

Across the empty square  
GP - V002.1  
SATB, piano, C instrument

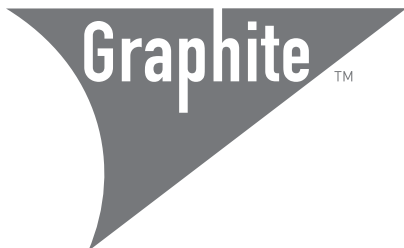
Ellen Gilson Voth

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# Ellen Gilson Voth

## Across the empty square

for SATB choir, piano, C instrument



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## Text:

They say that in the streets of Assisi  
People are singing to each other  
Across the empty squares,  
Keeping their windows open  
So that those who are alone, are not alone.

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise  
You can hear the birds again...  
The sky is no longer thick,  
But blue and grey and clear.

Yes, there is fear,  
But there need not be hate.  
In our isolation  
We need not pass on loneliness.  
In our sickness, we can halt disease of the soul.

Listen, the birds are singing again,  
The sky is clearing,  
And we are always encompassed by Love.

Open the windows of your soul.  
And though you may not be able  
To touch across the empty square,

Sing.

- Fr. Richard Hendrick

## Note to pianists:

The phrases from “How can I keep from singing” (designed for the piano or for the C instrument if used) function like a cantus firmus through the piece. You’ll also see other quotations that appear in the right hand of the piano part alone (ms. 8-9, 10-13, and 17-22):

Fra - tel - li d'I - ta - lia, l'I - ta - lia s'è des - ta,

Fra - tel - li d'I - ta - lia, l'I - ta - lia s'è des - ta,

from “Il Canto degli Italiano,” the Italian national anthem and

yì gēn zǐ - zhū zhī miào miào sòng gēi bǎo bǎo zuò guān xiǎo ———

from “Zi Zhu Diao,” a Chinese folk melody. Take care to follow the articulations and pedal markings, with the caveat that your ears and the acoustics of the room, if performing live, will be your ultimate guide for creating a soundscape that will have the most impact in performance.

## From the Composer:

When I first discovered the poetry of Fr. Richard Hendrick, I was struck deeply by how his words speak not only to a global pandemic, but to so much that separates us from others, and how our singing can cross those boundaries, if we are willing to “open the windows” within us. My thanks again to him for responding so quickly to my inquiry, and granting permission for me to set excerpts of his poem, to create this piece.

In both text and music, this piece suggests a palindrome. The first and fifth sections refer to scenes of Italians singing “across the empty squares” and the soundscape implied by their singing - moments of echo and delay, for example. Fragments of Italy’s national anthem are juxtaposed with a recitative-like vocal line; at the end of the piece, singers repeat motives independently to create a “wash” of sound. The second and fourth sections refer to the birds of Wuhan, first against a backdrop of dissonance mingled with a phrase from a Chinese folk song, and later in the harmonic openness and hopefulness suggested by a clearing sky.

The middle section functions as a turning point, balanced by two forces that stand in contrast. Musically this section follows a descending bass line and, in a more obscured manner, a circle of fifths altered by dissonance. These harmonic progressions, so natural and common in our musical vocabulary, are juxtaposed with a text that speaks to our power to work against, to rise above, progressions of human behavior. Hate does not need to be the product of fear; loneliness does not need to grow out of isolation. Even in our sickness, we can halt “disease of the soul.”

Woven throughout the accompaniment are phrases from the hymn tune, “How can I keep from singing?”, which are often hidden by surrounding musical material, then set free more clearly at the end.

While rooted in the sound concept of live performance, this piece is designed to be compatible with virtual performance, if need be. In either setting, “Across the empty square” suggests layers of time and how all of us experience time differently, yet the power and beauty of music are undiminished by the limits of time.

- Ellen Gilson Voth

**For the optional C instrument, the composer’s preferences are oboe then violin, but the part is adaptable for any C instrument.**

# Across the empty square

for SATB choir, piano, and C instrument

Fr. Richard Hendrick, OFM.

Ellen Gilson Voth

*Freely*  $\text{♩} = 69$

C Inst. *mp legato*

Piano *mp*

5

C Inst.

T *mp*

B *mp*

5

"My life flows

They say that in the streets of As - si - si peo - ple are sing - ing.

They say that in the streets of As - si - si peo - ple are sing - ing.

