

“I’m Gonna Sing ‘Til The Spirit Moves In My Heart”  
Words and Music by Moses Hogan

**BACKGROUND**

Moses Hogan’s “I’m Gonna Sing ‘Til The Spirit Moves In My Heart” is characteristic of both Hogan’s creative style and traditional spirituals. However though it is written in the style of a traditional African-American spiritual, this is an original composition by Hogan, emulating the musical attributes of many of his arrangements of traditional spirituals. Though this distinction should be made clear to ensembles performing this work, in order to give singers an accurate understanding of the historical context behind this piece, it should be performed using the stylistic characteristics and musical interpretation typical of traditional spirituals.

Entirely a cappella, Hogan is very judicious with his use of voicings and splits throughout the song. The majority of the piece features a Tenor small-group soli, who carry the main melody of the piece, specifically within the returning A section. However, the full choir stays almost exclusively in SATB form, without many divisi; the only instance of divisi occurs in the A section, where the SA voices split into three-part harmony periodically, in order to create a fully voiced Bb minor 7 chord with a doubled root in the bass. The only other use of varied voicing can be found in the final return of the A section, where a Soprano Obbligato is written, containing a duet harmony within itself. Though there are many other challenges within this piece, the limited use of complex vocal divisi will help make it more attainable at various levels.

This plan is intended to align with my Repertoire Programming Project and will be geared toward an auditioned high school chamber choir. As voicings for these ensembles can vary – especially in smaller schools, where the Tenors and Basses may be outnumbered by the Treble voices, the limited divisi certainly serves to the benefit of the ensemble. Additionally, it can be adjusted or modified in various different ways, in order to balance the ensemble’s sound.

For example, if there is a lack of tenors (likely a realistic assumption at the high school level), the soli passage can be converted into the dedicated tenor part; in the introduction, as well as every iteration of the A section, the entire tenor section will perform the soli part, returning to the written tenor line for the B and C sections, as well as the tag ending. To cover the Tenor part in the A sections, the abundance of Trebles could be utilized. Though the specific details of these assignments would vary by ensemble, a simple solution would be to split Sopranos, having 1s take the written top Treble line, while 2s could cover the written Alto part and middle split. To boost the lower voices, the Altos could cover the Tenor part in four-part splits, dividing between themselves (A1 on bottom treble, A2 staying on Tenor) to cover the 3-part treble split. This would be further aided in the final chorus by taking two Sopranos off their parts to cover the Obbligato. Overall, an approach like this would make the piece more attainable for a top-heavy high school ensemble, without compromising the balance of Hogan's voicings or allowing the key Bass part to be overshadowed by an overpopulation of the Treble voices.

Other solutions may be less involved; if there are a lot of Tenors, this piece is perfect, as it siphons some of them off to perform the soli. Additionally, select Altos (likely Alto 2s) could be assigned to the Tenor soli – so long as they can accommodate the F3 to F4 range – and a few Sopranos could be assigned Alto parts of lower three-part splits in order to balance the SATB sections. Ultimately, the makeup of each individual ensemble will determine the best voicings. Though it may seem to be reliant upon strong T/B numbers, there are certainly flexible ways to make this piece attainable for any high school chamber choir. For the sake of this paper, parts will be referred to as written, and plans will be created for a balanced 24-person ensemble, with six singers to a voice part for SATB sections. Additionally, the Tenor soli will be assumed to be auditioned outside of rehearsal, as students will have a premade track to learn the melody.

## **SCORE STUDY – BREAKDOWN & ANALYSIS**

The form of “I’m Gonna Sing ‘Til The Spirit Moves In My Heart” is fairly simple. It begins with an introduction section, featuring the Tenor soli’s initial statement of the full melody. This is followed by the first iteration of the A section (A1), which is repeated. Next, the Basses take over the melody for the B section, with the SAT voices providing backgrounds in three-part harmony. The A section is then restated (A2) without any repetition, essentially identically mimicking the second time through the A1 section. The C section serves to build up to the penultimate A3 section, by layering in the SAT voices with incredibly lyrical lines, underpinned by a repeating pattern in the Bass. This is followed by the last A section, now with Soprano Obligato, which is repeated. All of this leads into the tag ending.

