

# What's Keeping You From Singing ?

SSA and soloists



## Elizabeth Alexander

*Seafarer Press*

## What's Keeping You From Singing?

Girl, you got yourself a heck of a smile,  
Rosy and rowdy and redeeming.  
But I can't help noticing that it's been awhile  
Since I have seen it beaming.  
The wind is beckoning! Come on, come on!  
Taste this moment before it's gone.  
Every breath is a secret dawn,  
So Sister, come on!

### CHORUS:

What's keeping you from singing?  
What's keeping you from dancing?  
What happened to the whispering stories that invite  
you to listen to your heart's own guide?  
What's stopping the sweet, sweet silence of the night  
from gentling the winding of your mind?  
Oh, whatever's getting in the way of the truest part of you,  
Sister, lay that load aside.  
Oh, whatever's getting in the way of the truest part of you,  
Lay that load aside, lay it aside, lay it aside.

Although the road you're on may be as rough as they come,  
Walk on, walk on, walk on.  
Remember that the heart of a woman is a powerful drum:  
Listen to it beating in you, it's beating in you –  
It's beating in you:

### CHORUS

Although the songs come harder when you're not feeling strong,  
Sing on, sing on, sing on.  
Remember that your voice is a ribbon braided into our song:  
Listen to it calling to you, it's calling to you –  
It's calling to you:

### CHORUS



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### Cover Image by Mark Winter/Chicane:

New Zealand-born, award-winning cartoonist and animator **Mark Winter** has been practising the fine art of visual satire for the best part of forty years under the pen name **Chicane**.

He currently resides in London where he supplies a daily contribution back to newspapers in his homeland as well as a number of British publications.

To see more of Mark's art, including autographed portraits of many famous musicians, actors and public figures, visit

**[www.chicanepictures.com](http://www.chicanepictures.com)**

# What's Keeping You From Singing?

SSA and soloists

Joyfully

Elizabeth Alexander

*mp*

S I  
Girl, you've got your-self a heck of a smile, ro - sy and row - dy and re - deem -ing,\* But I

S II  
Girl, you've got your-self a heck of a smile, ro - sy and row - dy and re - deem -ing,\* But I

A  
Girl, you've got your-self a heck of a smile, ro - sy and row - dy and re - deem -ing,\* But I

*for rehearsal only*

5

S I  
can't help no - tic - ing that it's been a while since I have seen it beam - ing. The

S II  
can't help no - tic - ing that it's been a while since I have seen it beam - ing. Oh, the

A  
can't help no - tic - ing that it's been a while since I have seen it beam - ing. Oh, the

\* This song contains many words that end in “-ing,” which in American folk and country styles is often sung as “-in’.” As a choir you’ll want to decide how you wish to pronounce this suffix. A perfectly articulated “-ing” will certainly come across as fussy, especially in fun-loving passages like “dancing, dancing, dancing.” On the other hand, pronouncing the suffix with an overtly Southern or Southwestern accent may not be an authentic sound for your choir. Experiment as an ensemble until you find a way to sing the “-ing” words that feels comfortable and just right for you.

10 *sweet & soulful*

S I wind is beck - on - ing: Come on, come on! Taste this mo - ment\* be - fore it's gone, Ev' - ry\_\_

S II wind is beck - on - ing: Come on, come on! Taste this mo - ment\* be - fore it's gone, Ev' - ry\_\_

A wind is beck - on - ing: Come on, come on! Taste this mo - ment\* be - fore it's gone, Ev' - ry\_\_

\* One more articulation detail: This folksy style of singing doesn't call for overly articulated consonants, so allow the 't' in "moment" be *felt* rather than *heard*. It can be tricky to find the balance between relaxed articulation and sloppy singing, but doing so will make this song more effective in performance, as well as more fun to sing. To my ear, the most important consonants to deemphasize are final unvoiced consonants like "t" and "k."

