

JUDITH SHATIN

The Gift to Sing

SATB Choir



Program Note

The Gift to Sing is an SATB setting of the poem of that name by James Weldon Johnson - poet, novelist, major civil rights activist and more. His poem touches on the wondrous way in which singing can take us beyond our troubles and give us joy. While composing this, and finding ways to embrace these words in music, I had that same experience. The images combine plain-spokenness with imaginative use of poetic elements, as in the beautiful alliteration of 'Shadowed by Sorrow's somber wing.' The description of music's ability to pierce the darkness is particularly vivid, as is the increasing power ascribed to singing, from the softness of the first mention, to the strength of the last statement, suggesting how the act of singing can bring transcendence. *The Gift to Sing* was commissioned by Zephyrus, Central Virginia's Early Music Vocal Ensemble, and is dedicated to them. -JS

The Gift to Sing

Sometimes the mist overhangs my path,
And blackening clouds about me cling;
But oh, I have a magic way
To turn the gloom to cheerful day--
I softly sing.

And if the way grows darker still
Shadowed by Sorrow's somber wing,
With glad defiance in my throat,
I pierce the darkness with a note,
And sing, and sing.

I brood not over the broken past,
Nor dread whatever time may bring;
No nights are dark, no days are long,
While in my heart there swells a song,
And I can sing.

World Premiere Zephyrus Conductor Megan Sharp St. Paul's Memorial Church Charlottesville, VA 04/29/2023

Duration 3:20

To Zephyrus
The Gift to Sing

James Weldon Johnson

Judith Shatin

Pensive $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 44$

Soprano *p* *cresc.*
Some - times, some-times, some-times, some - times, — some - times, some-times,
p *cresc.*
Alto
Some - times, some-times, some-times, some - times, — some - times, some-times,
p *cresc.*
Tenor
Some - times, some-times, some-times, some - times, — some - times, some-times,
p *cresc.*
Bass
Some - times, some-times, some-times, some - times, — some - times, some-times,
Rehearsal Piano

4 *mf*
some-times, some - times, Some-times the mist o-ver - hangs my path, — o-ver-
mf
some-times, some - times, Some-times the mist o-ver - hangs my path, — o-ver-
mf
some-times, some - times, Some-times the mist o-ver - hangs my path, — o-ver-
mf
some-times, some - times, Some-times the mist o-ver - hangs my path, — o-ver-
4

The Gift to Sing

7 *mp* *mf*

hangs my path _____ And black - en-ing clouds a - bout me cling; _____

7 *mp* *mf* *mp*

hangs my path _____ And black - en-ing clouds a - bout me cling; _____ a -

8 *mp* *mf* *mp*

hangs my path _____ And black - en-ing clouds a - bout me cling; _____ a -

8 *mp* *mf*

hangs my path _____ And black - en-ing clouds a - bout me cling; _____

Detailed description: This system contains four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are in 6/8 time and feature lyrics: 'hangs my path _____ And black - en-ing clouds a - bout me cling; _____'. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves with chords and moving lines. Dynamics include *mp* and *mf*. A large watermark 'PERFORMANCE SCORE NOT FOR' is visible across the page.

10 *mp* *cresc.*

a - round me cling _____ But oh, I have a mag - ic way To

10 *cresc.*

round me _____ cling, a - round me cling _____ But oh, I have a mag - ic way To

8 *cresc.*

round me cling, a - round me cling _____ But oh, I have a mag - ic way To

8 *mp* *cresc.*

a - round me _____ cling _____ But oh, I have a mag - ic way To

10

Detailed description: This system contains four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are in 6/8 time and feature lyrics: 'a - round me cling _____ But oh, I have a mag - ic way To'. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves with chords and moving lines. Dynamics include *mp* and *cresc.*. There are fermatas and slurs over some notes. A large watermark 'PERFORMANCE SCORE NOT FOR' is visible across the page.

