

commissioned by the Warwick Valley Chorale (Warwick, NY) in celebration of their 75th season: 1940-2015; Stanley Curtis, Director

# Down to the River to Pray

a song of celebration for SATB Chorus and Piano

Traditional American Gospel Song  
G. Walker, alt.

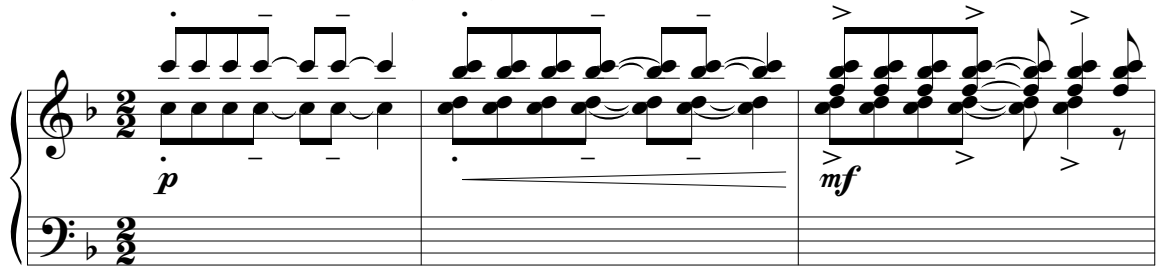
Gwyneth Walker

At a jubilant yet stately walking tempo  $\text{♩} = 60$

swing eighths ( $\text{♩} = \text{♩}^{\text{3}}$ )

with anticipation and growing excitement

Piano



The piano introduction is written in 2/2 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of three measures. The first measure starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a series of eighth notes in the right hand, with a bass line of quarter notes. The second measure continues the eighth-note pattern in the right hand. The third measure features a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and includes accents (>) over the eighth notes in the right hand. The instruction "with pedal" is written below the bass line.

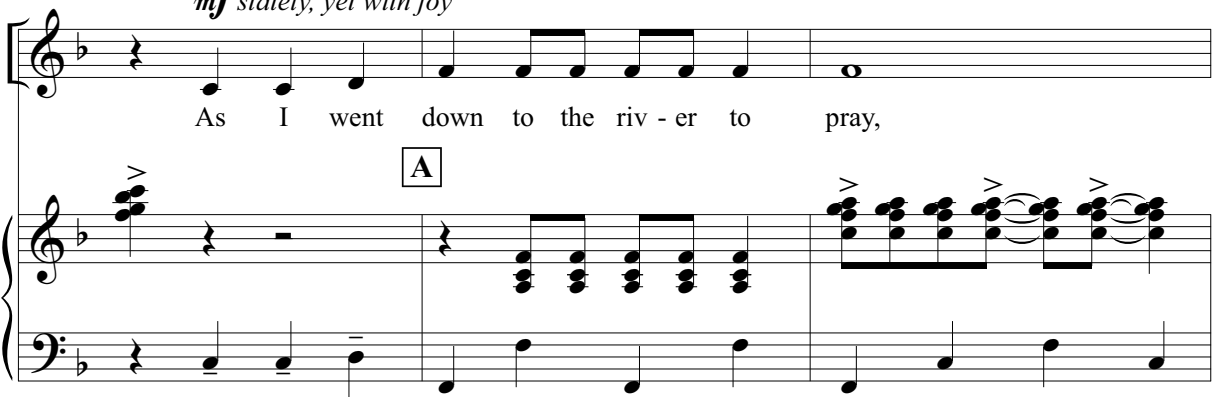
*p* *mf*

with pedal

4

All singers **A**  
*mf* stately, yet with joy

Unis. Cho.



As I went down to the riv - er to pray,

The vocal line for Unis. and Cho. begins at measure 4. The melody is in the treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are "As I went down to the riv - er to pray,". The piano accompaniment features chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A first ending bracket labeled "A" spans the final two measures of this section.

7

Unis. Cho.



stud - y - ing a - bout the good old way. And who shall wear the

The vocal line continues at measure 7. The lyrics are "stud - y - ing a - bout the good old way. And who shall wear the". The piano accompaniment continues with chords and a bass line.

10

Unis.  
Cho.

star - ry crown? \_\_\_\_\_ Good Lord, show me the

13

Unis.  
Cho.

way. \_\_\_\_\_

16

**B**

*(mf)* gently, but enthusiastically

S

O, my sis - ters, let's go down, — let's go down,

*(mf)* gently, but enthusiastically

A

O, my sis - ters, let's go down, — let's go down,

**B**

20

S  
come on down. O, my sis - ters, let's go down, —

A  
come on down. O, my sis - ters, let's go down, —

23

S  
*p* go - in' down to the riv - er, go - in' down to the riv - er to

A  
*p* down to the riv - er, — go - in' down to the riv - er to

26

S  
*mf* pray. (*mf*) as before down... down to the riv - er to

A  
As I went down to the riv - er to pray,

T  
As I went down to the riv - er to pray,

B

29

S  
A

stud - y, on the good old way.