Much of the score study consisted of an assessment of entrances and cutoffs. Essentially, singers will need to keep notes short, as the fast tempo doesn’t leave a ton of room for specific metricized cutoffs; these are primarily employed in the B section, to keep the Bass articulations and cutoffs uniform, while making sure the SAT voices are aligning their backgrounds together, especially for their shadow vowels on “Lord(ih).” Though they are written in, they are mostly for reference; I don’t feel that it would be practical to conduct every single sixteenth note for the sake of diction. Entrances are indicated periodically with asterisks, to represent a “snap” rhythm, coming in on the second sixteenth note of the beat. A few rhythmic alterations were also made, such as cutting off ties or dots, in order to create space and contrast in articulations.

Regarding tempo, the piece stays at a consistent 108 quarter – though this may need to be reduced to allow singers to keep up, as that speed with this quantity of sixteenth notes is rather daunting. The only tempo changes arise at the tag ending, where essentially everything following the fermata in m. 53 will be conducted out of time, as this section is incredibly rubato and free.

The first half of the song stays fairly low dynamically, with some specific marking given to indicate balance, such as the Bass fortissimo against the background SAT piano in the B section – this would realistically be less drastic, to avoid basses yelling or SAT voices becoming irrelevant to the overall musical texture. The peaks of the piece occur in and after the C section, which slowly builds to an ensemble fortissimo in m. 42, before quickly decaying to a piano. However, the ultimate arrival point in A3, where the ensemble maintains a fortissimo for a decent stretch of the piece. This is then contrasted by the lower-level, more prophetic tag ending. Extremely rapid crescendos and diminuendos are employed throughout the song as well, to develop more dynamic movement.

Diction and articulations are the last key element of the score study. Accents are written ad nauseum throughout the composition, making it difficult to discern which notes are of the utmost importance. This is synthesized with the text to determine important and critical syllables to emphasize; important words are underlined once, while the top-priority syllables have two underlines. Syllables of lesser importance should not be neglected, especially if notated with an accent, but should not detract from the syllabic stress of syllables at the peaks of phrases. As mentioned above, articulations are also assisted by the creation of space, made by dropping dots and cutting off ties; this is most prevalent in the B section.

Generally, consonants should be quick and crisp – *especially* “s.” These have the potential to pollute the texture of the piece with inconsistency and should not be lingered upon. Additionally, a specific note on the pronunciation of Jesus is made: when “sus” is written for slurred sixteenths, it should be pronounced “su-sa” or “su-suh.” This is reflected when relevant. Finally, vowels should be kept natural but tall; the most problematic will likely be brighter ones, as they may have a tendency to become nasally or strident, rather than tall and uniform.

## ANTICIPATED PITFALLS

There are three distinct realms of challenges for this piece: pitches, rhythms, and style. Overall, this piece should be fairly attainable for an advanced audition ensemble, even at the high school level. However, there are a variety of complex rhythms, difficult melodic and harmonic figures, and critical stylistic aspects which could pose problems to the ensemble, provided they are not appropriately addressed. Below are some of the expected difficulties posed by this piece, as well as ways which these pitfalls could be fixed, or even circumvented entirely.

### *Pitfalls in Pitches*

This piece absolutely demands musical flexibility within the natural minor scale, as every part navigates relatively complex lines within this scale. Fortunately, most of the piece is diatonic, save for the chromaticism of the tag ending, as well as a few chromatic neighbor tones in the B section (specifically, C-flats in the Bass and Tenor, and E-naturals in the Alto). As can be found in the tools related to pitches later on, exercises within the F natural minor scale will be highly beneficial for students in learning this piece, specifically if solfege is used to allow students to relate intervallic relationships to their specific parts. Personally, I would lean toward movable Do based minor solfege for this song, as this will help students – particularly the basses, lock into important harmonic notes, such as Do, Sol, and Fa; however, if students are not comfortable with this school of thought, and would be successful using La based minor, this could work as well.

Beyond simply scales and solfege patterns, warm-ups that simply make use of minor keys would be useful to get students in the proper tonality to approach the song. This could also allow more complex patterns to be used, as well as harmonically challenging exercises, to help students to listen more in a minor mode. The cascade scale could be a great tool for this, as the dissonance created in the exercise would get students comfortable with these types of harmonies and chords.

Chromatic warm-ups, such as those including neighbor tones and scale patterns, will help students develop comfort with these figures, making it easier for them to execute them within the context of the song. If students feel comfortable with it, utilizing chromatic solfege could be a great asset in fostering confidence when singing with chromaticism, and would also help solve the difficulty of the occurrences of “Ti” and “Se” in the B section, and the chromatic elements of the tag ending. This may also help support students in developing confidence with minor solfege.

