its musical excellence. *Motetti Spirituali*, Cesis's collection published in 1619, comprises twenty-three motets for diverse vocal forces of two to twelve voices with Latin texts from Psalms, Luke, John, Matthew, Revelation, and the Stabat Mater. In addition, four of the texts are original and in Italian.

This recording features ten singers and nine instrumentalists in a variety of combinations. According to director Candace Smith, we should not assume that these works were performed without organ, despite the absence of a basso continuo part. Additionally, two of the motets call for other instruments. Numerous communications to Italian convents restricting the use of instruments at the time likely suggest that instruments were, in fact, regularly being used. In addition, the collection contains tenor and bass parts.

Cappella Artemisia's recording presents various options for realizing the music. These include replacing voices with instruments, juxtaposing solo voices with tutti choirs, pitting vocal choirs against instruments, performing the works at the written pitch, and transposing, either the complete motet or individual parts, to accommodate typical female vocal ranges. The resulting work is a masterful set of performances on a high-quality recording. Their use of space, clear antiphonal differentiation, ornamentation, ample dynamic range, and varied use of style ranging from playful and energetic to somber and arresting, all contribute to a rewarding listening experience.

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