

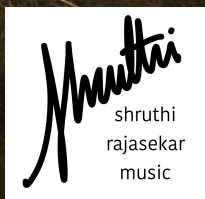
I Am My Own

for SATB Choir + single handbell



Shruthi Rajasekar

**Text by: Charlotte Brontë,
Emily Brontë, and Anne Brontë**



I Am My Own

Text:

I am no bird;
no net ensnares me

I will not yield
not in the slightest

You must listen to me
Hear me this time

I mean to live as I can
I am my own

I
echo back my own
exhilarating sense of
hope and freedom

indefinite dreams
bright anticipations
of the future greet me

I care for myself
I have an inward treasure
born with me

to live,
rise, and reign
what I possess is all my own

I made my way
I walked a while on
As in a dream
I flew

- *The Brontë sisters*

For Performers:

These thoughts guided my structure and aims for the piece. I therefore share them alongside the text:

1. *What does it mean to exist as a woman today?*
(No TERF's allowed)

Tension, fraught, angry
a woman restrained
To carry burdens, to be everything for others
to not speak up lest there be retribution
Existing for others — and fighting that identity. Protest

2. *What does it mean to be free?*

to not be stifled
to put yourself first
to be in an interesting tension with community
to exist with and without others
to not be defined, in worth, by your role or connection to others
to not be definable at all
to not have to prove
to exist as you

3. *What does the world look like if you designed it?*

to dream
to realize
to build
to soar, to be light, to not be weighed down
to break away
to walk, walk away
to go in peace
to move without ties to what you've built,
for you shall build again.

Program Note:

Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë wrote radical novels within their 19th-century Victorian-era circumstances. These texts depict individuals existing in tension with community, much as we are on the precipice of something (maybe many things) irreparably breaking in our world today. Though these novels are hailed as feminist texts, we should also scrutinize the Brontë canon, especially the classist, racist, ableist, and patriarchal norms espoused by their society and parroted faithfully by the sisters. Nonetheless, I reread these authors because I am taken with the image of “the departure” - when a pivotal character in each of the three novels quoted here (*Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) leaves. When they declare, “I am my own.” When they walk away - to their new destiny.

What does that look like in an era of unmitigated climate catastrophe, the cessation of basic human rights, the deliberate choice made by nations to completely neglect their inhabitants? What would it mean to simply leave it all behind? And leave in a way that doesn't do more damage (not via a billionaire's climate-choking spaceship), but, rather, sets the past and one's self free? I don't know; but I am intrigued by this idea - and I hope you'll join me in my departure, too. After all, the greatest asset of a choir is its sense of community; yet no choir exists without individual contribution and, perhaps, individual sacrifice. Can we have both? Autonomy and community care? Can we build a whole new world through mutual aid?

- *Shruthi Rajasekar*

Origins of the text in *I Am My Own*:

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you."
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Jane speaking to Mr. Rochester)

"Then you will not yield?"
"No."
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Mr. Rochester asks and Jane responds)

"There is no dishonour, no breach of promise, no desertion in the case. I am **not** under **the slightest** obligation to go to India, especially with strangers."
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Jane responding to St. John)

"Stop," she cried, "**you must listen to me** first; and I can't speak while those clouds are floating in my face."
(*Wuthering Heights*, E. Brontë, Catherine speaking to Hareton)

"Come in! come in!" he sobbed. "Cathy, do come. Oh, do—once more! Oh! my heart's darling! **hear me this time**, Catherine, at last!"
(*Wuthering Heights*, E. Brontë, Heathcliff addressing the ghost of Catherine)

"You cannot mean that you will break your heart and die for the detestable conduct of an infamous villain like that!"
"By no means: my heart is too thoroughly dried to be broken in a hurry, and **I mean to live** as long as I can."
(*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, A. Brontë, Mr. Hargrave speaks and Helen responds)

"I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: **I am my own** mistress."
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Jane speaking to Mr. Rochester)

the bleak and barren fields beyond might have struck me as gloomy enough at another time; but now, each separate object seemed to **echo back my own exhilarating sense of hope and freedom: indefinite dreams** of the far past and **bright anticipations of the future** seemed to **greet me** at every turn.
(*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, A. Brontë, Helen's diary)

Still indomitable was the reply—"I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself."
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Jane in dialogue with herself)

"I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld, or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give."
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Mr. Rochester's perception of how Jane regards herself)