15 *earnestly*

S I breath is a se - cret dawn,\_\_\_ Oh Sis - ter, come on! What's keep - ing you from

S II breath\_\_ is a se - cret dawn,\_\_\_ Oh Sis - ter, come on! What's keep - ing you from

A breath is a se - cret dawn,\_\_\_ Oh Sis - ter, come on! What's keep - ing you from

Opal Palmer Adisa, poet • Paul Adams, technological hero • Stephen Alexander, lyric consultant • Ginny Allen, Agile coach and friend • The great people at American Composers Forum • Yehuda Amichai, poet • A. R. Ammons, poet • Jennifer Anderson, conductor and composer advocate • Scott Bates, poet • Abbie Betinis, initiator of collaborative endeavors • Beth Norton, conductor and composer advocate • Dennis Blubaugh, more than just a music dealer • Michael deVernon Boblett, poet • Edna Busby, my first piano teacher • Ray Bradbury, writer • Augustin Cadena, translator • Norbert Capek, minister and advocate for religious freedom • Jessica Corbett, editor • David Cummings, poet • Philip Dacey, poet • Catherine Dalton, composer and serum partner • Emily Dickinson, poet • Evelyn Dudley, poet and caregiver • Rob Eller-Isaacs, minister and composer advocate • Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher and poet • Louise Erdrich, writer • David Allan Evans, poet • Sophia Lyon Fahs, writer • Richard M. Fewkes, minister and writer • Sasha Gertler, poet • Jack Gallagher, composer and teacher • Paul Gerike, proofreader • Jocelyn Hagen and Michael Hakan, founders of Graphite Marketplace • Steve Harper, just about everything • Steve Harkins, web designer • Edie Hill, composer and friend • Langston Hughes, poet • Margaret and George Heald, piano technician • Karel Husa, composer and teacher • David Ignatow, poet • Kabir, mystic • Linda Kachelmeier, composer and serum partner • Ruth Palmer, conductor and composer advocate • Joan Wolf Prefontaine, poet • Paul Rardin, conductor and composer advocate • Kalidasa, poet • Steve Kaul, recording engineer • Søren Kierkegaard, philosopher and poet • Dorothy Knost, piano teacher • Ben Krywosz, artistic director of Nautilus Music-Theater • Denise Levertov, poet • George Ella Lyon, poet • Jonathan Machen, vocalist • Dawna Markova, writer • Anne Matlack, conductor and composer advocate • Nancy Menk, composer advocate • Edna St. Vincent Millay, poet • Jane Ramseyer Miller, conductor, composer, social activist • Joe Mish, conductor and composer advocate • J. David Moore, composer • Gerald Rich, poet • Carl Sandburg, poet • friend • King Sigismund III, religious reformer • Ann Silsbee, composer, poet and friend • Simon Alexander-Adams, sounding board, fellow creative, and awesome son • Steven Stucky, composer and teacher • Rabindranath Tagore, poet • Sister Peronne Marie Thibert, teacher and writer • Oliver Alexander-Adams, unconventional thinker and light of my life • Howard Thurman, civil rights leader and writer • Everyone whose work supports the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries • Charles Varney, high school choral director • Anna Vonhuben, illustrator and graphic designer • Nancy White, poet • John Greenleaf Whittier, poet • Theodore Chickering Williams, poet • Daniel Winter, pianist and teacher • Nancy Wood, poet • Yehudi Wyner, composer and teacher

**A lot of hard work  
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**...and some of it  
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(You know why.) A complete perusal score may be  
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*Elizabeth Alexander*

*Seafarer Press*

The Music of Elizabeth Alexander  
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27 *warmly*

S I guide? What's stop - ping the sweet, \_\_\_\_\_ sweet\_ si - lence of\_ the night\_

S II lis - ten to your heart. \_\_\_\_\_ What's stop - ping the sweet, \_\_\_\_\_ sweet\_ si - lence of\_ the night\_

A lis - ten to your heart. \_\_\_\_\_ Oh, sweet, sweet si - lence of\_ the night\_

31 *mp*

S I \_\_\_\_\_ from gen - tl - ing the wind - ing of your mind? Oh, \_\_\_\_\_ what - ev - er's

S II \_\_\_\_\_ from gen - tl - ing the wind - ing of your mind? \_\_\_\_\_ What - ev - er's

A \_\_\_\_\_ Oh, \_\_\_\_\_ from gen - tl - ing the wind - ing of your mind? Oh, \_\_\_\_\_ What - ev - er's

36 *mf*

S I  
get - ting in the way of the tru - est part of you, Sis - ter, lay that load a - side,

