

Piano Reduction

# Gwyneth Walker

## Let America Be America Again

*for Narrator and Orchestra*

Based on the poem by Langston Hughes

## Program Notes

*Let America Be America Again* is a powerful poem by African-American poet/playwright, Langston Hughes (1902-1967). The strength of the message and language are well-suited to presentation by narrator and orchestra.

This is a dramatic and varied text, ranging from peaceful (dreamlike) passages to angry explosions. The author begins by speaking of the dream of America, a land where pioneers sought their freedom. [Hughes then acknowledges that, as a black American, “America never was America to me.”] There is the hope for liberty and equality. Yet for black Americans, and the downtrodden of all races, the American experience has all too often been one of persecution.

Speaking now in the first person, the author identifies with all struggling Americans. “I am the farmer... the worker...the Negro...I am the people.” “Yet I’m the one who dreamt the basic dream...to build a homeland of the free.” Despite their labors, these Americans have nothing except “the dream that’s almost dead today.”

With the strength of enduring hope, the author exhorts “We, the people, must reclaim the land...and make America again!”

The musical expression, which has thus far essentially provided a background and commentary to the reading, now comes forth with a closing hymn titled “Let America Be America Again!” The theme, which enters after a 12-measure introduction, is stated in low octaves, with a rhythm aligned with the words “Let America be America.” The theme returns several times, including in the closing section, where the ascending pitches are held through. This gathering of many notes expresses a “land for all!”

Dr. Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. Degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, she resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. For nearly 30 years, she lived on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont. She has now returned to her childhood hometown of New Canaan, Connecticut.

Gwyneth Walker has been a proud resident of Vermont. She is the recipient of the Year 2000 “Lifetime Achievement Award” from the Vermont Arts Council as well as the 2008 “Athenaeum Award for Achievement in the Arts and Humanities” from the St. Johnsbury (VT) Athenaeum.

Walker's catalog includes over 200 commissioned works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, chorus and solo voice. The music of Gwyneth Walker is published by E. C. Schirmer (choral and vocal music) and Lauren Keiser Music (orchestral and instrumental music).

Further information concerning Gwyneth Walker and her works is available at [www.gwynethwalker.com](http://www.gwynethwalker.com)

# Let America Be America Again

for Narrator and Orchestra  
(based on the poem by Langston Hughes)

Langston Hughes (1902 - 1967)

Gwyneth Walker

At a stately tempo  $\text{♩} = 66$  Tap piano ledge with R.H.

The score is for piano and consists of four systems of music. Each system has a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction 'in the distance'. The second system begins at measure 5 with a *poco cresc.* marking, followed by *mf* and *p* dynamics, and ends with a *cresc.* marking. The third system starts at measure 10 with a *f* dynamic, followed by a *p* dynamic, and includes triplet markings in the right hand. The fourth system starts at measure 15 with a *cresc. poco a poco* marking, followed by triplet markings, and ends with a *f* dynamic. Performance instructions include 'Tap piano ledge with R.H.' at the top, and '8vb' and 'Ped.' markings below the staves. The piece is in 2/2 time and the key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Roll fingers (tremolo) of both hands on piano ledge  
[as a dramatic introduction to NARRATOR]

20

*rit.*

(8vb)  
(Ped.)

**A**  
Narr: Let America  
be America again. **A.1** Let it be the dream  
it used to be. **A.2** Let it be the pioneer

25

(Same tempo  $\text{♩} = 66$ )

*pp* barely audible

(Ped.)

on the plain seeking a home  
where he himself is free. (25)

(America never was  
America to me.) (26)

**B** *gently, dreamlike*

*p*

(Ped.)

**B.1**

Let America be the dream  
the dreamers dreamed –

Let it be the  
\*great strong land of love

Where never kings connive  
nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

(Ped.)

\*Underlined words indicate new musical patterns

O, let my land be a land where Liberty Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,

But opportunity is real,  
and life is free,

**C** Equality is in  
the air we breathe.

(“breathing free air” motive)

(There’s never been  
equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this  
“homeland of the free.”)

**D**

Say, who are you that  
mumbles in the dark?  
And who are you that draws  
your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,

(Same tempo  $\text{♩} = 66$ )

Tap piano ledge with R.H.

(continue during reading)

(Same tempo)

41 I am the Negro bearing slavery’s scars.

I am the red man driven from the land,



I am the people, **F.4** humble, hungry, mean – O, Pioneers! **F.5** I am the man  
 Hungry yet today, who never got ahead.  
 despite the dream. The poorest worker  
 Beaten yet today – bartered through the years.

**G** Same tempo (♩ = 66)  
 gently roll chords  
 (to suggest dreaming)

[approximately coordinate reading with music.  
 Words in bold print fall at the start of measures]

Yet **I'm** the one who  
 dreamt our basic **dream** In the

**Old** World while still a serf of **kings**, who **dreamt** a dream so strong, so brave,

so **true**, That even yet its mighty daring **sings** In every **brick** and stone,  
 in every furrow

**turned** That's made **America** the land it has **become**.

O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas

In

65 **H** *flowing*

*f* *mf*

*Ped.*

search of what I meant to be my home –

For I'm the one who left dark

68

*Ped.*

Ireland's shore,

And Poland's plain,

and England's grassy lea,

And

71

*Ped.*

torn from Black Africa's strand I came To build a "homeland of the free."