The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway, and asserting a right to predominate, to overcome, **to live, rise, and reign** at last: yes, —and to speak.
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Jane summoning courage to advocate for herself)

I shall have so much more pleasure in my labour, my earnings, my frugal fare, and household economy, when I know that I am paying my way honestly, and that **what little I possess is** legitimately **all my own**;
(*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, A. Brontë, Helen's diary)

following the stream, **I made my way** into the open air
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Jane's narration)

I walked a while on the pavement
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, Jane's narration)

"On sped my rainbow, fast as light; **I flew as in a dream**"
(*Jane Eyre*, C. Brontë, the lyrics Mr. Rochester sings to Jane)

Performance Notes

- **“Flick” ornament (or “scoop”)**: simply approach the written note from below. This may be different for each individual and vary depending on context. A semi-tone or two should generally be enough distance: allow your modal and tonal intuition to guide the choice.

- Once you’ve become familiar with this gesture, be sure you’re not overemphasizing it — each flick should feel easy and transient. For example, the Alto soloist will probably take their first note from approximately D#4, whereas Soprano 1s might travel across a whole-step or even a minor third for their first flick in m.14.

- One theme of this piece is the relationship between individual and communal identities. This is embodied among the singers not only in the transformation from soloist to full choir but also in individuals within each section adapting the “flick”- style ornament #. Though gesturally the same across voices, each voice will move slightly differently through the shape of the flick. To render this “flick” (which, by my word choice, suggests something quick and not too studied), simply approach the written note from below.

- **Aleatoric section at Letter D**: First, confidently choose any note you would like to sing/convey in response to the previous material (which was characterized by its intensity). Then, slowly find an octave-displaced unison among yourselves without external direction — use your singing to communicate with each other. Then, find your way to another chord that feels like a place to rest.

- The idea behind this section is to explore the full spectrum between individual and community. The first part was inspired by a warm-up that one of my choir directors (Rebecca Wyffels, Minnesota) would use before concerts. What comes after is specific to this piece: from this place of complete allegiance to community, find the happy medium between the two extremes— a place to rest, whatever that means for you and your ensemble. In short, the first note requires you to sing; the second, to listen. It is my hope that the third truly requires both.

- **Handbell**: at Letter E, use a handbell (or any other chime/bell desired) that sounds at E4. If no handbell is available another sound/instrument may substitute, for example a piano.

- **Ending**: the final 4 bars of the piece can be approached with some freedom. This moment may not need conducting as all singers become more independent. There is no need to synchronise either as a choir or within sections.

- To realize the theme of departure, consider staging the piece with a staggered exit by the singers. This will also help realize the out-of-time feature for the ending, as each departing choir member sings to an internalized heartbeat instead of a conducted rhythm. To create a departure where one’s presence still echoes in the community, the choir can consider ultimately forming a semi-circle surrounding the audience.

- **Emotional component**: most of the melodic material of the piece has been left quite bare; my hope is that the performers bring personal pathos and feeling to their interpretations of this text.

Duration: c. 8’

I Am My Own

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9

A

p *cresc. poco a poco*

1 no net en - snares me I am no bird no

2 no net en - snares me I am I am no net

mp *p* *cresc. poco a poco*

1 I am no bird no net snares me I am no bird no net en -

A. (tutti div.)

2 I am no bird no net snares me am no bird

p *cresc. poco a poco*

1 bird en - snares me I am no net en -

T.

2 bird me bird bird

pp *cresc. poco a poco*

1 bird snares I am no bird

B.

2 bird snares me I am no bird

Pno

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16

mp *cresc.*

1 net en - snares I will not yield I will not yield I will not

S. *mp* *cresc.*

2 I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield not in the slight - est I will not

A. *mp* *cresc.*

1 - snares me I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not

2 no net en - snares I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not

T. *mp* *cresc.*

1 - snares me I will not yield not in the slight - est

2 I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not

B. *mp* *cresc.*

1 I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not

2 I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not

Pno

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B *p sub.*

1 *mf* yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield *p sub.*

S. 2 *mf* yield I will not yield_ not in the slight - est I will not yield I will not yield *p sub.*

1 *mf* yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield I will not yield *p sub.*

A. 2 *mf* yield I will not yield_ not in the slight - est *dim.* I will not yield I will not yield *mp* You must

1 *cresc.* I will not yield_ not in the slight - est *mf* I will not yield I will not yield I will not *dim.* *mp*

