

Cycle of Song, Vol I

Notes on the Music and Authors

The anthems in this collection are designed for small church choirs, though they certainly work well with larger choirs too. The fact is that the vast majority of our UU congregations are pretty small, and they have small choirs. 7-10 singers is about average, and many of those choirs aren't sure a tenor is going to show up on Sunday. This collection is meant to be a resource for those choirs to sing beautiful, well-crafted, accessible music that actually sounds like the faith we proclaim. I hope you find this music both practically useful and personally meaningful to sing.

We Bid You Welcome – a rousing opening, full of joy and flourish. Be sure not to rush! Once you have the refrain learned you've got half of the piece down. Work to keep the two-against-three rhythms in the verses (pp. 4 & 8) even and dancing. Notice the dissonance between the soprano A and baritone Bb that happens throughout the piece (e.g. m. 20). Be sure to make those intentional and well-tuned. The transition into the bridge section (p. 13) is the trickiest part of the piece. The baritone melody picks up where the sopranos leave off, and the sopranos and altos are supported by the piano. It will just take some practice to get the quick key change in your ears.

About the author - The Rev. Dr. **Richard S. Gilbert** retired in 2005 after serving 44 years in the Unitarian Universalist ministry in Cleveland, Ohio, Golden, Colorado, Ithaca, New York, and for 32 years at the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York. He received an M.Div. from St. Lawrence University Theological School, a D.Min. from Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and honorary doctorates from St. Lawrence University, Meadville Lombard Theological School, and Starr King School for the Ministry.

The Water Remembers – the idea for this text comes from a scientifically disproven theory which nonetheless has a beautifully poetic resonance with our theology of interdependence (i.e. it's "true" even if it's not "True"). "Water Memory" is the notion that water molecules retain a memory of place as they move through the cycles of nature. And as they do so they always bring both blessing and curse – the water is a great and necessary gift, but it is also responsible for incalculable human misery in the form of natural and human-

abetted disasters. The music should ebb and flow easily, just like gentle ocean waves. Be careful when singing the word “remembers” so as to avoid an ugly “RRR” on the sustained note.

Come and Find Me – the insistent E in the piano could be a sonar ping, or it could be a heart monitor, or it could be...? As each verse grows more harmonically complex and distant from the home key, it inevitably comes back to where it always has been. That, to me, seemed like the point of the poem. Tuning the dissonant chord in m. 65 may seem tricky at first, but both the alto and baritone enter on the same note from the end of their previous phrases.

About the Author - The Rev. **Elizabeth Tarbox** (1944–1999) served congregations in Middleborough and Cohasset, Massachusetts. She is the author of *Life Tides: Meditations* (Skinner House, 1993) and *Evening Tide: Meditations* (Skinner House, 1998).

Dark of Winter – I have always loved the text and Shelley’s original hymn tune as well. For a choral setting, I wanted to play with elongated phrases that really allowed for a sense of “comfort and caress.” Utilize a rich, dark, warm sound throughout, and really play with the dynamic swells to make each phrase have as much life as possible.

About the Author – **Shelley Jackson Denham** (1950-2013) was a UU music director, singer, composer, and poet, and was for many years a visionary leader at the Mountain Retreat and Learning Center in Highlands, NC. Her original setting of **Dark of Winter** is #55 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Will Justice Roll Down? – it is an enormously difficult to write a lyric about justice that actually says something meaningful. I spent weeks honing and revising this text, and I’m grateful to my friends Andrea Roth Murdock and Kendyl Gibbons for their helpful input during the process. This piece is a lament, a cry of frustration and anguish that we have not yet figured out how to cure the hatred and racism which continues to plague our societies. Written on the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr King, I spent time with the speeches King made toward the end of his life as he expanded his work into dismantling militarism and capitalism, which he names as pillars of an unjust society. And I heard him ask “How long?” while questioning the easy answer “Not long.” What will it take for justice to roll

down, finally? Nothing short of the radical fearlessness and depth of relationship that only agape love – the Beloved Community – can bring about.

