ELLA'S SONG

For SATB a cappella* Duration: ca. 3:40

Words and Music by BERNICE JOHNSON REAGON



RESPONSE



^{*} Cued notes are provided as a harmony part. ELLA'S SONG – SATB







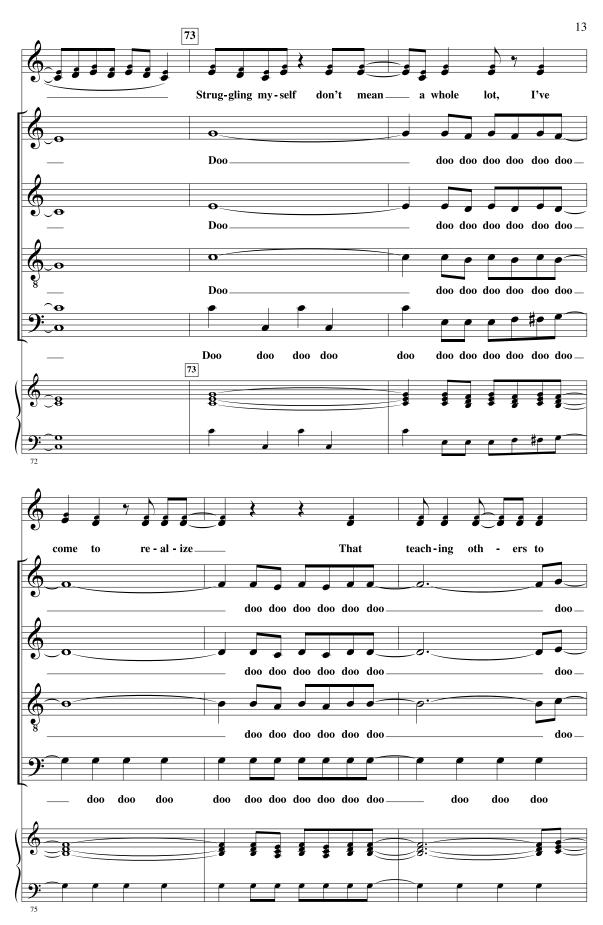




















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PERFORMANCE NOTES BY BERNICE JOHNSON REAGON

"Ella's Song" is composed in a call and response pattern. In a small ensemble, the opening line (the call) is sung by one voice, and there needs to be one voice for each line in the response section of the composition. With a choral ensemble, the 'call' is done by a group of singers (alto or/and tenor range) rather than as a solo or lead line.

Call – The call establishes the key and sets the mood and energy of the song for the rest of the singers. In my compositions, the melody always sits in the middle of the chord in what is usually a 5 part choral arrangement.

Response – The response answers the call. In "Ella's Song," part assignments should be made so that the call and response are balanced in terms of vocal power.

Attack – The first pitch of a song (or phrase) is not precisely attacked as in western classical choral singing; the opening sound is slightly scooped and slid into. There is no time allocated for this delicate effect — it is usually not noticed by those listening, but it softens beginnings and endings.

Endings – Many phrases are ended with two or three notes as tailings; this also occurs (less frequently) in the middle of a phrase. When these do occur, they should be executed in a run with a softly blurred flourish instead of an even reading of the time allowed each note. The best guide is listening to recordings and singers.

Dynamics – I have not included dynamics in the score; each verse has a quality and an inner emotion embedded in the text and the condition that is being expressed. Without being excessive, the director is invited to open up the text of the verses and the choral refrains to bring vitality and varying energy to the performance of the song.

Range – Whenever virtuosic high soprano runs appear, they may be simplified if care is taken to maintain the integrity of the individual line. All lines should be done in African American voice. Especially, high lines should not be sounded within what is often referred as the "mask." "Bassing" is an action — moving as a floor or pushing against the rest of the chord. The low harmony bass lines are very important to the sound style of the music. Performers may substitute the higher octave or "point at" a low note with an air tone.

Phrasing Flexibility — If this is performed by a small ensemble with one singer for each part, the lead may take liberties (improvise) with phrasing and melody provided that the pace of the composition is maintained. If this is sung by a choral ensemble, the lead line should be sung by a section of the ensemble — (1st altos, 1st tenors, etc.) in which case, phrasing should be performed as indicated in the score.

Harmony – All harmony lines must carry the emotional responsibility of the song; do not leave this area to the melody.