

Die Gedanken Sind Frei

(My Thoughts Are Free)

*Protest Song from the
16th c. German Peasant Wars*

*Translation and additional
lyrics by Elizabeth Alexander*



Treble clef voice, bass clef voice, piano

Elizabeth Alexander

Seafarer Press

Die Gedanken Sind Frei

Die Gedanken sind frei,
I proudly profess them.
As hard as you try,
you cannot suppress them.
No fence can confine them,
No creed undermine them,
They ring from on high:
Die Gedanken sind frei!

They laugh like a child,
and sing and make merry,
They bloom ever wild
like flow'rs on a prairie,
They wind and they wander,
They pensively ponder,
They soar to the sky.
Die Gedanken sind frei!

If you try to bind
my thoughts in a prison,
The next day you'll find
that they have arisen!
A brainstorm will thunder,
And burst chains asunder,
And off they will fly:
ie Gedanken sind frei!

They're liable to change
as I become older,
So don't think it strange
if they become bolder!
They won't remain static
Packed up in some attic;
To that, I'll say: "Fie!"
Die Gedanken sind frei.

Tho' you may despise them,
I shall not disguise them,

You can't codify them,
and I won't deny them,

Go on and deride them;
I'm not going to hide them,

Assail me or jail me,
my thoughts shall not fail me,

It's useless to ban them,
or pan them, or can them,

So don't even try!
Die Gedanken sind frei!

16th c. Protest Song from the German Peasant Wars
English singing translation & additional lyrics © 2010 by Elizabeth Alexander

*Never heard of the German Peasant Wars?
Neither have a lot of people!
Read about them on the inside of the back cover.*

for Susan Peck and John Hubert

Die Gedanken Sind Frei

for treble clef voice, bass clef voice, and piano*

16th century German protest song
English lyrics* and arrangement by Elizabeth Alexander

Jaunty, defiant (♩. = 63-66)

mp

I
II

Die Ge -

9

I
II

- dan - ken sind frei, I proud - ly pro - fess them. As hard as you try, you

*Ped. ** *Ped. ** *Ped. ** *Ped. ** *Ped. ** *Ped. **

15

I
II

can - not sup - press them.

mp

No fence can con - fine them, No creed un - der - mine them, They

*Ped. ** *Ped. ** *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped. **

* Die Noten sind frei auch! Feel free to perform octave transpositions on a few notes here or there it's better for your vocal range.

2

21

I *mf* They ring from_ on_

II *mf* ring from_ on_ high: Die Ge - dan - ken sind frei, they ring from on

Ped. Ped. * Ped. *

26

I high: Die Ge - dan - ken sind frei!

II high: Die Ge - dan - ken sind frei!

mp subito

Ped. *

31

I *mp* They

II *mp* They

r.h. *p subito*

l.h.

36 **A**

I laugh like a child, and sing and make merry. They bloom ever wild, like

II laugh like a child, and sing and make merry. They bloom ever wild, like

mf

mf

mp

2 4 1 Ped. * Ped. *

42

I flow'rs on a prairie. They wind and they wander, they pensively

II flow'rs on a prairie. They wind and they wander, they pensively

f *p subito*

f *p subito*

mf *p subito*

Ped. * Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

48

I pon - der, they soar to the sky, die Gedanken sind frei, they

II pon - der, they soar to the sky, die Gedanken sind frei, they

mp

mp

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. * Ped. Ped. * Ped. * Ped.

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 scrum 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 Hagan, 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 scrum 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
and creativity went
into bringing this
music to you...**



**...and some of it
was even mine.**

**This page has been intentionally omitted.
(You know why.) A complete perusal score may be
purchased through any music store or dealer.**

Elizabeth Alexander

Seafarer Press

The Music of Elizabeth Alexander

www.seafarerpress.com

B

75

I you try to bind my thoughts in a pri - son, *f* A

II *mf* The next day you'll find that they have a - ris - en. A *f*

grandly
mf

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.*

83

I brain - storm will thun - der and burst chains a - sun - der, *ritardando* *a tempo* *mp innocently* *port.* And

II brain - storm will thun - der and burst chains a - sun - der, *ritardando* *a tempo*

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *

90

I off they will fly! Die Ge - dan - ken sind frei! *mf* And off they will fly! Die Ge - dan - ken sind

II *mp innocently* *mf* Die Ge - dan - ken sind frei! And off they will fly! Die Ge - dan - ken sind

mp innocently *mf*

Ped. * *Ped.* * *Ped.* * *Ped.* * 1 *Ped.* 2 5 *

6

97 **ritardando**

I frei!