Pay very close attention to articulations in this piece. The vocal style is like an R&B/Gospel choir, with lots of soulful inflection in each voice (everyone sings like they have their own solo). Note the DS al Coda at the top of p. 6 which takes you back to the bottom of p. 2. The second time through you jump from the top of p. 4 to the coda at the bottom of p. 6.

I Choose You – the source text seems rather obviously to be a wedding poem, but I loved the idea of singing it as a statement about choosing one another, staying in the room when it gets hard, becoming a truly Beloved Community. The music just flows here, and should feel rapturous once you get to the big section on p. 9. One tricky spot is the leap into dissonance at the top of p. 11. The baritones will be tempted to sing the melody the altos just sang, leaping to the B (like the sopranos) instead of the C that's written. Don't let them do that.

About the Author - Rabbi **Rami M. Shapiro** is widely recognized as one of the most creative figures in contemporary American Judaism. A graduate of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, he also holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Union Graduate School. An award-winning poet, liturgist, and essayist, his prayers are included in worship services across the denominational spectrum of American congregations. Rami pursues his first love, writing, through books and a new column, *Roadside Assistance for Your Spiritual Journey*, in *Spirituality & Health* magazine. His latest book is *Holy Rascals: Advice for Spiritual Revolutionaries*.

www.rabbirami.com

Saranam – Saranam means “refuge” in Sanskrit, the ancient language of Hinduism. The text started off as a lyric to an imagined song in Madeline L'Engle's novel “House Like a Lotus” (1984), which was then adapted and expanded by the Northumbria Community, a worldwide community of monastic practice based in England. This text is found in the Northumbrian's book *Celtic Daily Prayer* (1999), which is a contemporary compendium for the liturgy of the hours. The music here is gentle, and mostly in unison. Sing it like a lullaby and you'll be on the right track.

www.northumbriacommunity.org

Primavera – I asked my friend Marta if she had a “spring” text that might work for this collection, and she was gracious enough to write “Primavera” specifically for this purpose. Her refrain seemed to flow so easily, and lent itself immediately to a “habanera” groove. The verses, however, seemed more fitting for a spoken word experience, so we created a hybrid of the two. You’ll need someone to offer the spoken poetry (found on the last page), and follow the ABCD cues for when to come in. You’ll also want to have a little bit of percussion – shaker, claves, maybe a cajon or a deep bass drum. This piece is the only one in the collection with split voice parts – an optional tenor split on pp. 8-9, and a soprano split at the end. If you cannot cover the splits just leave them out (keep the upper note in the soprano split). The vocal feel is very sensual, but don’t sacrifice rhythmic accuracy!

About the Author - **Marta I. Valentín** is a minister in a shared ministry with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Medford, MA. She was born in Spanish Harlem, NYC, and identifies as a Nuyorican – a Puerto Rican New Yorker. She is a poet, and her prayers and poems have been published by Skinner House Books in her meditation manual, *A Long Time Blooming*. Her works have also been published in a number of other books, including *Lifting Our Voices and Becoming: A Spiritual Guide For Navigating Adulthood*. She has also worked as a music producer for WGBH Radio and as a high school teacher. She is a very good salsa dancer, and often turns to salsa music when she is stuck with a sermon.

-- Jason Shelton, May 2018

We Bid You Welcome by Richard S Gilbert (adapted with permission)

Refrain:

We bid you welcome,
We bid you welcome here,
We bid you welcome to this place!

You here with weary spirit.
You here with troubles too much with you,
You, seeking rest and solace,
You hurting and afraid:
We bid you welcome...

You here in joyful spirit,
you here in great anticipation,
you seeking out a new faith,
you eager to explore!
We bid you welcome...

You who enter this hall as a home coming,
who find here room for you wand'ring spirit,
who find in this people a precious fam'ly,
whoever you are, welcome home! oh!
We bid you welcome...

The Water Remembers by Jason Shelton

Cycles of life, blessing and strife,
and the water, the water remembers.

Shower and snow, blessing and woe,
and the water, the water remembers.

Remembers the mountain side,
flowing to rivers wide,
into the ocean tide at dawn.

Soul of the earth, blessing and curse,
and the water, the water remembers.

Through countless years, blessing and tears,
and the water, the water remembers.