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7

C Inst. *For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.*

on in endless song"

T

8

sing - ing to each oth - er a - cross the emp - ty squares,

B

7

sing - ing to each oth - er a - cross™ the emp - ty squares,

\* notable. elevated.

\* = from the national anthem of Italy - music by Michele Novaro (1818-1885). Public domain.

9

C Inst. *For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.*

T

8

*p* keep - ing their win - dows o - pen, so that those who are a - lone,

B

9

*p* keep - ing their win - dows o - pen, so that those who are a - lone,

*mp*

3

\* notable. elevated.

12

S *mf* They

A *mf* They say that in Wu - han, af - ter

T *p* are not a - lone. *mp* Sing,

B *p* are not a - lone. *mp* Sing,

12 *mf*

15

C Inst. *mf* "above earth's lamentation"

S say that in Wu - han, af - ter so ma - ny years you can hear the birds a - gain,

A so ma - ny years of noise, you can hear the birds a - gain,

T *p* *mp* *p* Sing, *mp* *p*

B *p* *mp* *p* Sing,

15

17 *mp* The sky is no longer thick, but blue and grey and clear.

*mp* The sky is no longer thick, but blue and gray and clear.

*mp* *p* Sing. *mp* *p* Sing.

17

\*"Purple Bamboo Flute," from Chinese Folk Song Collection (Yeh Yang-Ching, editor).

21 *rit.* ♩ = 63

21 *rit.* ♩ = 63 *Soulfully* *mp*

26

S *mp* Yes, there is fear, but there need not \_\_\_\_

A *mp* Yes, there is fear, but there need not \_\_\_\_

T *mp* Yes, there is fear, but there need not \_\_\_\_

B *mp* Yes, there is fear, but there need not \_\_\_\_

26

29

C Inst. *mp* "I hear the real though far-off hymn"

S *mf* \_\_\_\_ be hate. In our i - so - la - tion, we need not pass \_\_\_\_ on lone -

A *mf* \_\_\_\_ be hate. In our i - so - la - tion, we need not pass \_\_\_\_ on lone -

T *mf* \_\_\_\_ be hate. In our i - so - la - tion, we need not pass \_\_\_\_ on lone -

B *mf* \_\_\_\_ be hate. In our i - so - la - tion, we need not pass \_\_\_\_ on lone -

29

33 *molto rit.\**

C Inst. *mp*

S - li-ness. In our sick-ness, we can halt \_\_\_\_\_ dis - ease \_\_\_\_\_ of the

A - li-ness. In our sick-ness, we can halt \_\_\_\_\_ dis - ease \_\_\_\_\_ of the

T - li-ness. In our sick-ness, we can halt \_\_\_\_\_ dis - ease \_\_\_\_\_ of the

B - li-ness. In our sick-ness, we can halt \_\_\_\_\_ dis - ease \_\_\_\_\_ of the

33 *molto rit.\**

37 *Freely*

C Inst. *mp*

S soul. \_\_\_\_\_

A soul. \_\_\_\_\_

T soul. \_\_\_\_\_

B soul. \_\_\_\_\_

37 *Freely*

43 *rit.* ♩ = 63

C Inst. *For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.*

S *mp*  
Lis - ten,

A *mp*  
Lis - ten,

T *mp*  
Lis - ten,

B *mp*  
Lis - ten,

43 *rit.* ♩ = 63

47 *dolce p* *mp* "that hails a

C Inst. *For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.*

S *dolce p*  
the birds are sing - ing a - gain,

A *dolce p*  
the birds are sing - ing a - gain,

T *dolce p*  
the birds are sing - ing a - gain,

B *dolce p*  
the birds are sing - ing a - gain,

47 *mp*

50

♩ = 69

C Inst.

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new creation'

*mp*

*mf*

S  
The sky \_\_\_\_\_ is clear - ing, and we are

A  
The sky \_\_\_\_\_ is clear - ing, and we are

T  
The sky \_\_\_\_\_ is clear - ing, and we are

B  
The sky \_\_\_\_\_ is clear - ing, and we are



50

♩ = 69

*mf*

For perusal purposes only. Do not copy. *poco rit.*

53

S  
al - ways en-com - passed by Love.

A  
al - ways en-com - passed by Love.

T  
al - ways en-com - passed by Love.

B  
al - ways en-com - passed by Love.



53

*poco rit.*

56 *♩ = 72 Warmly*

C Inst. For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.