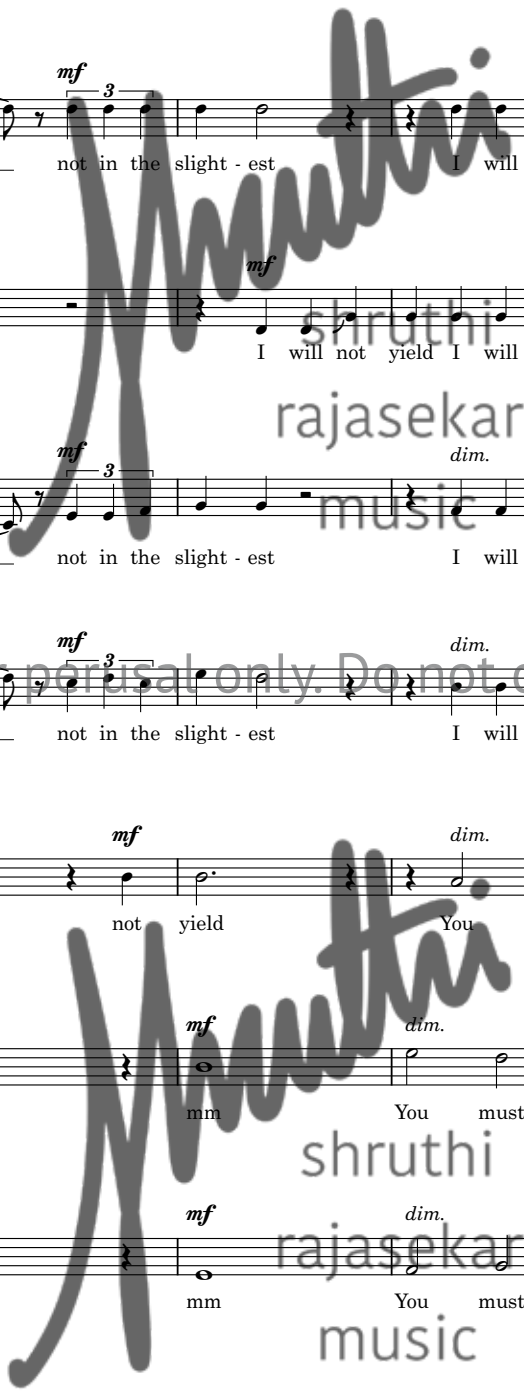
T. 2 *mf* yield I will not yield not yield *dim.* You must_ lis - ten *mp* lis - ten

B. 1 *mf* yield yield mm You must lis - - - ten *dim.* *mp*

2 *mf* yield yield mm You must lis - - - ten *dim.* *mp*

Pno *mf* *dim.* *mp*

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28

1 S. You must *mp* lis - ten *p* lis - ten to me *pp* You must lis - ten lis - ten to

2 S. You must *mp* lis - ten *p* lis - ten to me *pp* You must lis - ten lis - ten to

1 A. You must *mp* lis - ten You must *p* lis - ten lis - ten to me *pp* lis - ten lis - ten to

2 A. lis - ten You must lis - ten *pp* lis - ten lis - ten to

1 T. yield You must lis - ten You must me *pp* lis - ten to

2 T. You must lis - ten You must lis - ten You must me *pp* lis - ten

1 B. You must lis - ten You must lis - ten me *pp* lis - ten to

2 B. lis - ten You must lis - ten me *pp* lis - ten lis - ten to

Pno

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I Am My Own

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33

poco accel. *mf* *poco dim.* *mp*

1 me__ lis - ten hear me this time lis - ten lis - ten to me You You must

S.

2 me__ You must lis - ten hear me this time lis - ten lis - ten to me You You must

A.

1 me__ You must lis - ten hear me this time lis - ten hear me this time__ You must

2 me__ You must lis - ten hear me this time You must hear me this time You must

T.

1 me hear__ this time__ lis - ten lis - ten to me this time__

2 me You must hear__ this time You lis - ten hear me this time

B.