T  
B

stud - y - ing a - bout the good old way. And who shall wear the

32

S  
A

star - ry crown? Good Lord, show me,

T  
B

star - ry crown? Good Lord, show me,

35

S  
A

show me, show me the way.

T  
B

show me, show me the way.

**D**  
*(mf)* with strength

39

T  
B

O, my broth - ers, let's go down, let's go down,

**D**

*p*

*cue-sized right-hand notes for rehearsal only*

*p*

(play left-hand notes)

43

T  
B

come on down. O, my broth - ers, let's go down,

*mf*

*mf*

*cue-sized right-hand notes for rehearsal only*

*mf*

(play left-hand notes)

46

T  
B

*p* down to the river, down to the riv - er, down to the riv - er to

*p*

49 *(mf)* **E**

S  
A  
As I went down to the riv - er to pray,

T  
B  
pray. down... down to the riv - er to

*mf*

52

S  
A  
stud - y - ing a - bout the good old way. And who shall wear the

T  
B  
stud - y in the good old way.

55

S  
A  
star - ry crown? Good Lord, show me,

T  
B  
star - ry crown? Good Lord, show me,

58

S  
A

show me, show me the way.

T  
B

show me, show me the way.

61

**F** Celebratory interlude

*f*

3

64

68

71 Optional Claps (or taps) by the Chorus as a background during this interlude

Cl.

Cl.

78 *mf* *rit.* **G** **Slower (straight eighths)** *p* gently, reflectively

S  
O, lift your head my wear - y friend, and

A  
O, lift your head my wear - y friend, and

T  
O, lift your head my wear - y friend, and

B  
O, lift your head my wear - y friend, and

*rit.* **G** **Slower (straight eighths)** *p*



81

S  
taste the plea-sure that hea-ven will send. Let noth-ing cause you

A  
taste the plea-sure that hea-ven will send. Let noth-ing cause you

T  
taste the plea-sure that hea-ven will send.

B  
taste the plea-sure that hea-ven will send.

dramatic pause of anticipation – Conductor may turn to the audience to heighten the curiosity of what comes next

84

*rit.* *pp* *Start slowly and accel. (swing eighths)*

S  
to de-lay... but...

A  
to de-lay... but...

T  
to de-lay... but... *mp* has-ten on the good old,

B  
de-lay... but... *p* has-ten on the good old, *mp* has-ten on the good old,

*rit. rehearsal only* *Start slowly and accel. (swing eighths)*

*p* *(p)* *mp*

(*accel.*) **With energy** ♩ = 66 H

87 *mf* *div.* *f*

S  
has - ten on the good old way. down...

A  
has - ten on the good old way. down...

T  
8 has - ten on the good old way. As I went down to the riv - er to

B  
*mf* *div.* *f* *unis.*  
has - ten on the good old way. As I went down to the riv - er to

(*accel.*) **With energy** ♩ = 66 H

*Play* *gliss.*

*mf* *f* *f*

90 *unis.*

S  
*unis.*  
down to the riv - er to stud - y, in the good old way.

A  
*unis.*  
down to the riv - er to stud - y, in the good old way. And who shall wear the

T  
8 pray, stud - y - ing a - bout the good old way. And who shall wear the

B  
*unis.*  
pray, stud - y - ing a - bout the good old way. And who shall wear the



102 *f* *rit.* *ff*

S way, the way, the way!

A *f* *ff*

A way, the way, the way!

T *f* *div.* *ff*

T way, the way, the way!

B *f* *div.* *ff*

B way, the way, the way!

*f* *cresc.* *ff*

*rit.*

*Ped.*

July 16, 2015  
New Canaan, Connecticut  
3'30"

### Program Notes

*Down to the River to Pray* originates as an American gospel song with a simple message of faith and baptism, going “down to the river.” However, it is thought that the song was composed by a slave, with reference to the river and the “starry crown” (North Star) as a route and guide to freedom.

Usually the song is performed a cappella, and slowly, prayerfully. However, the walking aspect of the lyrics might suggest a different approach – one of swing rhythm in duple meter. Here the focus is on the journey, the joy of the pilgrimage, and the hope for freedom.

The accompaniment (either piano, or brass and percussion) plays a featured role, especially as rhythmic force. The song now becomes one of triumphant progression, hastening on the “good old way!”