

JS-059-MX / SZYMKO / RIVER / SATB, solo, piano /dur: 5'15"

*Commissioned by the Cincinnati Children's Choir  
Robyn Reeves Lana, Founder/Managing Artistic Director*

JOAN SZYMKO

RÍVER

for satb chorus  
soloist  
& piano

JOAN SZYMKO MUSIC

Notes from the Composer to the commissioning choir.

Cincinnati Children's Choir mission is "Building Tomorrow's Leaders, One Voice at a Time" and so I wanted to give CCC an opportunity to sing a new work that would serve this mission. I selected texts that I hope will resonate with you as we all—young people in particular, face an uncertain future together on Earth, our only home. As you carry this song out into the world, my hope is that those who listen will feel the urgency of these present times. We can no longer hold on to the shores of "business as usual" or cling to the banks of indifference. The "river" is our destiny; it is the inevitability of change— and the river won't stop and wait.

I also wanted to compose a choral work that may instill a joyful hope in both singer and listener. I came across this E.E. Hale quote while researching the source of the Native American, "Hopi Elders" text: *I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something.* I looked a bit further and found the rest of the quote, which I set as the turning point in this piece. Hale's most famous saying, while not in this work, certainly inspired me: *Look up and not down, look forward and not back, look out and not in, and lend a hand.* Yes, "I am only one," but as Hale often said, "Ten times one is ten!" We can each do our part, and— we have one another. As the Hopi elders text says: *Create your community. Be good to each other. And do not look outside yourself for your leader... Gather yourselves... push off into the middle of the river; see who is there with you and celebrate!*

See below the song lyric and my text source known variously as "Message from the Hopi Nation," "Wisdom of the Hopi Elders," and "Hopi Prophecy." It has made its way across the internet, showing up in blogs, quoted in sermons, heard on YouTube, etc. The authorship is unverifiable and there exist different versions of the same text. However I do believe that it is at its core, Native American in origin. The last line has been widely quoted and misattributed. I first came across it in the 1980's while singing the phrase in a song by Sweet Honey in the Rock. *We are the ones we have been waiting for* is a line from "Poem for South African Women" by the late African American poet June Jordan, published in 1980. It was picked up by many speech writers; also by Bernice Johnson Reagon who made the phrase into a song in the 1980's and Alice Walker who took the phrase as title for her most recent collection of essays (2006). More recently the phrase has been used in speeches by President Barak Obama.

— Joan Szymko  
January 1, 2014

#### RIVER

There is a river now flowing very fast.  
It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid.  
They will try to hold on to the shore.  
They will feel that they are being torn apart.  
There is a river now flowing very fast.

*I am only one, but I am one.  
I cannot do everything, but I can do something.  
And because I can't do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can do.  
What I can do, I should do. And what I should do, by the grace of God, I will do. (Edward E. Hale)*

Let go! Let go of the shore! Push off into the middle of the river.  
See who is there with you and celebrate!  
We are the ones we have been waiting for.

#### MESSAGE FROM THE HOPI ELDERS (text source material)

You have been telling people that this is the Eleventh Hour.  
Now you must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour. And there are things to be considered. . . .

Where are you living?  
What are you doing?  
What are your relationships?  
Are you in right relation?  
Where is your water?  
Know your garden.  
It is time to speak your truth.  
Create your community.  
Be good to each other.  
And do not look outside yourself for your leader.

This could be a very good time.

There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid.  
They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly.  
Know the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore,  
push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water.

And I say, see who is in there with you and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt. The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the word 'struggle' from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. We are the ones we've been waiting for.

# River

Native American Elder(s) circa 2000  
Edward Everett Hale (1822-1909)

JOAN SZYMKO

*urgently, intense* *p*

Alto: There is a riv-er. There is a riv-er now

*p*

4  
flow-ing fast, flow-ing ver-y fast. There is a riv-er, there is a riv-er flow-ing

6  
A *p* ver-y fast flow-ing ver-y fast. There is a riv-er. There is a riv-er now  
T *p*  
B *mp* There is a riv-er.  
There is a riv-er. There is a riv-er now

*mp*  
*simile*

8

S *mp* there is a

A flow-ing fast, flow-ing ver - y fast. *mf* There is a riv - er, there is a - e flow - g

T *mp* There is a riv - er now,

B flow-ing fast, flow-ing ver - y fast. *mf* There is a riv - there is a riv - er flow-ing

10

*mf* riv - er flow-ing ver - y fast w - ver - y fast. *mp* It is so great and swift that there are

*mp* ver - y fast, flow - ing ver - y fast. *mf* It is so great and swift that there are those who will

*mp* the is riv - er flow-ing ver - y fast, ver - y fast,

*mp* ver - y fast, ver - y fast ver - y fast, flow-ing ver - y fast.

