

Gwyneth Walker

Equality Now!

for Flute, Clarinet and Piano

inspired by the Woman's Rights Convention
in Seneca Falls, NY – 1848

with optional readings from the Convention
"Declaration of Sentiments"
and related documents

Equality Now!

(music for the Telos Trio: Flute, Clarinet and Piano)
a Celebration of the Woman's Rights Convention
Seneca Falls, NY – 1848

and an affirmation of Equal Rights for all

by Quaker composer Dr. Gwyneth Walker
a proud cousin of Lucretia and James Mott
and descendant of the Underhill-Titus-Frost families
of the Matinecock Friends Meeting
Oyster Bay, NY

Duration: 14 minutes (music only)
at least 20 minutes (with readings included)

Program Notes:

The history of the Woman's Rights Convention of 1848 continues to inspire "equality-oriented" followers. Visitors to the Woman's Rights Museum in Seneca Falls, NY, make this pilgrimage to honor those brave women who asserted their rights when few rights were theirs.

Today, as before, the affirmation of equality – among the sexes, among the races – is an ongoing struggle. **Equality Now!** is dedicated to that struggle.

This new musical composition incorporates readings from the Convention, from Convention-related writings, and American songs reflecting the spirit of the women. To start, the activity and energy of the women is captured by the traditional spiritual, "Sisters, Never Sit Down!" In truth, these vibrant and determined women no doubt had little time for sitting and relaxing. [It was said of Susan B. Anthony that she had so much energy, that had she not channeled her work into the suffrage movement, one might worry how she would have redirected this force!] Therefore, the music (in swing-jazz rhythm!) is marked *with restless motion*.

"Announcement" opens with a reading of the very announcement of the upcoming Convention, as published in the local newspaper. *Hear! Hear!* The music opens with the piano playing octaves, forcefully, to gain attention (for the announcement). The expression is energetic, brimming with anticipation.

The formal Proclamation from the Convention is preceded by a series of "Resolutions" outlining the need for change, the impetus for the Convention. Since many of the attendees were Quakers, and their affirmations of equality were faith-based, the composer (herself a Quaker) has added phrases at the end of each of the resolutions: *This I believe* and *This, by my faith, I believe*. This is a gentle movement, with the clarinet playing a melody associated with the words: *We are all equal. We are one*. The music ends on unison pitches, *as one*.

The fourth movement is entitled "Declaration – These Truths Are Self-Evident." This is the reading of the very essential Declaration of Sentiments drafted by the Convention. In this movement, readings from the Declaration are intertwined with piano music to

emphasize the growth of the sentiments. Ultimately when the Declaration **insists** upon equal rights for women, the piano begins a low tremolo in the background which leads into the forceful drive of the rest of the music. *Determined* repeated 8th-notes open and close the movement.

“Looking Forward” is based on a quote from Susan B. Anthony (who herself did not attend the Convention, but was so inspired by what she heard of the event that she dedicated the rest of her life to carrying forth its ideals) looking to the future. As she has said, “Failure is Impossible.” The music opens with gentle chords in the piano, marked *wisps of the future*. The character of this movement is exuberant and sparking. Mostly the instruments play in their high ranges. Patterns ascend *as if reaching for the future*. The winds end with short motives, marked *a ray of hope*. The piano closes with more *wisps of the future*.

The exhortation from Susan B. Anthony, “Sisters, Take the Wheel!,” refers to women grabbing life and taking control of their future. However, one might keep in mind that the bicycle was now coming into vogue, and was particularly popular with women, offering a newfound freedom of travel. So, this movement might have been titled “Sisters, Get on Your Bicycles and Go Out into the World!” Therefore, this movement is a new arrangement of the familiar song “Bicycle Built for Two.” Extra emphasis has been placed on the image of the spinning wheel, so often depicted in wind arpeggio patterns. The bicycle riding becomes almost breathless (for the winds!).

Finally, there is a return to the opening song, “Sisters, Never Sit Down” For this is the message that Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the other attendees of the Woman’s Right Convention wish to convey to us. To value equality, one must put one’s ideals into action. **We are resolved. These truths are self-evident. Failure is impossible!**

Equality Now! **(after Seneca Falls)**

Introduction

"Sisters, Never Sit Down!"

Announcement

"With Courage and Determination"

Resolved

"All Are Equal"

Declaration

"These Truths are Self-Evident"

Looking Forward

"Failure is Impossible"

Conclusion

"Sisters, Take the Wheel!"

The Readings

Introduction

"Sisters, Never Sit Down!"

Reader exhorts the audience to action:

Sisters, gather your strength. There is much work to be done.
This is your life. This is your voice.

Sisters, take courage! Never sit down!

Announcement

“With Courage and Determination”

A reader comes to stage front/center and claps her hands twice, to quiet the crowd:

Hear! Hear!

She reads from a document held in her hands:

“A Convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, N.Y., on Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July current; commencing at 10 o’clock A.M. During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen, will address the Convention.”

Resolved
"All Are Equal"

to be read by one or several readers

[spoken forcefully] **Resolved**, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.

[spoken more introspectively, quietly] *This I believe.*

Resolved, That woman is man's equal--was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.

This I believe.

Resolved, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation, by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, not their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.

This I believe.

Resolved, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her.

[spoken more loudly] *This, by my faith, I believe.*

Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.

[spoken with great conviction] *This, by my faith, I truly believe.*

all readers: All are equal. All are one!

Declaration

“These Truths Are Self-Evident”

One or more readers read as much or as little from the following Declaration as they wish:

Declaration of Sentiments:

[Low notes in piano are played (for mood of solemnity), and fade out as the reading begins]

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident *[two “chords of enlightenment” are played by piano]*; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

[Piano begins to play background repeated chords. Reader begins to read, and continues while piano plays. Piano changes pattern with each new paragraph of the reading.]

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men - both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master - the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education - all colleges being closed against her.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

[piano stops playing]

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation, - in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, **we insist** *[piano starts playing low tremolo in background]* that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.

[music resumes, forcefully]

Looking Forward
"Failure is Impossible!"

"Oh, if I could but live another century and see the fruition of all the work for women! There is so much yet to be done." [*Susan B. Anthony – 1902*]

"The day will come when man will recognize woman as his peer, not only at the fireside, but in councils of the nation. Then, and not until then, will there be the perfect comradeship, the ideal union between the sexes that shall result in the highest development of the race."

"It will come, but I shall not see it. Probably you will. It is inevitable. [*optional: piano begins playing rolled chords, "wisps of the future," quietly behind the reading.*] We can no more deny forever the right of self-government to one-half our people than we could keep the Negro forever in bondage. It will not be wrought by the same disrupting forces that freed the slave, but come it will, and I believe within a generation."

Conclusion

"Sisters, Take the Wheel!"

Sisters, gather your strength. There is much work to be done.
This is your life...your voice.

Sisters, take the wheel!