As an a cappella piece, intonation will likely become a recurring pitfall. Various warm-up activities, as well as kinesthetic gestures and exercises to be used throughout the rehearsal process, could be employed to help correct issues of intonation. Considering the extremities of the ranges employed throughout the piece, especially toward the end, it’s likely that we could end up with a tear in intonation, so it is important to be prepared to correct issues of intonation.

#### *Pitfalls in Rhythms*

By far, the rhythms are some of the trickiest parts of this song. To get ahead of problems created by rhythms, I’ve written in the counts using “1e&a 2e&a” on the piano reduction when new patterns appear, so they can be addressed early on through chanting and count-singing. Additionally, warm-up exercises can be constructed utilizing rhythms from this song. The best warm-ups would likely be breath engagement ones, as the fast and rhythms patterns would force students to rely upon their abdominal muscles to catch these patterns in time. Students should also keep a steady pulse somewhere on their body when learning new rhythms, to help them internalize the beat, and develop a sense of how the rhythms relate to the larger pulse. Snapping on releases, as well as stomping on the downbeat before syncopated entrances, could help with catching rhythms that may have a tendency to get lost due to the pace of the piece; that being said, rehearsing far below performance tempo will also be critical in accurately learning rhythms.

### *Pitfalls in Style*

Though much of it may seem self-explanatory, style will likely become a much more difficult aspect of this song than what the score should suggest. Due to the complexity of the pitches and rhythms, it will likely take some time for students to begin applying musicianship to their performance. Articulations should be carefully monitored, in conjunction with phrasing and textual emphasis, so that students are accurately inflecting the meaning of the words. Getting ahead of this problem area, students should be taught correct phrasing and syllabic stress from the very beginning, right as rhythms are learned – in fact, they should learn rhythms with proper stylistic attributes, rather than merely learning the rhythms without accents and textual stress.

As notes begin to enter the fray, so too can dynamics. Specifically for the various A sections, these can be used to differentiate between the landmark points of the song, giving students something to keep them engaged, rather than allowing them to slip into a mindset of “oh, we know this part, I can go on mental autopilot.” As for dynamic nuances, these can be workshopped later into the process. It may be overwhelming to expect students to achieve the proper rapid crescendos and diminuendos early on in the learning process; this can be a focus later down the road and can help to keep the rehearsal process fresh as the piece ages to them.

Issues of diction can be addressed through proper modelling, having students pick between good and bad models, and using warm-ups to activate their focus on diction. This will be something continually addressed throughout the learning process, though it will likely become a larger focus in the back half of the process, as it should not be a variable which overwhelms students, causing them increased difficulty in picking up on their notes and rhythms. This logic applies similarly to vowels; though feedback will never be fully withheld, a simply passable vowel may not be corrected early on, to avoid creating too many layers of focus for the students.

Ultimately, this piece may be one the students could memorize, creating a new series of pitfalls. Memorization should only be undertaken during this latter half of the learning process, when students are no longer absorbed in notes and rhythms, and are beginning to turn their attention to musicianship and style. Memorization can be encouraged slowly throughout the process by asking for eye contact, and having students put their music away at various points.

### **ACTIVITIES, EXERCISES, & TOOLS**

Below are multiple tables with various warm-ups, exercises, and activities which could be utilized throughout the rehearsal process for this piece. They are broken up into four distinct categories (Pitches, Rhythms, Diction, and Vowels) and sorted to correspond with the most applicable realm for the exercise.

<b><u>PITCHES</u></b>		
<b><u>Exercise</u></b>	<b><u>Function</u></b>	<b><u>Relation to Piece</u></b>
Natural Minor Scale Patterns with Solfege	Help develop comfort and flexibility singing in the natural minor mode	Increase confidence singing in minor, Connecting Solfege to the piece
Natural Minor Scale Cascades and Rounds	Help students with intonation and independence singing in harmony in minor	Increase confidence in singing harmony in minor
Chromatic Scale Patterns & use of neighbor tone patterns	Help develop comfort and flexibility singing chromatic passages and notes	Facilitate ease of learning chromatic tag ending and B section neighbor tones
Trapdoor breath	Help students rely on breath if intonation is suffering	A cappella intonation may become problematic
Contrary motion gesture (pointing up going low, pushing down going high)	Help students more accurately stay in tune while singing moving lines	A cappella intonation may become problematic