14 *f* *Dolce* *p*
turn the gloom to cheer-ful day ____ I soft - ly sing, I
turn the gloom to cheer-ful day ____ I soft - ly sing ____ I soft - ly sing ____
turn the gloom to cheer - ful day ____ I soft - ly sing, I
turn the gloom to cheer-ful day ____ I soft ly sing, ____ I soft - ly sing, ____

19 *mp*
soft - ly sing, I soft ly sing, ____ sing, ____ soft - ly, ____ soft - ly ____
soft - ly sing, sing soft - ly, soft - ly
soft - ly sing, ____ soft - ly sing, sing, soft - ly, soft - ly
____ I soft - ly sing, ____ sing, ____ soft - ly, ____ soft - ly ____

The Gift to Sing

23

sing, softly sing, I softly
softly sing, I softly
softly sing, I softly
sing, softly sing, I softly

25

Anxious

sing. And if the way And if the way grows dark-er still,
sing. if the way And if the way grows dark-er still,
sing. And if the way, And if the way grows dark-er still,
sing. if the way, And if the way grows dark-er still,

30 *cresc.* *f* 2

Shad - owed, shad - owed — by Sor - row's som - ber

cresc. *f* 2

Shad - owed, — shad - owed by Sor - row's som - ber

8 Shad - owed, — shad - owed by Sor - row's som - ber

Shad - owed, shad - owed — by Sor - row's som - ber

30

mf **Assertive** *cresc.* 2

wing, With glad de - fi - ance in my throat, I

mf *cresc.* 2

wing, With glad de - fi - ance in my throat, I

mf *cresc.* 2

wing, wing, With glad de - fi - ance in my throat, I

wing, wing, With glad de - fi - ance in my throat, I

33

The Gift to Sing

36 *f* pierce, pierce, pierce, I pierce the dark - ness, _____ the dark - ness, _____ with _____ a

f pierce, pierce, I pierce the dark - ness, _____ the dark - ness, _____ with _____ a

f pierce, pierce, I pierce the dark - ness, _____ the dark - ness, _____ with _____ a

f pierce, pierce, pierce I pierce the dark - ness, _____ the dark - ness, _____ with _____ a

Echo *mf* 2

40 *f* note _____ and sing, _____ and sing

f note _____ and sing, _____ and sing, _____ and

f note _____ and sing, _____ sing, _____ and

note _____ and sing, _____ and sing

40

Exuberant

The Gift to Sing

43 *mf* Confident

43
sing sing I brood not o - ver the
sing sing I brood not o - ver the
sing sing I brood not o - ver the
sing sing I brood not o - ver the

46

46
bro - ken past, Nor dread what - e - ver Time may bring; No
bro - ken past, Nor dread what - e - ver Time may bring; No
bro - ken past, Nor dread what - e - ver Time may bring; No
bro - ken past, Nor dread what - e - ver Time may bring; No

The Gift to Sing

Jubilant

49 *cresc.*
 nights are dark, — no days are long, — While in my heart there swells — a
cresc.
 nights are dark, — no days are long, — While in my heart there swells — a
cresc.
 nights are dark, — no days are long, — While in my heart there swells — a
cresc.
 nights are dark, — no days are long, — While in my heart there swells — a

53 *f* *mf*
 song. — and I can sing, and I can sing and I can
f *mf*
 song. — And I can sing and I can sing and I can
f *mf*
 song. — and I can sing, and I can sing and I can
f *mf*
 song. — And I can sing and I can sing, and I can

59 *f*

sing, sing, sing and I can
 sing, sing, sing and I can
 sing, sing, sing and I can
 sing, sing, sing and I can

59

63 *Lightly, with joy piú mosso* *rallentando, cresc. al fine*

sing and I can sing and I can sing and I can sing and I can sing, and I can sing.
 sing and I can sing and I can sing and I can sing and I can sing, and I can sing.
 sing and I can sing and I can sing and I can sing and I can sing, and I can sing.
 sing and I can sing and I can sing and I can sing and I can sing, and I can sing.

63