S II  
get - ting in the way of the tru - est part of you, Sis - ter, Oh,

A  
get - ting in the way of the tru - est part of you, Sis - ter, Oh,

**Last Time To Coda ⊕**

*(Yikes, where's that darned Coda!? Turn TWO pages, and go straight to Rehearsal Letter C)*

40

S I  
lay it a - side. Oh, what - ev - er's

S II  
*mp*  
Oh, Sis - ter, lay it a - side, What - ev - er's

A  
*mp*  
Oh, Sis - ter, lay it a - side, What - ev - er's

44 *mf*

S I get - ting in the way of the tru - est part\_ of you, — Lay that load\_ a - side,

S II get - ting in the way of the tru - est part\_ of you, — Oh, lay that load a - side,

A get - ting in the way of the tru - est part\_ of you, — Oh, lay that load\_ a - side,

48 *p*

S I — lay\_ it a - side, lay\_ it a - side, — *p* 1. Al - though the  
2. Al - though the

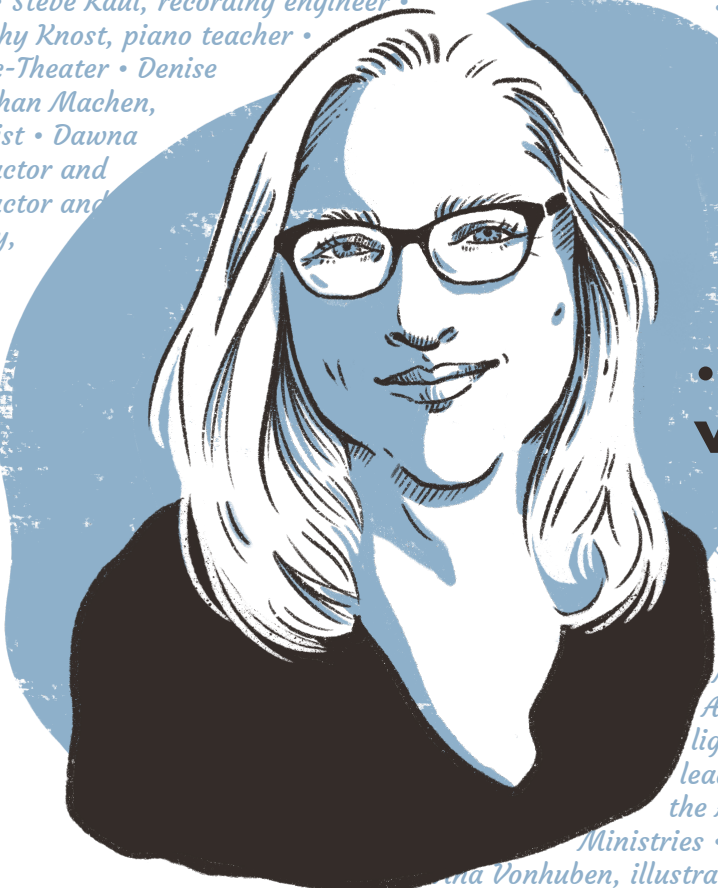
S II — lay\_ it a - side, lay\_ it a - side, — *p* 1. Al - though the  
2. Al - though the

A — lay\_ it a - side, lay\_ it a - side, lay\_ it a - side, — *mf* 1. The  
2. The



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58 *p subito*

S I  
 Lis-ten to it beat-ing in you,\_\_\_ Lis- ten, lis - ten:\_\_\_  
 Lis-ten to it call-ing to you,\_\_\_ Lis- ten, lis - ten:\_\_\_

S II  
*p subito*  
 Lis-ten to it beat-ing in you,\_\_\_ Lis- ten, lis - ten:\_\_\_  
 Lis-ten to it call-ing to you,\_\_\_ Lis- ten, lis - ten:\_\_\_

A  
*p subito*  
 Oh, Lis-ten to it beat - ing,\_\_\_ Lis-ten to it beat - ing,\_\_\_  
 Oh, Lis-ten to it call - ing,\_\_\_ Lis-ten to it call - ing,\_\_\_

62 *mf*

S I  
 Lis-ten, lis - ten:\_\_\_ it's beat-ing in you:\_\_\_ What's keep - ing you from  
 Lis-ten, lis - ten:\_\_\_ it's call-ing to you:\_\_\_