<b><u>RHYTHMS</u></b>		
<b><u>Exercise</u></b>	<b><u>Function</u></b>	<b><u>Relation to Piece</u></b>
Chanting and Count-Singing with 1e&a 2e&a Syllables	Help students develop understanding of rhythms	Complex rhythmic figures throughout the piece
Tapping a steady pulse	Give students sense of underlying beat	Keep students in time despite fast paced rhythmic figures
(1)e-a 2& Warm-Up Rhythm	Use this pattern in a scale or breath warm-up to familiarize students with the rhythm	“Sing Oh my Jesus” rhythm – the 1 can be dropped for “Oh my Jesus”
Snapping on Releases	Help students time releases	Fast pace can make missing cutoffs prominent problem
Stomp on downbeats before syncopated entrance	Help students lock into steady beat despite offbeat rhythms	Many offbeat rhythms within this piece (“Oh my Jesus”)
<b><u>DICTION</u></b>		
<b><u>Exercise</u></b>	<b><u>Function</u></b>	<b><u>Relation to Piece</u></b>
P-T-K-F-Ch	Engage articulators in warm-ups, get students articulating	Increase student awareness of consonants
Lah-D(ih) Warm-Up (some word with D(ih) shadow vowel)	Help students become familiar and comfortable with shadow vowel concept	“Lord(ih)” shadow vowel in the B section
Any tongue-twister or diction-based warm-up	Engage articulators in warm-ups, get students articulating	Increase student awareness of consonants
<b><u>VOWELS</u></b>		
<b><u>Exercise</u></b>	<b><u>Function</u></b>	<b><u>Relation to Piece</u></b>
Mi-Me-Ma-Mo-Mu with coordinating gestures	Work through spectrum of vowels with tall composition	Keep vowels tall throughout the work
Ya-Ya-Ya-Ya-Ya (SFMRD)	Loosen and relax jaw	Help with tall vowels
Hand on cheek to check for tall vowels	Help students check in and self-assess height of vowels	Help with tall vowels

## **LONG TERM PLANNING & CONTENT CHUNKS**

The following table details a sequential progression for a twelve-week period, over which “I’m Gonna Sing ‘Til The Spirit Moves In My Heart” could be learned by working on specific aspects of the piece, including various sections, as well as content areas. This sequence assumes the ensemble meets once a week, with roughly 20 min./rehearsal spent on this individual song.

<b><u>Week</u></b>	<b><u>Content Focus</u></b>	<b><u>Passage(s)</u></b>	<b><u>Goals</u></b>
1	A. Rhythm B. Text Stress C. Phrasing D. Context	All versions of the A Section (A1 mm. 10 – 20, A2 mm. 28 – 34, A3 mm. 44 – 54)	Students will be able to chant the rhythms to the A sections accurately and with appropriate phrasing and text stress, and will understand the piece’s origin
2	A. Pitches	Tag Ending (mm. 54 – 58) All versions of the A Section (A1 mm. 10 – 20, A2 mm. 28 – 34, A3 mm. 44 – 54)	Students will learn the tag ending of the song, and will learn the pitches of the A sections
3	A. Rhythms B. Pitches	B Section (mm. 20 – 28)	Students will be able to perform the B section of the song, with appropriate pitches and rhythms
4	A. Rhythms B. Pitches	C Section (mm. 35 – 44)	Students will be able to perform the C section of the song, with appropriate pitches and rhythms
5	A. Text Stress B. Phrasing C. Dynamics	B Section (mm. 20 – 28) C Section (mm. 35 – 44)	Apply appropriate stylistic elements to the B and C sections of the song, including dynamic nuance/contrast and text stress
6	A. Rhythms B. Pitches C. Text Stress D. Dynamics	Full Song	Review and perform the song in full, synthesizing the past five lessons’ content. Assess what needs work moving forward

7	A. Diction B. Articulations	Full Song	Review, refine, & polish the consonants of the piece, as well as the articulations of notes
8	A. Vowels B. Blend	Full Song	Review, refine, & polish the vowels of the piece, and the tone and blend of the ensemble
9	A. Dynamics B. Text Stress	Full Song	Review, refine, & polish the dynamics and textual emphasis and stress of the piece
10	A. Memory	Full Song	Run through piece multiple times, make necessary adjustments, work toward ensemble memorization of song
11	A. Memory B. Fine Tuning C. Expression	Full Song	Continue work on memory, fine tune any new or recurring problems, dig into textual meaning and how to convey it
12	A. Memory B. Fine Tuning C. Expression	Full Song	Run piece only for memory, continue making small adjustments and digging into the meaning of the piece.