II frei! They're

pesante, a little ornery

Ped. * Ped. Ped. * Ped. Ped. * Ped. * Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

105 **C** **freely, with a dramatic flair**

II lia-ble to change as I be-come old-er, so don't think it strange if they be-come bold-er!_(r!)*

colla voce

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. *

* Go ahead and growl a little here...

114 **a tempo** *mf* **f**

I They won't re-main stat-ic, packed up in some at-tic. To that, I'll say:

II They won't re-main stat-ic, packed up in some at-tic. To that, I'll say:

f

121 *lunga* *mp* *sweetly*

I "Fie!" Die Ge - dank - en, die Ge - dank - en, Die Ge - dank - en,

II "Fie!" Die Ge - dank - en, Die Ge - dank - en, Tho'

lunga *mp* *sweetly*

lunga *mp* *sweetly*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

129 **D** *mp* *sweetly* Gradually growing more and more defiant...

I You can't co - di - fy them, and

II you may de - spise them, I shall not dis - guise them,

mp *sweetly*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

135 *mf*

I I won't de - ny them, As -

II Go on and de - ride them; I'm not going to hide them, *mf*

mf

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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Elizabeth Alexander
Seafarer Press
The Music of Elizabeth Alexander
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160

I

Shout: *f*

Fie!

II

Shout: *f*

Fie!

The image shows a musical score for three parts: two vocal parts (I and II) and a piano accompaniment. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The vocal parts are marked with a forte 'f' dynamic and the instruction 'Shout: f'. Both vocal parts have a long rest for the first five measures, followed by a sharp accent and the word 'Fie!' on a quarter note. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand with triplet and quartet markings, and a bass line in the left hand with a long note in the first measure and a triplet in the fifth measure.

Most people are familiar with the game-changing French Revolution of 1789, but fewer have heard of the German Peasant Wars of 1524-25. This is probably because they weren't successful! Nevertheless, these early rebellions set the stage for later political, economic and religious uprisings like the French Revolution and the Protestant Reformation.

The folksong *Die Gedanken Sind Frei* ("My thoughts are free") predated the German Peasant Wars by hundreds of years, but it quickly became their rallying cry and protest song. Centuries later, this song was made popular by Pete Seeger, who sang an English translation by Arthur Kevass.



The guy on the cover is an engraving of a 15th century peasant reprinted from the French manuscript, *La Danse Macabre*

Composer Note: Desiring to create my own arrangement of this great protest song, I initially sought permission to use Arthur Kevass' well-known lyrics, but I wasn't able to reach an agreement with the copyright owner. I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I sulked about this rejection for nearly five years before realizing that I might create my own English translation, using the original German lyrics as a starting point. (After all, Die Gedanken sind frei!)

It soon became clear to me that this enduring protest song was written in an era which lacked not only freedom of speech, assembly and religion, but also due process and legal representation. 16th century peasants who sang this song reveled in the right to "think what I wish, but always discreetly," and to "laugh and joke and think in my heart," because at that time, to disagree with political and religious powers was to invite not only ridicule, but also imprisonment or death. Thus, a literal translation of the song's original opening line reads: "My thoughts are free; no one can guess them."

Desiring to capture the song's spirit in a compelling way, I realized that the challenge of our own time is to take this courageous stance one step further. We are now offered the possibility of effecting change through the open vocalization of our thoughts – a possibility that was "unthinkable" for a 16th century German farmer. Thus, my lyrics challenge us to not only think free thoughts but also, in the words of my opening line: "proudly profess them."

This more overt tone notwithstanding, the first three verses of my lyric are an entirely solid singing translation of the original German lyric. But from that point on, the creativity of this 20th century lyricist could no longer be held in captivity. Beginning with "They're liable to change as I become older..." through the final "Fie!", the lyrics are entirely my own!

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