

When I Become an Old Woman
SSA, piano, opt. body perc.
JH - GRL34

Sherry Blevins

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for SSA choir, piano, opt. body percussion, staging suggestions



COMPOSE
LIKE A GIRL

Illustration: KT Thompson

jh music

Text:

When I become an old woman,
When I become an old woman,
I'll be magnetic.
It's genetic.
When I become an old woman,
Oh, an old woman,
I'll be vivacious,
Extra loquacious.

I'll lose my filter,
And say exactly what I'm thinking.
I'll learn to tango.
I will dance like nobody's watching.
(Twirl like no one's watching.)
I'll never worry when people pass judgment.
Poor saps don't know what they're missing!

I'll give up plucking,
And embrace my inner Yeti/Sasquatch.
I will wear stretchy pants,
And never bother with zippers or button flies.
(Who has time for buttons?)
I'll toss my bras/heels away!
Say goodbye to my underwire prison/
this medieval torture!

When I become an old woman
My purse could hold the kitchen sink, (the whole sink!)
It will be hot pink. (My purse will be hot pink!)
When I become an old woman,
Oh, an old woman,
I will be brassy.
And oh, so sassy, (oh, so very sassy!)

When I become an old woman
I will dance the tango!
- Sherry Blevins

From the Composer:

"When I Become an Old Woman" has had a very long journey becoming what it is today. In 2017, my dear mentor, friend, and amazing operatic soprano, Rebecca Cook-Carter, asked me to compose a song cycle for her based on the famous poem by English poet, Jenny Joseph called "Warning," a.k.a., "When I Am an Old Woman (I Shall Wear Purple)." At this time, I had only composed one other piece as I had just discovered my passion for composing, but I was excited at the prospect and told her I would have to get Jenny Joseph's permission to set the text. So, I wrote to Ms. Joseph's literary agency. After some time, they said that she wanted to hear the music before she agreed. So, I got to work and soon after, Rebecca (Becky) and my friend and extraordinary pianist, Mark Burlison, made a recording to send to her.

Then we waited... and waited... and waited some more! Finally, I reached out to Ms. Joseph's agency to find out if we could proceed. (Becky wanted to perform the work for the college where she was Opera Director.) Sadly, her agency answered that Ms. Joseph had passed away and they were sorry, but permission would not be granted as the rights were tied up in her estate. Saddened at her passing and the thought that I wouldn't be allowed to continue spreading her delightful poetry through music, I decided not to give up. At least twice a year after that, I would email and ask again. I got "no" after "no" until finally, in 2023, I got a yes!!! By this time, Becky was no longer at the college, so we asked for permission to have her perform the song cycle in a Steinway Gallery Concert. They said "yes" to that too!!! I was then accepted into a composing institute called Opera Lucca in Lucca, Italy in the summer of 2023, so I asked if we could premiere the music there as well and they said "yes" again!!!

After having the entire song cycle called "Warning" performed, first in Italy, and then in a Steinway concert, I thought that perhaps this music should be in the hands of adult treble choirs. So, I reached out to one of the best conductors of adult treble choirs that I know, Iris Levine of VOX Femina Los Angeles, and asked her if she thought there would be any interest in having the song cycle scored for SSA chorus. She was kind enough to spend some time with the music; then she wrote back and asked if I would score the first movement for her choir. I was so elated! I contacted Ms. Joseph's agency one last time for permission and received a resounding "Thank you, but no."

I spent one full day with a broken heart, and the next day, my composing teacher, Raphael Fusco and my wife, Ruth both reminded me that I am a lyricist and that I should create my OWN lyrics. So, I did! And the result is the saucy and fun-filled piece you see before you that is inspired by the late English poet, Jenny Joseph and dedicated to Becky.
- Sherry Blevins

Performance Notes:

You will notice that there is optional body percussion for this piece. If you choose to perform these movements, clap over your shoulder, and use the ball of your foot to “dig” instead of stomp. If your choir typically holds their music, you may still be able to perform these movements if every other member holds music and shares with their neighbor. Be sure the dynamics of the body percussion align with the music. This piece also includes staging or acting suggestions to add to the playful and humorous quality of the piece. Feel free to modify these or add your own.

Lastly, there is a line that says, “I’ll give up plucking and embrace my inner Yeti.” A Yeti is an abominable snowman said to live in the Himalayas. An alternate lyric includes “Sasquatch” instead of “Yeti.” Sasquatch is a large, hairy, humanlike creature said to live in the northwestern United States and western Canada. I included both options so that you can choose the one that you and your audience know best as a big furry creature. If neither, you may substitute “Big Foot” as a final option.

There is also a line that says, “I’ll toss my bras away! Say goodbye to my underwire prison!” If preferred, you may sing “I’ll toss my heels away! Say goodbye to this medieval torture!” I find the first funnier, but if your choir is made of teenagers, they may not yet know what a horrible prison the underwire bra is! Pro tip: It is a good idea to rehearse this in front of a good-humored practice audience so that the choir can learn to keep their focus amidst hearty laughter. Choir, keep your diction super clean. The piece is only funny if the audience can understand the lyrics. But most of all, have fun being saucy, a little naughty, and all the good things we plan to be when one day... we too are old!

- Sherry Blevins



Sherry Blevins is a sought-after artist and award-winning composer, lyricist, music educator, and Founder/Director of ICCI: The International Choral Composer’s Institute. Since 2018, she has had more than 30 works published by Jocelyn Hagen Music, Fred Bock Publishing, Colla Voce, Alfred, Gentry, BriLee, and Hinshaw Music where she was awarded her own series. She has composed for singers and choirs around the globe including being selected as Composer-in-Residence for National Concerts, premiering her “Awaken” at Carnegie Hall in 2024. She was the first composer to win the Bluebonnet Composition Initiative of SoCo Women’s Chorus and was winner of the Claremont Chorale’s Composition Contest. She was also selected to attend Opera Lucca’s Composer’s Institute in Lucca, Italy where she premiered two works, and was twice selected to attend the CORO Composer’s Institute in Iowa. She has been commissioned by VOX Femina Los Angeles, Western Alaska’s Region 1 Festival, West Vancouver Schools’ Honour Choirs, Indiana and Oklahoma All-State High School Mixed Choruses, renowned soprano, Rebecca Cook-Carter, West Virginia ACDA Mixed Honor Choir, Tennessee All-State Treble choir, Durham Elementary All-County Chorus, The Chattanooga Boys Choir, the Piedmont Invitational Choral Festival, South Carolina Music Educators National Conference, Young Voices of the Carolinas, The Cincinnati Boychoir, Santa Monica College, Virginia Commonwealth University, and many others.

According to Hinshaw Music, “Sherry Blevins, a luminary in the world of choral composition and education, orchestrates harmonies that resonate with the soul. Her musical expertise is surpassed only by her dedication to nurturing the next generation of voices, making her a revered figure in both composition and education.”

Commissioned by VOX Femina Los Angeles
Dr. Iris S. Levine, Founding Artistic Director
Premiere performance, June 2, 2024
Zipper Concert Hall, Colburn School of Music, Los Angeles, CA

For Rebecca Cook-Carter, my teacher, mentor, and friend

When I Become an Old Woman

SSA choir and piano with optional body percussion and staging suggestions

Sherry Blevins

Tango/Sexy ♩ = ca. 99

Handclap

Over left shoulder

Over right shoulder

Over left shoulder

f

Dig Ball of Foot (optional)

R L

Soprano 1

Soprano 2

Alto

Piano

f

ped. simile



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6

H.C.

D.F.

R

L L

Over right shoulder

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S1

S2

A

f When I be-come an

f When I be-come an

f When I be-come an

mf

f

3 3 3 3

11

S1

S2

A

old wo-man, when I be-come an old wo-man, I'll be mag - ne - tic.

old wo-man, when I be-come an old wo-man, I'll be mag - ne - tic.

old wo-man, when I be-come an old wo-man, I'll be mag - ne - tic.

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2

16

Shoulders up/down *Flip hair gesture*

S1 (L R L) It's ge - ne - tic. (L) When I be - come an old _____ wo - man, an

S2 (L R L) It's ge - ne - tic. (L) When I be - come an old _____ wo - man, an

A (L R L) It's ge - ne - tic. (L) When I be - come an old _____ wo - man, an

Jocelyn Chagnon

21

S1 old _____ wom - an, So vi - va - cious! lo - *mp*

S2 old _____ wom - an, So vi - va - cious! lo - *mp*

A old _____ wom - an, I'll be vi - va - cious. Ex - tra lo - qua - cious.

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3

poco rit. *a little slower* ♩ = ca. 94

26

S1 *mf* *assertively* *f* *mf*
 qua-cious. I'll lose my fil - ter, and say ex - act-ly what I'm think-ing. I'll learn to

S2 *mf* *assertively* *f* *mf*
 qua-cious. I'll lose my fil - ter, and say ex - act-ly what I'm think-ing. I'll learn to

A *mf* *assertively* *f* *mf*
 and say ex - act-ly what I'm think-ing. I'll learn to

poco rit. *a little slower* ♩ = ca. 94

31

S1 *f* *mf*
 tan - go, I will dance_ like no - bo-dy's watch - ing. I'll ne-ver

S2 *f*
 tan - go, Twirl_ like no-one's watch - ing.

A *f*
 tan - go, Twirl_ like no-one's watch - ing.

35

S1
 wor-ry _____ when peo-ple pass judg-ment, Poor saps don't know what they're

S2
 Ne-ver wor-ry when peo-ple pass judg-ment, when peo-ple pass judg-ment, Poor saps don't know what they're

A
 When peo-ple pass judg-ment, Poor saps don't know what they're

mf

joceelyn hagen

molto rit. ----- *Tempo II* (♩ = ca. 94)

S1
f mis - sing! *mp* I'll give up pluck-ing, and em - brace my in - ner
 (*pantomime plucking hair*)

S2
f mis - sing! *mp* Pluck-ing, pluck-ing. em - brace my in - ner
 (*pantomime plucking hair*)

A
f mis - sing! *mp* Pluck-ing, pluck-ing. em - brace my in - ner

f *mp*

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43

S1 *mf* Ye - ti. I will wear stretch - y pants and ne - ver bo - ther with zip - pers or
Sas - quatch.

S2 *mf* Ye - ti, my in - ner Ye - ti. Stretch - y pants, Oh,
Sas - quatch, my in - ner Sas - quatch.

A *mf* Ye - ti, my in - ner Ye - ti. Stretch - y pants, Oh,
Sas - quatch, my in - ner Sas - quatch.

Piano accompaniment for measures 43-46. Includes dynamic markings *mf* and *mp*, and articulation like *port.* and *acc.*

47

S1 *mf* but - ton flies. I'll toss my bras a - way! Say good - bye to my un - der - wire pri - son! —
mf I'll toss my heels a - way! Say good - bye to this me - die - val tor - ture. —
ff

S2 *mf* Who has time for but - tons? I'll toss my bras a - way! Say good - bye to my un - der - wire pri - son! —
mf I'll toss my heels a - way Say good - bye to this me - die - val tor - ture! —
ff

A *mf* Who has time for but - tons? I'll toss my bras a - way! Say good - bye to my un - der - wire pri - son! —
mf I'll toss my heels a - way! Say good - bye to this me - die - val tor - ture! —
ff

Piano accompaniment for measures 47-50. Includes dynamic markings *mf* and *f*, and articulation like *acc.* and *rit.*

52

A tempo ♩ = 98

*Opt. 1. *Angrily grab left bra strap!*

*Opt. 2. *Every other person, lean on neighbor for support, and lift left foot as if in pain!*

D.F.

S1 *angrily ff* *ff* *ff*
 *L My un-der-wire pri-son! — When I be-come an
 This me-die-val tor-ture! —

S2 *angrily ff* *ff* *ff*
 *L My un-der-wire pri-son! — When
 This me-die-val tor-ture! —

A *angrily ff* *ff* *ff*
 *L My un-der-wire pri-son! —
 This me-die-val tor-ture! —

A tempo ♩ = 98

fff *f* *fff*

57

S1 *port.*
 old _____ wo-man; when I be-come an old _____ wo-man,

S2 *port.*
 I be-come an old _____ wo-man, old _____ wo-man,

A *ff* *port.* *ff*
 When I be-come an old _____ wo-man, old _____ wo-man, My purse could

ff

7

61

S1 *ff* 

The whole sink! My purse will be hot pink! When I be-come an

S2 *ff* 

The whole sink! My purse will be hot pink!

A 

hold the kit-chen sink. It will be hot pink.



65

S1 

old wo-man; oh, an old wo-man I will be bras-sy,

S2 

An old wo-man; oh, an old wo-man bras-sy,

A 

Old wo-man; oh, an old wo-man



poco rit. *a little slower* ♩ = ca. 70

70

S1 — And oh, so sas-sy. When I be-come an old wo-man,

S2 Oh, so ve-ry sas-sy. old wo-man,

A bras - sy, Oh, so ve-ry sas-sy. old wo-man,

mp *p* *mp* *p*

poco rit. *a little slower* ♩ = ca. 70

mp *p*

75

H.C. *Tempo I* (♩ = ca. 99)

Over left shoulder

S1 *f* *ff* *port.* // *f*
I will dance the tan-go! La, dee, da, dee, la, dee, da,

S2 *f* *ff* *port.* // *f*
I will dance the tan-go! La, dee, da, dee, la, dee, da,

A *f* *ff* *port.* // *f*
I will dance the tan-go! La, da, dee,

Tempo I (♩ = ca. 99)

sub. f *f*

8vb 9

H.C. 

D.F. 

S1 
La, dee, da, dee, la, dee, La, dee, da, dee, la, _ dee, da _ dee, la, _ dee, da, _ dee, da.

S2 
La, dee, da, dee, la, dee, La, dee, da, dee, la, _ dee, da, _ dee, la, _ dee, da, _ dee, da.

A 
da, _ dee, la, dee, La, dee, da, dee, la, _ dee, da, _ dee, la, _ dee, da, _ dee, da.



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Joceelyn Dahagen

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