Voices from the Freedom March

Note to the performers

These spirituals represent the original soul music. For best results, sing as soulfully and emotionally as possible. Sing your heart out.

On a technical level, be aware that this score conveys information such as pitch and rhythm, but it does not convey *style*. You’ll have to supply that yourself. Again: think soul music. In many places, for example, it’s appropriate to “scoop” the note (starting below the written pitch and rising up to it). It would be way too laborious to write every single one out. But if you know soul music, you’ll do it naturally.

I encourage you to listen to the Folkways recording, *Freedom Songs: Selma, Alabama*. This was my primary source material for this arrangement, and will give you a sense of style as well as a sense of history. If your soul music education requires further study, you have an ample menu from which to choose: Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, and Stevie Wonder are a few of my favorites, but you can go all the way back to Delta blues musicians like Skip James or Robert Johnson, jazz singers like Etta James or Nat “King” Cole, or just look around right now at singers like Beyoncé or John Legend. The Tree of Soul has deep roots and many branches.

All six of the songs from *Voices from the Freedom March* became anthems of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, and have continued to serve as a soundtrack for protest marches through the present day—often in medley form, similar to this arrangement. Their endurance and iconic strength is simply amazing, as if they were carved in stone, and yet they endure because they are able to live, grow, and evolve to serve each new generation.

These songs, as with most spirituals and protest songs, have many interchangeable verses, and new verses are usually created to fit the situation.

For example, on *Freedom Songs* you will hear “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me ‘round” sung as “Ain’t gonna let no policeman turn me ‘round,” “Ain’t gonna let no horses turn me ‘round,” and “Ain’t gonna let no jailhouse turn me ‘round”.

In “We Shall Not Be Moved,” they sing: “We’re fighting for our rights/And we shall not be moved” and “We shall all be free/And we shall not be moved.”

The words I have chosen for this arrangement are by no means set in stone. Why not choose different verses, or even create new words, to fit the challenges of your community? You are encouraged to do so if the spirit moves you. Whatever your struggle, whatever your dream, these songs are made to bring you together in the spirit of hope and determination.

Another technical note: though I have written the soloist in the female range, and as one part, the soloist could also be a male voice (transposed down an octave) and different soloists could be used in different sections.

—Mike Roberts, Berkeley, CA, December 5, 2017