*poco f* "My life flows on in endless song"

S O - pen the win - dows of your soul, O - pen the

A O - pen the win - dows of your soul, O - pen the

T O - pen the win - dows of your soul, O - pen the

B O - pen the win - dows of your soul, O - pen the

56 *♩ = 72 Warmly*

*f* "My life flows on in endless song"

59

C Inst. For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.

S win - dows of your soul. And though you may not be

A win - dows of your soul. And though you may not

T win - dows of your soul. And though you may not be

B win - dows of your soul. And though you may not

59

62 *mp*

S a - ble to touch a - cross the emp - ty square,

A touch a - cross the emp - ty square,

T a - ble to touch a - cross the square, emp - ty square,

B touch a - cross the emp - ty square,

62 *mp*

All singers continuously repeat these motives on the word "sing", gradually closing to [ŋ] at their own pace, tempo and inflection, creating a wash of sound.

66 *mp* ♩ = 69

C Inst. *mp* "No storm can shake my inmost calm"

S *mp* Sing, Sing,

A *mp* Sing, Sing,

T *mp* Sing, Sing,

B *mp* Sing, Sing,

66 *mp* ♩ = 69

70

C Inst. *while to that rock I'm*

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S

A

T

B

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notable. elevated. (T/B motives change)

70

(Singers continue independently; with new motives for tenors and basses.)

74

C Inst. *clinging"*

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S

A

T

B

Graphite

notable. elevated.

Sing.

Sing.

74

*mf*

77 *rit.*

C Inst. *mp* "How can I keep from singing?"

**Together:**

S Sing. *p* (all close to [ŋ]) *notable. elevated.*

A Sing. *p* (all close to [ŋ]) <sup>TM</sup>

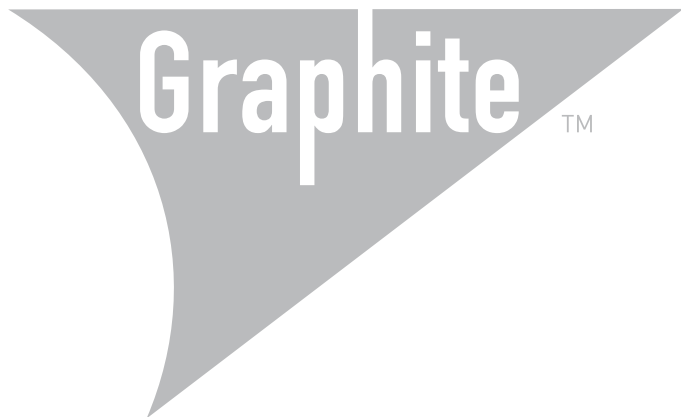
T Sing. *p* (all close to [ŋ])

B Sing. *p* (all close to [ŋ])

77 *rit.*

*p*

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notable. elevated.

C Instrument

# Across the empty square

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for SATB choir, piano, and C instrument

Fr. Richard Hendrick, OFM.

Ellen Gilson Voth

*Freely*  $\text{♩} = 69$

*mp* *legato*

9  $\text{♩} = 69$

*mf*

\* C4 may be substituted here if B flat is unplayable

16  $\text{♩} = 63$

*mp*

33 *molto rit.*  
(omit as needed in case of virtual performance)

*Freely*

*mp*

41 *rit.*  $\text{♩} = 63$

47  $\text{♩} = 69$  *poco rit.*

*mp*

56  $\text{♩} = 72$  *Warmly*

*mf*

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notable. elevated.

65  $\text{♩} = 69$

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*mp*

73

Graphite™

notable, elevated.

79

*rit.*

*mp*

Quoted material  
How Can I Keep From Singing?

Robert Lowry

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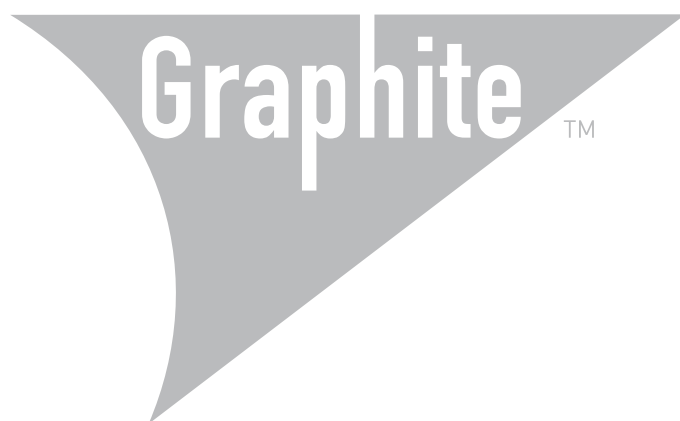
My life flows on in end-less song, a - bove earth's lam - en -

ta - tion. I hear the real though far - off hymn that hails a new cre -

a - tion. No storm can shake my in-most calm™ while to that rock I'm cling-ing. Since