12

*mf*

those who will be a-fraid, be a - afraid, they'll try to hold on, \_\_\_\_\_ they'll try \_\_\_\_\_ on to the

*f*

be a-fraid, they will be a-fraid They'll try to hold on, they'll try to hold on to the shore

*mp* *mf*

8 flow-ing ver-y fast. \_\_\_\_\_ They'll try \_\_\_\_\_ to hold on

*mp*

flow-ing ver-y fast. \_\_\_\_\_ They'll try \_\_\_\_\_ to

15

shore. \_\_\_\_\_ they feel that they are be-ing torn a - part \_\_\_\_\_ torn a - part, \_\_\_\_\_

They'll feel that they are be-ing torn a - part, torn a - part, \_\_\_\_\_

8 to the shore. \_\_\_\_\_ They'll feel that they are be - ing torn

hold on to the shore. \_\_\_\_\_ They'll feel that they are

17 *f* *mf*

torn a - part,

torn a - part, torn a - part.

a - part, torn a - part.

be - ing torn a - part, torn a - part.

19 **B** *mf*

There is a riv - er. There is a riv - er now flow - ing ver - y

*f*

*f*

There is a riv - er. There is a riv - er now flow - ing fast, flow - ing ver - y fast.

**B**

*f*

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

21

*f*

fast. \_\_\_\_\_ *mf* *cresc.* *f* There is a riv - er flow - ing ver - y fast, flow

There is a riv - er. \_\_\_\_\_ There is a riv - er now. \_\_\_\_\_

8 There is a riv - er, there is a riv - er flow - ing ver - y fast, flow - ing ver - y fast.

23

ver - y fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be a - fraid,

There is a

8 It is so great and swift that there are those who will be a - fraid, they will be a - fraid.

There is a riv - er. \_\_\_\_\_ There is a



*f*

they will be a-fraid. They'll try to hold on... They'll try to hold on...  
 riv-er now... They'll try to hold on...  
 They'll try to hold on; they'll try to hold on to the shore... They'll try to hold on...  
 riv-er now... They'll try to hold on...

**29** **C** *mf*

Alto: There is a riv-er...

*f*

B There is a riv-er. There is a riv-er flow-ing fast, flow-ing ver-y fast. There is a riv-er, there is a riv-er flow-ing

**C**

**32** *mf*

S There is a riv-er...

A ver-y fast flow-ing ver-y fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will

**FOR PERUSAL ONLY**



34

*f* There is a riv - er. There is a riv - er;

*f* There is a riv - er. There is a

There is a riv - er;

be a - fraid, they will be a - fraid They'll try to hold on,

36

hold on, hold on, They'll feel that they are be-ing

riv - er; hold on, hold on, hold on,

hold on, hold on, hold on,

They'll try to hold on to the shore. They'll feel that they are be-ing

39

*mf* *f* *div.*

torn a-part, torn a-part, torn a-part, torn a-part.

*mf* *f*

torn a-part, torn a-part, torn a-part, torn a-part.

*mf* *f*

8 torn, torn, torn, torn, torn a-part.

*mf* *f*

torn a-part, torn a-part, torn a-part.

*mf* *cresc. poco a poco*

42

**D** *ff* *ff* *ff*

S There is a riv-er, there is a riv-er now. There is a riv-er, there is a riv-er now.

S There is a riv-er,

A There is a riv-er, There is a riv-er,

T There is a riv-er, there is a riv-er now. There is a riv-er, there is a riv-er now. There is a riv-er. There is a

B

**D** *ff*

45

There is a riv-er, ——— There is a riv-er flow-ing ver-y fast, ver - y fast, flow-ing v —

— There is a riv-er, ——— ver-y fast, ver — er-y fast,

There is a riv-er, ——— There is a — flow-ing ver-y fast. —

riv-er now. ——— There is a riv-er flow-ing ver-y fast, ver - y fast.

There is a riv-er ——— There is a riv-er flow-ing ver-y fast. —

*f* *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *dim.* *mf*

♩=60

48 **E** *Calm and clear*  
*mf* *mp* *hold back a bit* **A tempo**

Solo: I m - y one, but I am one. I can - not do

*mf* *mp* *mf*

♩=60

**E** *sostenuto e espress.* *colla voce* **A tempo**

*mp* *dim.* *p* *mp*

12

52 *mf*

Solo

ev-'ry - thing, — but I can do some - thing. — And be - cause I can't do

56 *hold back a bit* *poco rit.* **F** *ad lib.* *allegro*

S

ev-'ry-thing, — I will not re - fuse to do the some-thing — I can do.