S II  
*mf*  
 Lis-ten, lis - ten:\_\_\_ it's beat-ing in you,\_\_\_ it's beat-in' in you:\_\_\_ What's keep - ing you from  
 Lis-ten, lis - ten:\_\_\_ it's call-ing to you,\_\_\_ it's call-in' to you:\_\_\_

A  
*mf*  
 \_\_\_ Lis-ten to it beat-ing in you,\_\_\_ in you: What's keep - ing you from  
 \_\_\_ Lis-ten to it call-ing to you,\_\_\_ to you:

**C** Coda

66 *mf*

S I get-ting in the way of the tru - est part\_\_ of you,\_\_ Lay that load\_\_ a - side,\_\_

S II get-ting in the way of the tru - est part\_\_ of you,\_\_ Oh, lay that load a - side,\_\_

A get-ting in the way of the tru - est part\_\_ of you,\_\_ Oh, lay that load\_\_ a - side,\*\_

\* The altos' super-low divisi notes are optional (but cool).

These written out solos are merely suggestions! Ad libbing is welcome. Solo may also be divided between multiple soloists.

70

Solo Lay it a - side,

S I lay\_\_ it a -

S II lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

A lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

74

Solo 

Oh Sis - ter, lay that load a - side\_\_

S I 

- side,\* lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

S II 

- side,\* lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

A 

- side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -



\* Choristers, you are going to be repeating this measure for the next 3 pages, so please do two things for me. First, get your eyes out of the \*!%^>@! music. Secondly, sing each new phrase as if it were a matter of life or death. You never know; it might be.

78

Solo 

Oh\_\_ the

S I 

- side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

S II 

- side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

A 

- side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -



82

Solo  
wind is beck-on-ing, Oh the stor-ies are whis-per-ing,

S I  
- side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a -

S II  
- side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a -

A  
- side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a -

86

Solo  
Come on, come on, come on, keep sing - ing, Come on, come on, and lay it a - side.

S I  
- side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a -

S II  
- side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a -

A  
- side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a - side, lay it a -

90 Repeat once or twice if you need more time for solos.

Solo  
Oh \_\_\_\_\_ Sis - ter, Lay that load a - side.

S I  
- side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

S II  
- side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

A  
- side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a - side, lay\_\_ it a -

94 **poco a poco meno mosso**

Solo  
Oh \_\_\_\_\_ Sis-ter, Lay it a - side, Lay down that\_\_

S I  
- side, \_\_\_\_\_ lay\_\_ it a - side, \_\_\_\_\_ lay\_\_ it a - side, \_\_\_\_\_

S II  
- side, lay\_\_ it a - side, \_\_\_\_\_ lay\_\_ it a - side, \_\_\_\_\_

A  
side, lay\_\_ it a - side, \_\_\_\_\_ lay\_\_ it a - side, \_\_\_\_\_

- side, \_\_\_\_\_ lay\_\_ it a - side, \_\_\_\_\_ lay\_\_ it a - side, \_\_\_\_\_

99 *p* **Slowly and deliberately**

Solo  
load. Oh Sis - ter, Oh. *port*

S I  
lay\_\_ it a - side, lay it a - side. *pp (but still with passion)*

S II  
lay\_\_ it a - side, lay it a - side. *pp (but still with passion)*

A  
lay\_\_ it a - side, lay it a - side. *pp (but still with passion)*

**Composer's Note:** My mission in composing this song was to respond to the joys, sorrows, hopes and dreams of Rochester Women's Community Chorus. Soon after the contract was signed, the choir sent me a rich letter describing what was important to its members: community, joy, song, peace, courage...

Included with the letter were several poems and quotes, including an excerpt from Angeles Arrien's book, *The Four-Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary* (HarperCollins, © 1993). Arrien writes: "In many shamanic societies, if you came to a shaman or medicine person complaining of being disheartened, dispirited, or depressed, they would ask one of four questions. 'When did you stop dancing? When did you stop singing? When did you stop being enchanted by stories? When did you stop finding comfort in the sweet territory of silence?'"

At the time, I had more commissions than I could comfortably keep up with, and as a self-publisher I was scrambling to keep up with order fulfillment and administrative tasks. While I loved the music I was composing, I was seriously weighed down by these challenges. I was not able to rest deeply, and my brain felt full all of the time.

In short, I was not singing. I was not dancing. I was not being enchanted by stories. I was not finding comfort in silence.

