



**GWYNETH WALKER**

# Shoe Jazz

four songs on poems by Nikki Giovanni

*for Youth Chorus and String Quartet (or Piano)*



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

**FULL SCORE**

# 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 *pure* song, in the key of C 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 chorus sings upward grace-note figures to suggest upside-down chords. The song ends very simply 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, chorus 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

# Shoe Jazz

for Youth Chorus and String Quartet (or Piano)

Nikki Giovanni  
from Bicycles 2009\*

Gwyneth Walker

## 1. First Chair

$\text{♩} = 120$  swing eighths  
with subtle energy, in a jazz style

1  
Violins *mf*

2  
Violins *mf*

Viola *mf*

Violoncello *mf*

5  
Vlns. *pizz.*

2  
Vlns. *arco*

Vla. *pizz.*

Vla. *arco*

Vlc. *pizz.*

Vlc. *arco*

10  
Y  
C *mf* [A] [a subtle "blues" slur]

They say I'm too jazz - y

[A]

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vla. *arco*

Vlc. *arco*

\*Used with permission of the poet.

**E**  
52 *gracefully, well-behaved!*

Y  
C

look good And I dress well I def-in-ite-ly have Stage

**E**

1  
Vlns.

2

Vla.

Vlc.

*rit.* **F** *a tempo* (♩ = 120), *insistently*  
(boastfully, like a diva!) *f* *f*

57

Y  
C

pres-ence, Stage pres-ence, Stage pres-ence. I want to play I want to play I want to

*rit.* **F** *a tempo* (♩ = 120), *insistently*

1  
Vlns.

2

Vla.

Vlc.

63

Y  
C

play

1  
Vlns.

2

Vla.

Vlc.

[non-pitched vocal sounds in rhythm with the accompaniment]

67 *p*

Y  
C

ta ta ta ta\_\_ ta ta ta ta\_\_ ta ta ta ta ta ta ta\_\_ ta

1  
Vlns.

2

Vla.

Vlc.

71 **G** *rhythmically*

Y  
C

ta ta ta ta\_\_ ta ta ta I want\* to play I want to want to want to play I want to play I

1  
Vlns.

2

Vla.

Vlc.

75 *cresc. poco a poco (to m. 83)*

S

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

A *cresc. poco a poco (to m. 83)*

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

1  
Vlns. *cresc. poco a poco (to m. 84)*

2 *cresc. poco a poco (to m. 84)*

Vla. *cresc. poco a poco (to m. 84)*

Vlc. *cresc. poco a poco (to m. 84)*

*cresc. poco a poco (to m. 84)*

\*Perhaps substitute "wanna" for easier diction.

79 *(cresc.)*

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

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

Vlns. 1 *(cresc.)*

Vlns. 2 *(cresc.)*

Vla. *(cresc.)*

Vlc. *(cresc.)*

82 *(cresc.)* **f** **H**

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

A I want to play I want to want to want to play **f**

Vlns. 1 *(cresc.)* **f** **H**

Vlns. 2 *(cresc.)* **f**

Vla. *(cresc.)* **f**

Vlc. *(cresc.)* **f**

85 [Chorus raise hands in air and wave to get attention] *shout enthusiastically*

Y I WANT TO PLAY!

C

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vla.

Vlc.



# 2. No Heaven

**♩ = 100 or slower**  
*con sord.*

**Vlns.**  
1 *p* gently, reverently  
2 *p* gently, reverently

**Vla.**  
*p* gently, reverently

**Vlc.**  
*p* gently, reverently

**8** **A** *p* gently  
How can there be No Hea - ven When rain falls gent - ly on the grass When

**14** **B** *mp*  
sun - shine scam - pers a - cross my toes No Hea - ven No Hea - ven How can there be No

**Vlns.**  
1 *mp*  
2 *mp*

**Vla.**  
*mp*

**Vlc.**  
*mp*

E

52 *f* emphatically

Y C  
 How can there be No Hea - ven When tears com - fort When dreams car - ess \_\_\_\_\_