A

*mf* new voices:

I am on - ly one,

*colla voce* *poco rit.* **F** *mf*

60 *mp* Solo conts. on melody line (S) *n*

S

but I am one. I can - not do ev-'ry thing — but I can do

A

*mp* *mf*

T

but I am one. I can - not do ev-'ry thing — I can do

B

*dim.*

some - thing. — And what I should

*hold back a bit*

S

some - thing. — What I can do, I should — do

A

*colla voce*

T

*dim.*

\* M59 begins with a few voices; gradually building as singers join at phrases indicated by arrows. Tutti by M70

69 **Tutti**  
*mp* poco rit. . . . . **G** **A tempo** end solo

Solo: do, by the grace of God, I will do.

S do, by the grace of God, There is riv

T by the grace of God, This is a riv - er,

T by the grace of God, I will do Let

*pp* *p* *mf*

poco rit. . . . . **A** *mp* *p*

*dim.* *mp* *p*

73 *p* *mp* *mf* *cresc.*

S low-ing fast, flow-ing ver - y fast. Push off in - to the

A of the shore! Let go! Push off in - to the mid - dle of the

T go! Let go of the shore! flow - ing fast, flow - ing ver - y fast.

B go! Let go of the shore! flow - ing fast, flow - ing ver - y fast. Push

*mf* *p* *mf*

*mf* *p* *mf*

*mf* *p* *mf*

76

*molto legato e sost.*

mid-dle of the riv-er. Let go! Let go! See who is there with you

riv-er. Let go! Let go! See who is there with you

*mf* Push off in-to the mid-dle of the riv-er. Let go! See who is there with you

*cresc.* off in-to the mid-dle of the riv-er. Let go! See who is there with you

Piano accompaniment for measures 76-79, including a grand staff with treble and bass clefs.

80

*poco accel.*

*con vivo!*

$\text{♩} = 48$

and cel-e-brate! We are the ones. We are the ones.

*ff* cel-e-brate! We are the ones. We are the ones.

and cel-e-brate! We are the ones.

*ff* and cel-e-brate! We are the ones.

$\text{♩} = 48$

*poco accel.* *con vivo!*

Piano accompaniment for measures 80-83, including a grand staff with treble and bass clefs.



84

We are the ones\_\_\_\_ we have been wait-ing for. We are the ones.\_\_\_\_ We are the ones.

We are the ones\_\_\_\_ we have been wait-ing for. See who is

We are the ones.\_\_\_\_ We are the ones we've been wait - ing for.\_\_\_\_ are the ones.\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ We are the ones.\_\_\_\_ we have been wait- ing for.\_\_\_\_ We are\_\_\_\_ the ones,

88

\_\_\_\_ We are the ones\_\_\_\_ we have been wait-ing for. We are the ones.\_\_\_\_

there with you and cel-e-brate! Cel- e - brate! Cel- e - brate!\_\_\_\_ See\_\_\_\_ who is

We are the ones.\_\_\_\_ We are the ones we've been wait-ing for. We are the ones.\_\_\_\_ We are the ones.

We are\_\_\_\_ the ones, We are\_\_\_\_ the ones,\_\_\_\_ Cel-e-brate! See\_\_\_\_ who is

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

92

We are the ones \_\_\_\_\_ Cel-e-brate! Cel-e-brate!\_\_\_\_  
 there with you\_\_\_\_\_ and cel-e-brate! Cel-e-brate!  
 \_\_\_\_\_ We are the ones\_\_\_\_\_ we have been wait  
 there with you\_\_\_\_\_ and cel-e-brate! Cel-e-brate! Cel-e-brate!\_\_\_\_\_

Piano accompaniment for measures 92-94, featuring a treble and bass clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

95

Piano accompaniment for measures 95-98, continuing the musical texture with various chordal and melodic patterns.

99 *f* *cresc.* *ff*  
 \_\_\_\_\_ who is there with you\_\_\_\_\_ and cel-e-brate! Cel-e-brate! Cel-e-brate!\_\_\_\_ Cel-e-brate!  
*f* *ff*  
*cresc.*

Piano accompaniment for measures 99-102, including dynamic markings *cresc.* and *ff*.

FOR PERUSAL ONLY