

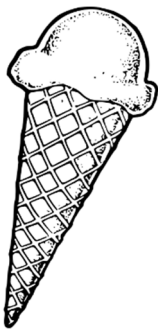


GWYNETH WALKER

Shoe Jazz

four songs on poems by Nikki Giovanni

for Soprano and Piano



1. First Chair
2. No Heaven
3. Shoe Jazz Blue Jazz
4. I Know the Song the Moon Sings

Shoe Jazz

duration 12:10

The texts for *Shoe Jazz* are found in a 2009 collection entitled Bicycles by African-American poet Nikki Giovanni (b. 1943). These poems speak to all ages – young and old. There is humor, tenderness, rhythmic energy and strength, with an over-riding message of *I am who I am!*

The opening song, “First Chair,” speaks of a desire to play first chair (the premiere seat in an orchestra section), but knowing *I’m too jazzy...I am Gospel...and Rhythm and Blues. I make my own music*. This song uses a swing rhythm almost throughout. The astute listener may hear the high octave motive (elevated) for the words *First Chair*. References to the music of Vivaldi and Beethoven provide contrast between “preferred” music, and the poet’s natural music.

“No Heaven” is a simple, tonal song, in the key of E flat Major. *How can there be no heaven, when rain falls gently on the grass. A charming image comes with: And little finches eat upside down*. Here the singer performs upward grace-note figures to suggest upside-down chords. The song ends very gently with *How can there be no heaven...when you smile at me*.

“Shoe Jazz Blue Jazz” makes reference to Miles Davis (iconic American jazz trumpeter). *Miles Davis – All Blues*. This is an especially swing rhythmic, relaxed tempo song. The shoes come in many colors. Perhaps these are dancing shoes. But they also tap out any little ants scurrying across the floor! Vocal sounds enhance the rhythms: *ta-ta-ta-ta...*

“I Know the Song the Moon Sings” is an extended song, due to the expanded message of the poem. The mood ranges from ephemeral moonlight (gentle high *tremoli* in the accompaniment, singer with upward thoughts of the moon) to a more down-to-earth soulful singing (*I, too, am a motherless child*). The music briefly quotes from the spiritual, “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” However, this *motherless child* is full of energy, *running wild!* Thus, a refrain from “Shoe Jazz Blue Jazz” returns to close the set.

Poems

FIRST CHAIR

They say I'm too jazzy
For First Chair

I bring something different
And maybe something nice

But the orchestra is Baroque
And I am Gospel

It is Beethoven
And I'm Rhythm and Blues

It's piano
And I'm honking sax

My problem is:
I make my own muffins
Ice cream
And music

Not always the best
But all ways my best

I look good
And I dress well

I definitely have
Stage presence

I want to play
I want to play
I want to play

NO HEAVEN

How can there be
No Heaven

When rain falls
gently on the grass
When sunshine scampers
across my toes

When corn bakes
into bread
When wheat melts
into cake

When shadows
cool
And owls
call
And little finches
eat upside
down

How can there be
No Heaven

When tears comfort
When dreams caress
When you smile
at me

SHOE JAZZ BLUE JAZZ

Green shoes
Blue shoes
Red shoes
Good news

Bad news
Suede shoes
No ties
Loose pants

Pink shoes
 Shining
White shoes
 Whining
All shoes
 Dining
On the little ants

Your shoes
Her shoes
My shoes
Good news

His shoes
Those shoes
Miles Davis
All Blues

I KNOW THE SONG

I know the song
The moon sings
Though she only sings
To moonbeams
And to all the stars
That twinkle
In the night

I know the song
Her heart hears
Since she belongs
To no one
And there is none to hear
Her sing her song

I know to sing
The moon song
That mostly the moon
Sings alone
Bravely
Through the night

I know the song
The moon sings
I understand the harmony rings
That tinkle chiming for the sun

I, too, am
A motherless child
My heart and soul
Are running wild

I, too, am a motherless child

This version commissioned by Jamie Reimer (Soprano) and Stacie Haneline (Piano)

Shoe Jazz

for Soprano Solo and Piano

Nikki Giovanni
from Bicycles 2009*

Gwyneth Walker

1. First Chair

♩ = 120 *swing eighths*
with subtle energy, in a jazz style

Piano

mf

with slight pedal

S

mf

They say I'm too

*Used with permission of the poet.

13 **A** [a subtle "blues" slur]

S jazz - y _____ for First Chair,* _____

16

S _____ First Chair, _____ I'm too

19

S jazz - y _____

22 **B** *delicately* *smoothly*

S I bring some - thing dif - ferent And may - be some - thing

*The best player in an orchestra section.

26 **Freely** *f* recite on pitch, free rhythm straight eighths [strong break] *mf*

S nice But the orchestra is Baroque And I am

Freely straight eighths (a bit of Vivaldi!) [strong break]

f

29 *a tempo* (♩ = 120) swing eighths **Freely** straight eighths *f*

S Gos - pel It is Beet - ho - ven

a tempo (♩ = 120) swing eighths **Freely** straight eighths (Beethoven's Symphony #5!) *f*

32 *a tempo* (♩ = 120) swing eighths *mf* **Freely** straight eighths *f*

S And I'm Rhy - thm and Blues It's pi -

a tempo (♩ = 120) swing eighths *f*

C Freely

35

S a - no _____ And I'm honk - ing sax

(f) *a tempo* (♩ = 120)

C Freely

(a nice piano arpeggio)

a tempo (♩ = 120)

[non-pitched vocal sounds to resemble tapping on a Cymbal]

38

S ta ta ta_

mf

D Freely, slowly

recited on pitch

41

S ta ta ta_ My problem is:

D Freely, slowly