While addressing the needs of commissioning parties is always paramount, in order to write powerful music I also have to engage the yearnings of my own heart. So I wrapped Arrien's four questions into the chorus of *What's Keeping You From Singing?* and composed a song of insight and compassion for both the women's chorus and for my own neglected self. As I write these words two years later, I am happy to report that I am working a bit less and singing a bit more.

## Selected Choral Music by Elizabeth Alexander

**A Palette To Paint Us As We Are** (Gerald Rich)  
SATB, piano • SEA-014-01  
SSA, piano • SEA-014-02

**Beware the Winter Settin' In** (Alexander)  
SATB, Celtic band, opt. children's choir • SEA-139-00

**Blessed Be the Flower That Triumphs** (Boblett)  
SATB • SEA-078-00

**Cherish Your Doubt** (Alexander)  
SATB, piano • SEA-063-01  
SSAA, piano • SEA-063-02

**Die Gedanken Sind Frei** (German protest song, arr.)  
SATB, piano • SEA-087-00

**Do Not Leave Your Cares at the Door** (Norman Naylor)  
SATB • SEA-071-00

**Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm** (Yehuda Amichai)  
SATB • SEA-026-01

**Faith Is the bird that feels the light** (Tagore)  
SSA • SEA-068-00

**Fighting Over What We Believe** (Alexander)  
SATB, soloists, piano • SEA-099-01

**Finally On My Way To Yes** (Pesha Gertler)  
SSATB, piano • SEA-019-00

**Folks, I'm Telling You** (Langston Hughes)  
SSATB, piano • SEA-027-00

**Glen Song** (Scott Bates)  
SSATB, piano • SEA-025-00

**Handles** (Alexander)  
SSA, piano • SEA-148-00

**How To Sing Like a Planet** (Alexander)  
SATB, piano • SEA-105-01

**If You Can Walk You Can Dance** (Zimbabwean Proverb)  
SAB, piano, claves • SEA-022-03  
TBB, piano, claves • SEA-022-05  
SSA, piano, claves • SEA-022-06  
SATB, piano, claves • SEA-022-07

**Immortal Love** (John Greenleaf Whittier)  
SATB • SEA-017-00

**Infant Holy, Infant Lowly** (Polish carol, arr.)  
SSA • SEA-020-00

**Jump!** (Ray Bradbury)  
SSA, string quartet • SEA-090-00

**Kindling** (Alexander)  
SATB, chamber ensemble • SEA-123-00  
SATB, piano • SEA-123-09

**Let it Matter** (Alexander)  
SSA, piano • SEA-125-03  
SATB, piano • SEA-125-04

**No Other People's Children** (Alexander)  
1-4 part choir, soloist, piano • SEA-141-03

**...or a musician** (Philip Dacey)  
SATB, orchestra • SEA-007-00

**A Palette To Paint Us As We Are** (Gerald Rich)  
SA, piano • SEA-014-00  
SATB, piano • SEA-014-01

**Praise Wet Snow Falling Early** (Denise Levertov)  
SATB, piano • SEA-015-00

**Reasons for the Perpetuation of Slavery** (Alexander)  
SSAA • SEA-091-00

**Same Birds** (David Allen Evans)  
SATB • SEA-128-00

**Song of Kabir** (Kabir)  
SATB • SEA-119-00

**The Gate is Open** (Sister Peronne Marie Thibert)  
SATB • SEA-097-01

**They Have Freckles Everywhere** (Alexander)  
SSAA, piano • SEA-076-00

**To Make a Prairie** (Emily Dickinson)  
SSA, piano • SEA-016-00

**We Lift Up Our Hearts** (Richard Fewkes)  
Unison children's choir, SATB, piano • SEA-021-00

**We Remember Them** (Sylvan Kamens, Jack Riemer)  
SATB, piano • SEA-083-01

**Where there Is Light in the Soul** (Chinese proverb)  
SAB • SEA-070-00  
SATB • SEA-070-01  
SSA • SEA-070-02  
TBB • SEA-062-03

**When the Song of the Angels Is Stilled** (Thurman)  
SATB • SEA-062-00  
TTBB • SEA-062-02  
SSAA • SEA-062-04  
SATB, flute • SEA-062-05

**Why I Pity the Woman Who Never Spills** (Prefontaine)  
SSAA • SEA-058-00