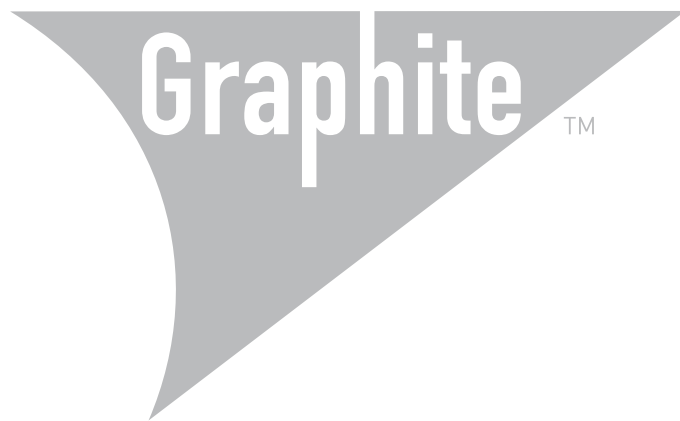
Love is Lord of heav'n and earth, how can I keep from sing - ing? —

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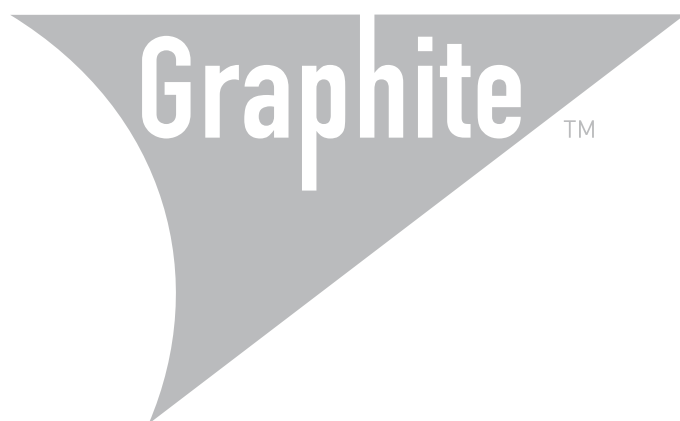
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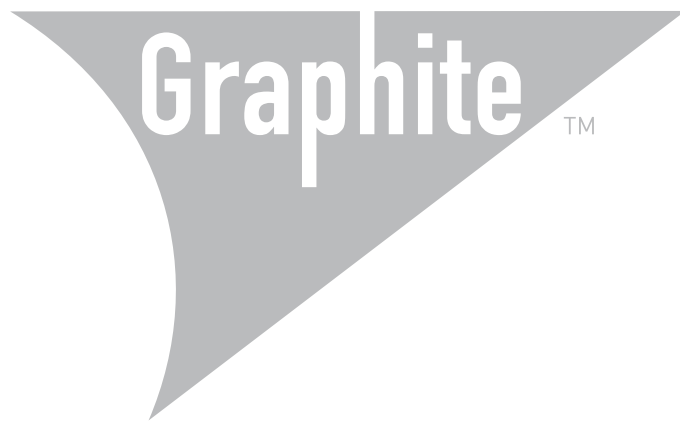
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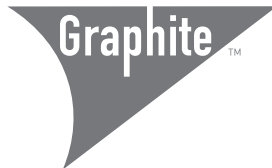
## Ellen Gilson Voth



Active as a conductor and composer, Ellen Gilson Voth composes works that reflect her passion for and commitment to high standards of artistry in writing for the human voice. Praised for music that is “superbly crafted for singer and accompanist,” Voth’s works have been commissioned and premiered by a wide range of professional, semi-professional and amateur choirs across the US, and featured at regional and national conferences of the American Choral Directors Association and College Music Society. Her art song and short opera works have garnered national attention as well. An experienced educator and clinician, she regularly presents workshops and coaches emerging composers on the art and craft of composition. Voth received her DMA degree from The Hartt School, University of Hartford, and currently lives with her husband and daughter in West Hartford, CT. To learn more about her work, visit [www.ellengilsonvoth.net](http://www.ellengilsonvoth.net).

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