

## “How Can I Keep from Singing?” Song Comparison

For my song comparison, I chose a version of “How Can I Keep from Singing?” arranged by Ronald Staheli, and performed by the NUS Choir, at the Esplanade Concert Hall. Firstly, there are some stand-out musical differences between Staheli’s arrangement of the song, and the Robinson version that we are going to perform. The Staheli arrangement has a solo, a portion for a small group female solo that layers in after the initial solo, and a portion for a small group male solo. The arrangement comes back frequently to the words “my life flows on, in endless song,” as if it were almost a refrain, while the Robinson version does not highlight these lyrics as much, and in fact, uses “goes” rather than “flows.” Also, in the Staheli arrangement, there is a huge crescendo into the key change where the choir is singing the word “singing,” where in the Robinson score, it is just “oo” into the key change. Finally, the Staheli version features more verses and therefore more lyrics than the Robinson version does. I could not make out the words exactly and the score is not available for public viewing online, however, other versions I've found have a lot more religious text, so there is a possibility that that's what this version contains. Upon finding a choir with better diction’s performance of the same arrangement, however, it seems that the text does not have a largely religious focus.

The differences in the arrangement lead to a different performance of the piece, and a different mood that it portrays. The layering of the voices into the piece portrays a feeling of unity; the song begins with a solo voice that is soon joined by a few more voices, and then joined by a large chorus. This highlights the feeling of unity as one of the core emotions that singing can create. The emphasis on the words “my life flows on” sort of created an expression that emulated the text; it was flowier and lighter, which created more of a contrast between the verses, which were

louder, and more intense. The impact of singing the word “singing” into the key change was very strong; it highlighted, once again, the importance that singing has to the meaning of the text, and created an intense climax of the song that opened up to a more powerful but angelic sounding verse. Finally, I think that the variation and volume of text did not have a huge effect on the overall tone the song struck, however, if the words were in fact religiously affiliated, that obviously creates a more religious and spiritual mood.

I think that it is difficult to say which version better communicated the text. The diction or video quality was sort of poor in the videos I found of choirs singing the Staheli arrangement, however, their constant return to the words “my life flows on” and “singing” creates a very centralized message focusing on unity, and the importance of singing. The Robinson version I think also does a very nice job of communicating similar focuses, with the constant repetition of “how can I keep from singing?” and the refrain “no storm can shake...” The only place I really think that the Staheli version beats the Robinson version as far as communicating these themes is when entering the refrain; the power of singing “singing” is much greater than that of singing an “oo.” Both songs seem to convey a similar message, one less focused on religion than other versions, but I think that the Robinson version communicates an element of inner peace more effectively with the frequent repetition of the refrain. This theme and the mood it can create resonates with me personally more than the broader ideas of unity in the Staheli version do, so in my opinion, the Robinson version more effectively communicates the message of the text.

In our version, I think it is crucial that we highlight the refrain (“no storm can shake...”); the diction must be extremely clear, the dynamics must be varied, and this portion must be brought out. In the Staheli version, it seems as though he intentionally brought out the theme of singing,

so that's how the choir performed it. In Robinson's version, it seems as though he is trying to bring out those elements of inner peace in the text of the song, and as a choir, I believe this piece will be most successful if we zero in on what Robinson focuses on. The key change is likely the best opportunity to highlight this refrain, so I think we must take dynamic contrast and facial expression into account in order to highlight that section the most. I think the expression we use should reflect feeling at peace when times are tough, and the importance of love to peace, through a deliberate delivery and variation in sections.

Video I listened to primarily: [https://youtu.be/\\_WglgZT7SFs](https://youtu.be/_WglgZT7SFs)