[optional harmony]

Opt. *f* emphatically *p*

How can there be No Hea - ven When tears com - fort When dreams car - ess \_\_\_\_\_

E

1 *f* *p* gently *pizz.*

2 *f* *p* gently *pizz.*

Vla. *f* *p* gently *pizz.*

Vlc. *f* *p* gently

58

*rit. to end*

(*p*)

Y C  
 When you smile at me \_\_\_\_\_

Opt. \_\_\_\_\_

*rit. to end*

1 *arco* 3 *pp* *via sord.*

2 *arco* 3 *pp* *via sord.*

Vla. *arco* 3 *pp* *via sord.*

Vlc. *arco* *pp* *via sord.*

2:40

### 3. Shoe Jazz Blue Jazz

[connector from the previous song]

♩ = 120, or slower

*senza sord.  
gently, peacefully*

1  
Vlns. *p*

2  
*senza sord.  
gently, peacefully*  
*p*

Vla. *senza sord.  
gently, peacefully*  
*p*

Vlc.

7 **Free measure** *rit.* **Relaxed tempo** (♩ = 120)  
*as a Miles Davis Trumpet solo* *swing eighths*

1  
Vlns. *mf* *p*

2

Vla.

Vlc. *senza sord.*  
*p* *mf*

11 **A**  
\***A** *mf*

Y  
C  
Green shoes Blue shoes

1  
Vlns. *mf*

2  
*mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vlc.

\*Chorus may be divided into groups, A and B, for back-and-forth responses.

16

Y  
C

Red shoes Good news

Vlns. 1 2

Vla.

Vlc.

20

Y  
C

Bad news ta ta ta ta ta ta Suede shoes

**B** **B** *mf* **A** [non-pitched vocal sounds to resemble tapping on a Cymbal] **B**

Vlns. 1 2

Vla.

Vlc.

24

Y  
C

ta ta ta ta ta ta No ties ta ta ta ta Loose pants

**A** **B** (*ossia for lower voices*) **A** **B**

Vlns. 1 2

Vla.

Vlc.

F

56 *p* whispered gleefully, not on pitch

Y C ta ta ta ta\_ ta ta ta ta\_ ta ta ta ta\_ Green

F

1 *p*

2 *p*

Vla. *p*

Vlc. *p*

61

Y C Blue Red

1 *pizz.*

2 *pizz.*

Vla. *cresc. poco a poco*

Vlc. *cresc. poco a poco*

66

Y C Good news!

Chorus exclaims Clap hands

1 *arco* *f*

2 *arco* *f*

Vla. *cresc.* *f*

Vlc. *cresc.* *f*

# 4. I Know the Song the Moon Sings

Moderate tempo ♩ = 108  
(straight eighths)

*shimmering, as moonlight  
sul tasto*

Vlns. 1 *p*

Vlns. 2 *shimmering, as moonlight  
sul tasto*  
*p*

Vla. *shimmering, as moonlight  
sul tasto*  
*p*

Vlc. [moonsong theme]  
(ord.)  
*mf cantabile*

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

**A**

*p* gently, as moonbeams

Y  
C

I know the song The moon sings...

**A**

*ord.*

Vlns. 1 *ord.*

Vlns. 2 *ord.*

Vla. *ord.*

Vlc. *p*

21

Y  
C

Though she on-ly sings To moon-beams And to all the stars That twin-kle In the night\_\_\_\_\_

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

26

Y  
C

Some voices *(p) smoothly* Others answer *pp smoothly*

moon - - - - - beams, \_\_ moon - - - - -

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

30

Y  
C

- - - beams \_\_\_\_\_

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

\*Cue-sized notes are an *ossia* for lower voices  
Walker | *Shoe Jazz* | 4. I Know the Song the Moon Sings