*poco rit.*

74

*f*

*Ped.*



The free?  
Who said the free? Not me?  
Surely not me?  
The millions on relief today?

**I.1**

The millions shot down  
when we strike?

**I.2**

The millions who have  
nothing for our pay?

**I**  
78

*ff with anger*

*8vb*

For all the dreams we've dreamed  
And all the songs we've sung  
And all the hopes we've held  
And all the flags we've hung,

**I.3**

The millions who have  
nothing for our pay—

**I.4**

Except the dream  
that's almost dead today.

*8vb*

*8vb*

**J** **Moderate tempo** ♩ = 96  
*flowing, as a dream rising*

79

*mf cantabile*

*with pedal*

[approximately coordinate reading with music.  
Words in bold print fall at the start of measures]

**O**, let America be **America** again —      The **land** that never has been yet —

83

*poco accel.*

10

And yet must be – the **land** where every **man** is free. The **land** that's mine – The

Slightly faster ♩ = 108

86

poor man's,

Indian's, Negro's, ME –

Who made

90

*rit.* **K** ♩ = 96

America,

Whose sweat and blood, whose **faith** and pain,

Whose

94

**hand** at the foundry, whose **plow** in the rain, Must **bring** back our mighty dream again.

97

*rit.*

101

(Ped.)

L.1
L.2

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose –
 The steel of freedom does not stain.  
From those who live like leeches  
on the people's lives  
We must take back our land again, America!

**L**  
103

O, yes, I say it plain,  
 America never was America to me,  
 And yet I swear this oath –
 Out of the rack and ruin  
of our gangster death,  
America will be!

**M**  
104

**N**

The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, lies,  
 We, the people, must redeem  
 The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.

106

The mountains and the endless plain –  
 All, all the stretch of these great green states –  
 And make America again!

108

# Closing Hymn

“Let America Be America Again!”

**O**

109

Grandly. slowly

*accel.*

Musical score for measures 109-113. The score is in 2/2 time with a key signature of one flat. It features a grand staff with piano (*p*) and forte (*f*) dynamics. The right hand has a melodic line with a fermata over the first measure, while the left hand plays a steady bass line. A "Ped." marking is present below the bass line.

114

*a tempo* ♩ = 80

Musical score for measures 114-117. The score is in 2/2 time with a key signature of one flat. It features a grand staff with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in both hands.

*with pedal*

118

Musical score for measures 118-121. The score is in 2/2 time with a key signature of one flat. It features a grand staff with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in both hands, including some chordal textures in the right hand.

**P**

122

Musical score for measures 122-125. The score is in 2/2 time with a key signature of one flat. It features a grand staff with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in both hands, including some chordal textures in the right hand.

126

Musical score for measures 126-129. The score is in 2/2 time with a key signature of one flat. It features a grand staff with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in both hands, including some chordal textures in the right hand.

Q

130

Musical notation for section Q, measures 130-133. The piece is in G major (one flat) and 4/4 time. The right hand features a melodic line with some grace notes and a long slur over measures 132-133. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment of chords and eighth notes.

134

Musical notation for section Q, measures 134-137. The right hand continues the melodic line with eighth-note patterns. The left hand maintains the accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

R

138

Musical notation for section R, measures 138-141. The right hand features a sixteenth-note scale with a '6' (sixteenth) marking above it. The left hand has a long slur over measures 140-141 with a 'Ped.' (pedal) marking below it.

142

Musical notation for section R, measures 142-145. The right hand continues the sixteenth-note scale with '6' markings. The left hand has a long slur over measures 144-145 with a 'Ped.' marking below it.

S

146

Musical notation for section S, measures 146-149. The right hand features a melodic line starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The left hand provides a simple accompaniment of chords and eighth notes.

150

Musical score for measures 150-153. The piece is in G major (one flat). Measure 150 features a *cresc.* marking. Measure 153 features a *f* marking. The score consists of a grand staff with treble and bass clefs.

**T**

154

Musical score for measures 154-157. The score consists of a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measure 157 contains a long, multi-measure rest in the treble clef.

158

Musical score for measures 158-161. The score consists of a grand staff with treble and bass clefs.

**U**

162

Musical score for measures 162-165. The score consists of a grand staff with treble and bass clefs.

166

*rit.*

Musical score for measures 166-169. The piece is in G major (one flat). Measure 166 features a *rit.* marking. The score consists of a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measure 169 contains a long, multi-measure rest in the bass clef.

V

170 *a tempo* (♩ = 80)

*Narr. spoken forcefully and dramatically*

*Slowly*

Let America be!

Let America  
be America!

Let America be  
America... again!

*rit.*

\*Tap piano ledge triumphantly with both hands

\*Tap piano ledge near the middle, or in the most resonant location, with the pedal remaining down from letter H. This ought to produce a ringing of the strings.