1 me hear__ hear me this time You lis - ten hear me this

2 me lis - - ten this time You lis - ten me

Pno

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Charged ♩ = 108

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C

1 *f* *mp* *f*
 lis - ten lis - ten to me _____ lis - ten lis - ten to me _____ I mean to

2 *f* *mp* *f*
 lis - ten lis - ten to me _____ lis - ten lis - ten to me _____ I mean to

1 *f* *mp* *f*
 lis - ten lis - ten to me _____ lis - ten to me _____ I mean to

2 *f* *mp* *f*
 lis - ten _____ lis - ten lis - ten to me _____ I mean to

1 *mp* *f*
 _____ lis - ten _____ lis - ten to me _____ I mean to

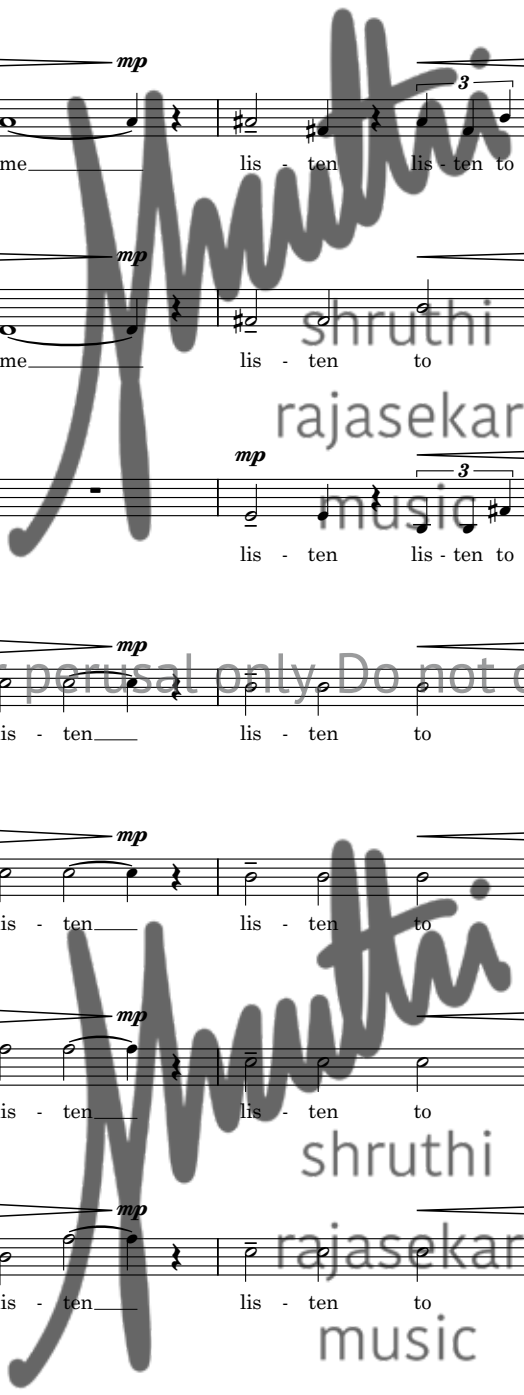
2 *mp* *f*
 _____ lis - ten _____ lis - ten to me _____ I mean to

1 *f* *mp* *f*
 lis - ten lis - ten _____ lis - ten to me _____ mean to

2 *f* *mp* *f*
 lis - ten lis - ten _____ lis - ten to me _____ mean

Pno *f* *mp* *f*
 _____ _____ _____ _____

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poco accelerando.....

43

1
S.
live___ to live as I can_____ I am my own___ Hear me:

2
live___ to live as I can_____ I am my own___ Hear me:

1
A.
live___ to live as I can_____ I am my own___ Hear me:

2
live___ to live as I can_____ I am my own___ Hear me:

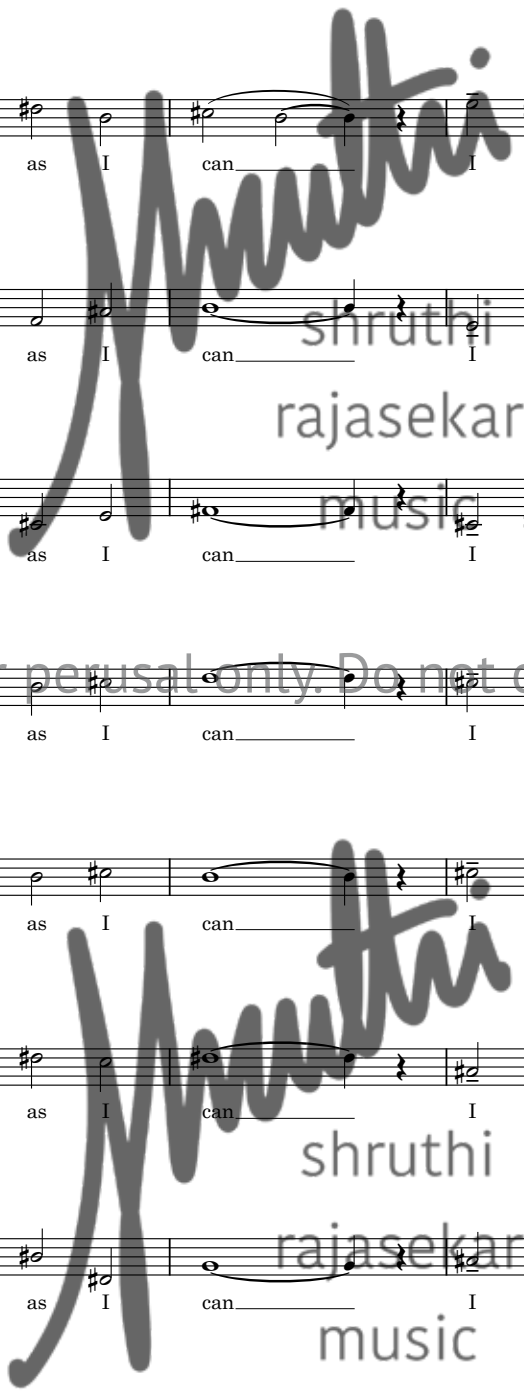
1
T.
live___ to live as I can_____ I am my own___ Hear me:

2
live___ to live as I can_____ I am my own___ Hear me:

1
B.
live___ to live as I can_____ I am my own___

2
live as I can_____ I am my own___

Pno
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$\text{♩} = 132$

ff

1
S.
I am my own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

2
I am my own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

1
A.
I am my own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

2
I am my own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

1
T.
I am my own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

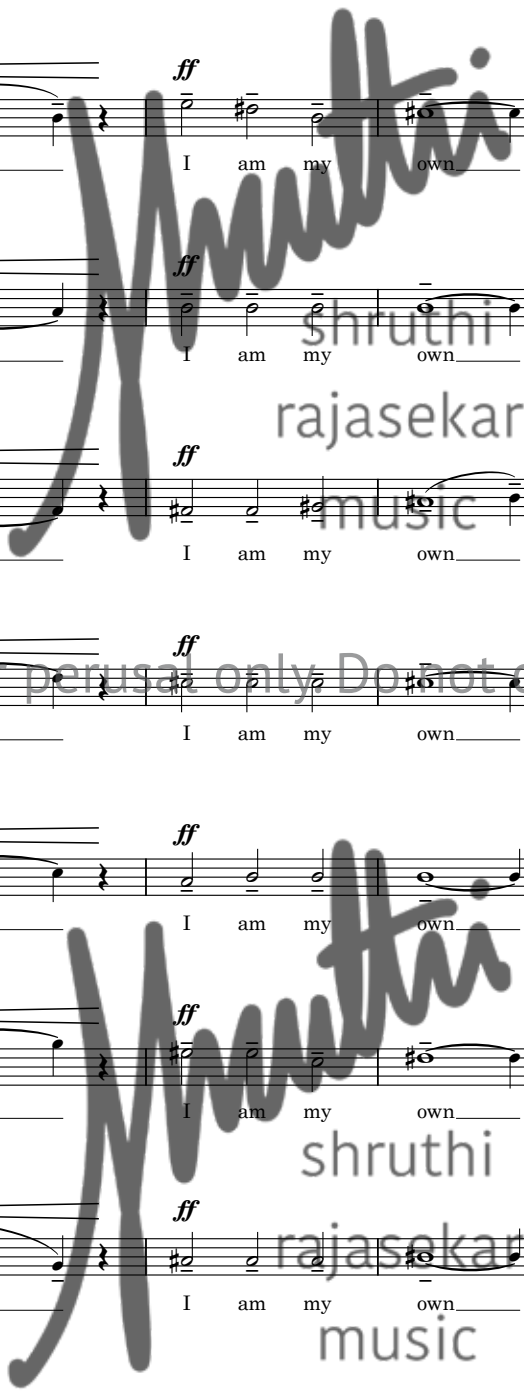
2
I am my own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

1
B.
I am my own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

2
I own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

Pno
I am my own_____ I am my own_____ I am my own

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54

D sing any pitch that feels right slowly find an octave unison move to a place that, when combined with your neighbors, feels like a lovely place to rest

1 (I)

S. sing any pitch that feels right slowly find an octave unison move to a place that, when combined with your neighbors, feels like a lovely place to rest

2 (I)

A. sing any pitch that feels right slowly find an octave unison move to a place that, when combined with your neighbors, feels like a lovely place to rest

1 (I)

A. sing any pitch that feels right slowly find an octave unison move to a place that, when combined with your neighbors, feels like a lovely place to rest

2 (I)

T. sing any pitch that feels right slowly find an octave unison move to a place that, when combined with your neighbors, feels like a lovely place to rest

1 (I)

T. sing any pitch that feels right slowly find an octave unison move to a place that, when combined with your neighbors, feels like a lovely place to rest

2 (I)

B. sing any pitch that feels right slowly find an octave unison move to a place that, when combined with your neighbors, feels like a lovely place to rest

1 (I)

B. sing any pitch that feels right slowly find an octave unison move to a place that, when combined with your neighbors, feels like a lovely place to rest

2 (I)

Pno any pitch

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shruthi rajasekar music

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E

55 After the end, what would we build? $\text{♩} = 54$

fpp bell-like

S. *mf* handbell solo (Bell is still ringing) *mf* Hum *fpp*

1. *mp* hope and free - dom

A. *mp* my own sense hope

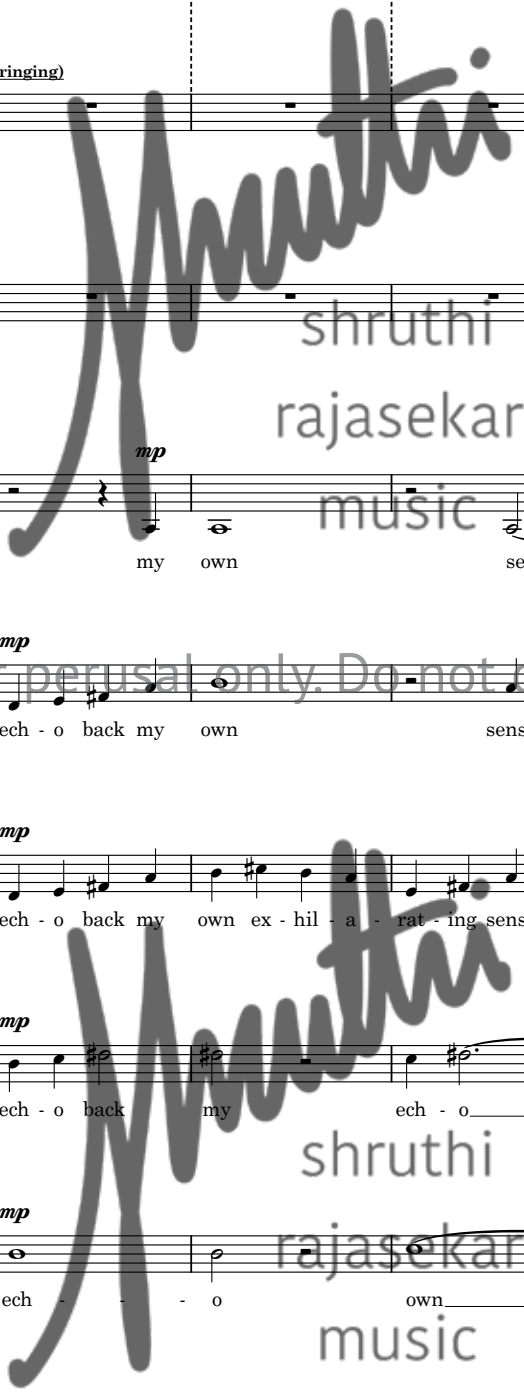
1. *mp* ech - o back my own sense of hope in - def - i - nite

T. *mp* ech - o back my own ex - hil - a - rat - ing sense of hope and free - dom

1. *mp* ech - o back my ech - o back in - def - i -

B. *mp* ech - o own in -

Pno (handbell) pedal ad lib. (+handbell)



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Voice only
fpp *mf-p*

63

S. *(Bell is still ringing - allow bell to fade naturally)*
Hum _____ My _____

1. dream of the fu - - - ture and free - dom

A. 2. dreams bright _____ my own sense of hope and

1. dreams bright an - tic - i - pa - tions of the fu - ture. ex - hil - a - rate _____

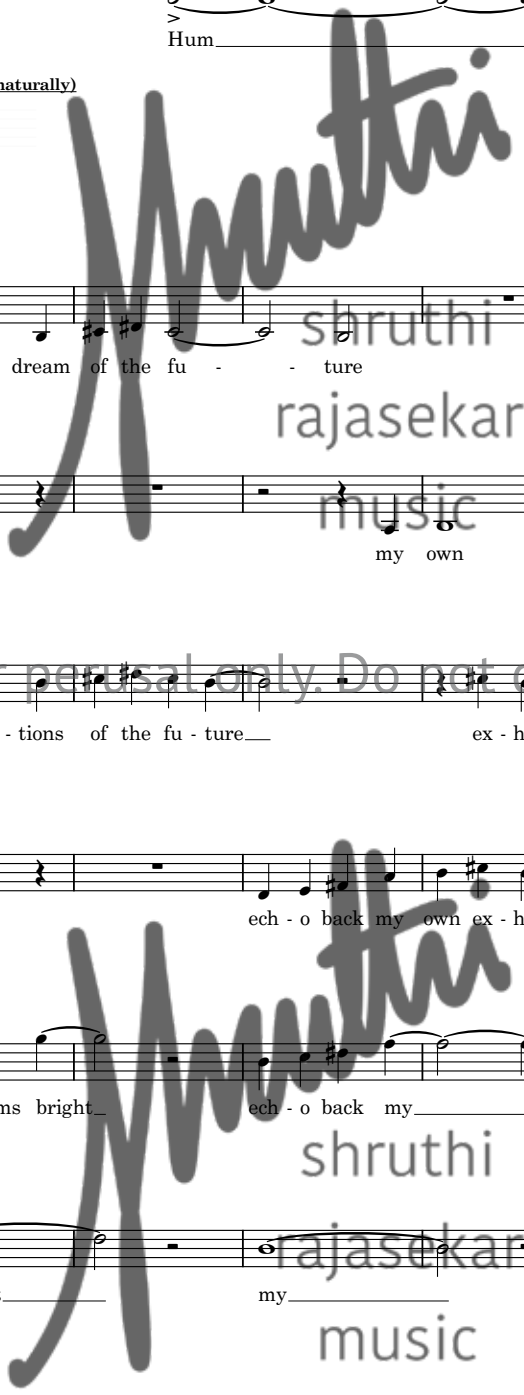
T. 2. dreams _____ ech - o back my own ex - hil - a - rat - ing sense of hope and free - dom

1. - nite dreams bright _____ ech - o back my _____ ech - o back my _____

B. 2. - fi - nite dreams bright _____ my _____ own _____

Pno

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70 *mf-p* *mf-p* *mf-p* *mf-p* *mf-p*

1 *mf-p* *mf-p* *mf-p* *mf-p* *mf-p*

S. own dreams greet me

2 *mf-p* *mf-p* *mf-p* *mf-p* *mp*

own dreams greet me dreams

1

A. of the fu - ture me

2

free - dom bright dreams own ex - hil - a - rat - ing

1

T. in - def - i - nite dreams bright an - tic - i - pa - tions of the fu - ture me greet

2

bright dreams ech - o back my own ex - hil - a - rat - ing sense of

1

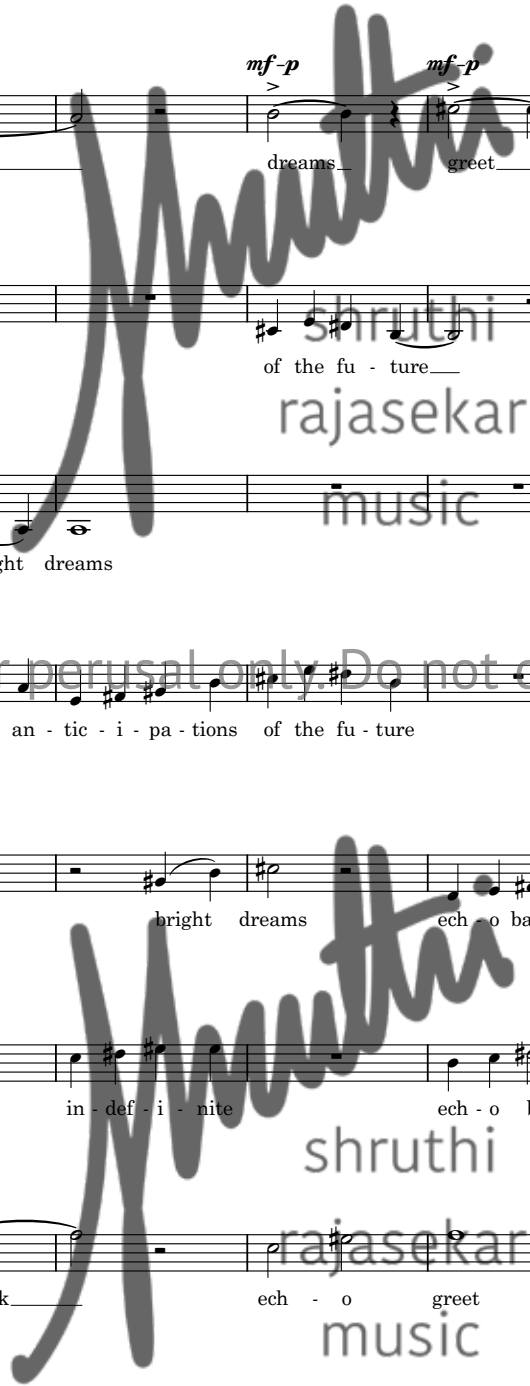
B. in - def - i - nite dreams in - def - i - nite ech - o back

2

ech - o back ech - o greet me greet

Pno

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77 *mp*

1 my own_ my own_ dreams I care_

S. 2 my own_ dreams I care_

1 greet me ech - o my own_ dreams care_ care_

A. 2 and free - dom_ back my own_ dreams care_ care_

1 greet me ech - o my own_ dreams I I

T. 2 hope and free - dom_ back my own_ dreams I I

1 me I I

B. 2 me I I

Pno

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84

S. *for_ my - self I_ have_ an in - ward_*

A. *care_ care_ care_ care_ care_ care_ am_ am_*

T. *I_ I_ I_ I_ I_ I_ I_ I_*

B. *I I I I I I I I*

Pno

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rajasekar
music

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92

S. *treas - ure_ born_ with_ me_*

A. *am_ am_ own_ own_ own_ my way_ my way_ make my_* *cresc.*

T. *I_ I_ my_ my_ am my_ make_ make_ I*

B. *I I am my own own_ own_ I_*

Pno

shruthi
rajasekar
music

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100 *cresc.*

S. to live _____ rise and_ reign _____

A. way _____ live _____ live _____ and _____ and _____ reign _____ reign _____ and _____

T. *cresc.* way to _____ to _____ rise rise _____ reign _____ rise _____ rise _____

B. *cresc.* way _____ to _____ to _____ rise rise reign reign rise

Pno

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108 *f* *dim.*

S. what I _____ pos - - sess _____ is_ all _____ my _____ own _____

1 *f* _____ and my own I _____ my my own

A. *f* _____ and my own I _____ my my own *mp*

T. *f* reign_ am_ my_ own_ *mp* am_ own_ my_ own_

B. *f* reign I am my own I am my *mp*

Pno

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116 A wonderful secret only you know *mp* *mf*

S. I walked a while on I walked a while on

1. *mp* I made my way my way my way I walked a while on *mf*

A. my way my way made my

2. *eagerly* I made my way I made my way way made my *mf*

T. own I made made my way made my

B. *eagerly* *mf*

Pno

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122 repeat several times, ad lib. becoming more independent *dim. sempre* Move to this phrase as desired repeat and *dim al niente* S1&2, A1 leave stage

S. I walked a while on As in a dream I flew

1. *dim. sempre* I walked a while on As in a dream I flew

A. *A2, T1&2, B1&2 start leaving the stage - move slowly* *dim. sempre* way made my way walked my *A2, T1&2, B1&2: Distantly heard*

2. way made my way walked my

T. *dim. sempre* way made my way walked my

B. *dim. sempre* way made my way walked my

Pno

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"[Shruthi] Rajasekar has allowed boldness to be her guiding light in the journey through her dense and evocative creativity... Rajasekar will continue to sail forward, into a cartography of her own delineation."

– The Seattle Times

Composer and vocalist Shruthi Rajasekar (she/her) is a McKnight Fellow, Jerome Hill Artist Fellow, Associate of the Royal Northern College of Music (ARNCM), winner of the Global Women in Music Award from the United Nations, and a Marshall Scholarship recipient. Her creative work highlights identity, community, and joy. Shruthi's music reflects her deep roots in the Carnatic (South Indian classical) and Western classical idioms, her diasporic South Asian background, and her belief in the importance of communal gathering and civic engagement. Globally, her compositions have been featured at the Royal Albert Hall (London, UK), the Cannes Film Festival (France), the National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai, India), Victoria Concert Hall (Singapore), and the United Nations' COP 26 (Glasgow, UK).

www.shruthirajasekar.com