Remembers the thirsty grass,
shallows where creatures pass,
shorelines where children splash and play.

Thunder and rain, blessing and pain,
and the water, the water remembers.
And the water, the water remembers.

Come and Find Me by Elizabeth Tarbox

Come and find me.

You won't have to look hard.

Come to where
the ocean touches the shore;

find me in the brightlight promise
of morning on the waves;

look carefully at the bubbles breaking
on the wet sand there I am.

Turn over the glistening rock,
slippery with its cushion of seaweed here I am.

Hear the gulls
crying news of the endless ocean that is my news, my voice.

Lie with me in the tall, green marsh grass; see my footprints
in the sand you have walked upon.

Do not say I am lost,
for you have found me.

I am here.

Dark of Winter by Shelley Jackson Denham

Dark of winter, soft and still,
your quiet calm surrounds me.
Let my thoughts go where they will,
ease my mind profoundly.
And then my soul will sing a song,
a blessed song of love eternal.
Gentle darkness soft and still,
bring your quiet to me.

Darkness, soothe my weary eyes,
that I may see more clearly.
When my heart with sorrow cries,
comfort and caress me.
And then my soul may hear a voice
a still, small voice of love eternal.
Darkness, when my fears arise,
let your peace flow through me.

Will Justice Roll Down? by Jason Shelton

(On the 50th anniversary of the assassination of MLK)

Let justice roll down like waters,
So the prophets said.
Yet every day another child
Is weeping without bread
Or lying in the street,
Cut down by hatred once again
We cry...

Will justice ever roll down?
Will justice ever roll down?
 Hope that calls in vain,
 So much hurt and pain,
Sorrow all around...

Will justice ever roll down?
Will justice ever roll down?
 Freedom cannot wait
 Lest it come too late,
So the time is now...

We celebrate a dreamer's vision
Of peace and harmony.
Yet everywhere the dream is shattered
By cruel reality.
How long until the day
When love will rule our hearts again?
We cry...

Will justice ever roll down?
Will justice ever roll down?
 Hope that calls in vain,
 So much hurt and pain,
Sorrow all around...

Will justice ever roll down?
Will justice ever roll down?
 Freedom cannot wait,
 Lest it come too late.
Yes, the time is now!

No more delay!
The time has come to pay what's promised.
This is the day
When fearless love must rise to save us all!

And then will justice roll down,
Yes, then will justice roll down:
 No one's voice unheard,
 No one's dream deferred,
Let this be our vow!

And then will justice roll down,
Yes, then will justice roll down:
 Love that casts out fear,
 That's where we go from here.
Let our song resound!

For when our hearts can see
The dignity
In every living soul,
Then justice will roll...

I Choose You by Rami Shapiro

I choose you this day to love and confide in,
To hold on to and reach out from.

I choose you this day
To believe in and share with,
To learn from and grow with.

I choose you this day to give you my heart.

Saranam (Refuge) from the Northumbria Community, England

Receive our thanks for night and day,
for food and shelter, rest and play.
Be here our guest, and with us stay,
saranam, saranam, saranam.

For this small earth of sea and land,
for this small space on which we stand,
for those we touch with heart and hand,
saranam, saranam, saranam.

In midst of foes I cry to Thee,
from ends of earth, wherever I may be,
My strength in helplessness, oh, answer me!
saranam, saranam, saranam.

For those who've gone, for those who stay,
for those to come, foll'wing the Way,
be guest and guide both night and day,
saranam, saranam, saranam.

Primavera by Marta I. Valentín

Primavera, la primavera,
we give thanks for your living vow,
in this season of new beginnings,
la primavera calls to us now.

In the soft earth beneath our dry feet,
the earth she moves and moans anew,
and we are called to plant our seedlings,
with sacred deeds of deepening hues.

Across the blue sky above our heads,
the sun's warm rays come right to us,
the wind lifts spirits from our kin-dom*
our love psalm reaches to newfound heights.

The lilled springtime keeps coming forth,
rebirthing us from dark places
with rain and misting they grow taller
and we grow deeper in good graces.

As we emerge as siblings of faith,
the spring tells us to show we care
for one another and our mother
and let it be our solemn prayer.

*Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz