

Of Dance and Struggle:

A Musical Tribute to the Life of Nelson Mandela

A Multi-Movement Work for
Choir

(a capella and accompanied)

Solo Piano

African Drums

With
Narration and Dance

By

Karen Walwyn

“Artists reach areas far beyond the reach of politicians. Art, especially entertainment and music, is understood by everybody, and it lifts the spirits and the morale of those who hear it.”

Nelson Mandela

Music has been a major thread in the fabric of the people of South Africa in a tremendous way that few other countries have experienced. Music in South Africa serves a vital ceremonial role in birth, circumcision, celebrations, weddings, funerals, burials, nursing, campaigns, cultural meetings, and many other life-changing events.

In South Africa, music was also significant to the eventual fall of the Apartheid regime. Music played a pivotal role in protests and campaigns against the apartheid regime. Thousands of people marched and sang protest songs in the streets regularly. While some of the marches were extemporaneous and non-threatening

regularly. While some of the marches were extemporaneous and non-unrehearsed, others were purposely executed with an electrifying force to invoke fear within government officials and supporters of the apartheid regime. During some of the more demonstrative protests, marches included a dance step called the *Toyi Toyi*; this dance step figuratively resembled a battle with weapons, while shouting in great force "sifuna _____", meaning "I want.....". They cried out in great fervor their desire for freedom, the abolishment of apartheid, and the release of Nelson Mandela. In response to these marches and demonstrations, the Casspir, a four-wheeled armored vehicle, dogs, and tear gas were used to dismantle the marches, usually resulting in bloodshed, often in huge amounts. The singing did not stop once arrested as many prisoners sang nightly, encouraging themselves, building on the strength of each other as they continued exercising their resolve for racial equality behind bars.

Birth, the opening movement, is for piano solo and employs twentieth-century compositional techniques found in chance music. John Cage describes chance music in a comment in a 1957 lecture titled *Experimental Music* as "a purposeless play" which is "an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living". This movement is suggestive of the natural laws of nature bringing forth a new human to life, with an element of wonder in what this life would represent in the near future.

Madiba, the first movement for a capella choir, celebrates the birth of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and of the Xhosa culture in which he was born, in 1918. Madiba is the name of the clan of which Mr. Mandela is a member and is referred to endearingly by his fellow countrymen. Rolihlahla is his birth name given to him by his father. It means, as mentioned by Mr. Mandela, "pulling the branch of a tree", or in other words, a "trouble maker". The city of his birth was Mvezo and as a little boy, soon moved with his mother to Qunu, a town near Umtata in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The Xhosa people taught Mandela the skills that would shape his character and philosophy. The Xhosa tribe is a part of the Nguni people; a proud people... one that believes in the importance of the law, education and courtesy.

The gently accented pedal point sung by the tenor and bass sections is suggestive of a mother rocking her new born infant. The repetition of Mandela's name throughout the work is characteristic of the native style of repetition, with each reiteration, an intensity of emotion.

Circumcision is accompanied by African drum and Dance. "Nature's Playground, Pilgrimage, & Manhood". The subject matter, though obvious, is for the native South African male and in many instances, the female as well, an extremely important step to maturity. Without this ritual, one is not looked upon as being a mature man or woman. The songs depict the procedure and experiences of this ritual for young men. They also reveals that the candidates eventually learn the Apartheid regime will severely interrupt the ideals and goals of the young men. Circumcision begins with the boys in isolation for several weeks, often in the mountains. During the process of healing, they smear white clay on their bodies and observe numerous taboos. The elders teach the boys by oral tradition. The music is loosely based on melodies of native circumcision songs of South Africa. The use of open fifths is heard often in native songs, and is employed generously throughout this movement. Polyphonic singing in native songs has been common and is informally employed in some of the sections of this movement.

We Are One for unaccompanied choir with narration speaks of a typical worrisome day, one of fear and caution, for a black South African living under the rule of apartheid. It also speaks of the terrible isolation, torture, and death in prison of

political prisoners that fought for freedom, civil rights, and the abolishment of apartheid. It references numerous significant crusaders. *We Are One* includes the well documented last words of Mandela's speech in his defense at the Rivonia Trials in 1963 to the indictment of sabotage which would carry the possibility of a death sentence: "It alleged that the defendants had acted in concert and conspired with some seventy other persons and several organizations, including the African National Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa. With these other individuals and organizations, the defendants had "incited, instated, commanded, aided advised, encouraged or procured other persons" to commit acts of sabotage, preparatory to and in facilitation of, armed invasion and guerilla warfare. It alleged more than 235 acts of sabotage." (Kenneth S. Broun, *Saving Nelson Mandela*, p. 42).

Soweto 76 is for solo piano with photographs depicting the most tragic event during the rule of Apartheid, on June 16, 1976, ending in nearly one thousand deaths though most news reports at the time may have admitted anywhere from only two to about one hundred deaths. Children carefully planned to peacefully protest against the teachings in the language of the oppressor and to the subjects taught that would educate blacks only for menial jobs positions such as miners, gardeners and housecleaners. The conflict of the African native and the Afrikaans police and military is heard inside of the first section of *Soweto 76*. The employment of the Afrikaans national anthem, "Die Stem van Suid Afrika" is laid above the setting of the march like feel emanating from the bass and above the middle voice which is replicating the rhythms and melody of a typically angular highly-spirited protest song. Later in the work in the slower section, three freedom songs are heard in an informal polyphonic style. One of the protest songs, which is one of the most popular songs sung during Apartheid, *Zenzeni na*, will be heard by the choir in the following movement. These protest songs are heard more engagingly in the development section in the violent ambush scene.

The music employs hyper and multi-meters depicting the conversations, rallying between the protestors and the police presence. The asymmetric rhythms represent the children marching arm in arm in groups of five, which was done for safety reasons. The free rhythms and octave displacements with clusters represent the ambushes on the children by the police. The polyrhythms, and additive rhythms infiltrate the work depicting the planning and organizational processes within different groups of children as the march continues throughout the day.

Zenzeni na, sung a capella is, as mentioned earlier, one of the most popular songs sung during Apartheid. Ms. Bongie Mkabela, one of the surviving children in the Soweto Riot and now, the director of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund in Johannesburg, states in an interview on NPR that this song was most touching because it asks, "What did we do? Is it because of the color of skin?"

Dance for Freedom is a set of three protest songs. These songs were introduced to me by the Abancedisi Choir from Grahamstown Township, South Africa. The added vocal rhythms, talking and whistling reflect the typical environment of the natives singing in a village in free style. The harmonies employed reflect influences by the performances of the Abancedisi Choir. *Oliver Tambo*, who was a central figure in the African National Congress and an Anti- Apartheid politician, is asked in this song, to speak on behalf of the natives, to President De Klerk to release Nelson Mandela from prison. *Ekuseni* speaks of a secret plan to break Mandela out of prison. And, finally, *Mandela lo* celebrates the presidencies of Mandela, Ngu Zuma, and Obama; all sung in Xhosa, the second most common home language. There are approximately 8 million people in South Africa that are Xhosa people, the speakers of Bantu languages. There are at least 250 Bantu languages though the number could be as high as 535; all of which are spoken in Central, East, and Southern Africa.

Inauguration includes two works, *It Is Three o' Clock*, and *Nikosi sikeleli' iAfrica for Our President*. *It Is Three o' Clock*, sung a capella, depicts the journey and arrival of Mr. Mandela as he was just released from prison on his way to Cape Town to make his initial speech to his people of his country; it is reflected in the male voices. The excitement of the crowd which is reflected in the female voices was tremendous and as each hour passed beyond the appointed time of three o' clock, the crowd became anxious but did find ways to remain rather peaceful as many reflected on the history of their times. The realization that soon all of the atrocities committed during the reign of Apartheid would soon come to an end was almost too unbearable for which to wait.

Nikosi sikeleli' iAfrica for Our President is accompanied by drums and includes a narration of an excerpt of the inaugural speech of President Mandela. *Nikosi sikeleli' iAfrica* is, as said by Verne Harris, Head of the Memory Program at the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Madiba's favorite spiritual of all time. It has become the first of several parts of the South African National Anthem of today. With the insertion of excerpts of *We Shall Over Come*, *Everybody Sing Freedom*, and *Free At Last*, three of many well-known American Negro Spirituals, which are heard near the end, the work culminates in a joyous celebratory finale.

Karen Walwyn