Gwyneth Walker

Why We Must Change

Contemporary Songs for Medium-High Voice and Piano on the poetry of Alice Walker

1. Word Reaches Us
2. Every Revolution Needs Fresh Poems
3. May it Be Said of Me
Why We Must Change are musical settings of the poetry of Alice Walker (b. 1944). These songs are described as contemporary due to the relevance to topics of today (2014). A central message is the connection formed between those who suffer tragedy, and those who endeavor to form a common bond, to show compassion, to join with strength.

The first poem, “Word Reaches Us,” is dedicated to Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, a victim of gun violence in Tucson, AZ, in 2011. The opening phrase of Word reaches us that you are sleeping refers to the period of time, directly after the shooting, when the victim lay in a coma. Her tragedy becomes our shared suffering. Addressing her as Sister, whom I never met, we thank her for reminding us...that we must change.

In the musical setting, refrains of We pray for healing, healing frame this song. These words are sung in a low range, on few pitches, as a prayer in recitative style. Through the course of the song, the phrases rise to the exclamation of Gabrielle’s name. The highest point is reached with the words Sister, whom I never met. The music then descends and quiets, returning to the opening phrases of healing. The piano accompaniment of gently repeated eighth-notes might be heard as the pulsing hear of the sleeping victim.

“Every Revolution Needs Fresh Poems” reminds us that poets take chances, poets go without sleep and face the dark, and poets disregard conventions. Therefore, it is poetry that will lead us the change. The musical expression of these words comprises an agitated piano solo (with some especially fresh chords), with readings interspersed. This is a rhythmic piece – restless, always on the move.

“May it be Said of Me” opens with pulsing eighth-note patterns, similar to the first song. In this case, the heartbeat is our own. For our actions are led by the heart. The effort is to embrace the suffering of another as one embraces the pain within. There is no distance between humanity. May it be said of me that I shared your sorrow. May it be said of me...that when you rose from your knees...I joined you...singing.

This song features many added-tone chord clusters. These express the group sentiment – may it be said of me, may it be said of any one of us, that we could show compassion. The music rises, as does the message of the poem, The climactic final words, I joined you – singing, lead to phrases from the song “How Can I Keep From Singing” (new music), which provide a celebratory conclusion.

We must listen. We must show compassion. We must change.
Why We Must Change
for Solo Voice and Piano

Alice Walker (b. 1944)

1. Word Reaches Us
For Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords

Word reaches us
that you are sleeping, sleeping.
Dismayed
we have turned to the sea.
We encounter among others
walking there
a sense of what we have lost:
the broad expanse of humanity’s
sensitivity to the oneness of itself.
Gabrielle,
while you sleep, resting your nimble
brain, we think of walking with you
in the valley
of the shadow of death; holding
you up.
We hope you can feel our grief;
our sorrow vast
like the ocean that draws us.
We know in this moment you teach us many things:
how all across the world
there is no one who deserves this fate.
We know we must bleach and sterilize our
tongues,
brighten with understanding
all our dark thoughts.
Sister, whom I never met
except in this pain that has so
wounded you
thank you for reminding us
through your suffering
and your suspenseful sleep
that we must change.

Slowly \( \frac{3}{4} q = 92 \)
\( p \) gently

We pray for healing, healing.

Slowly \( \frac{3}{4} q = 92 \)
\( p \)

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

We pray for healing, healing.

\( pp \) barely audible

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

with much pedal

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Word reaches us that you are sleeping.
Sleeping.

Dismayed we have turned to the sea.

Countering among others walking there a sense of what we have lost: the broad expanse of humanity's sensitivity to the oneness of itself.

Free measure

Free measure, accel.

Free measure, accel.

Walker | Why We Must Change | 1. Words Reaches Us
Gabrielle, while you sleep, resting your nimble brain, we think of walking with you in the valley of the shadow of death; holding you up. We hope you can feel our

Walker | Why We Must Change | 1. Words Reaches Us
grief: our sorrow vast like the

ocean that draws us. We know in this moment you can

teach us many things: how all across the world there is

no one who deserves this fate. We know we must bleach and sterilize our tongues,

Walker | Why We Must Change | 1. Words Reaches Us
all our dark thoughts. Sister, whom I
never met except in this pain that has so wounded you

Walker | Why We Must Change | 1. Words Reaches Us
thank you for reminding us through your suffering and your suspenseful sleep.

that we must change.

Sister, whom I never met except in this pain that has so

F a tempo (q = 92)

Sister, whom I never met except in this pain that has so

F a tempo (q = 92)
wounded you

thank you for reminding us through your suffering

and your suspenseful sleep that we must change.

We pray for healing, healing, healing.

3'10"

Walker | Why We Must Change | 2. Every Revolution Needs Fresh Poems
2. Every Revolution Needs Fresh Poems

Every revolution needs fresh poems
that is the reason
poetry cannot die.
It is the reason poets
go without sleep
and sometimes without lovers
without new cars
and without fine clothes
the reason we commit
to facing the dark
and
resign ourselves, regularly, to the possibility
of being wrong.

With energy \( \frac{\text{energy}}{\text{beats per minute}} = 112 \), but not too rushed

Poetry is leading us.
It never cares how we will
be held by lovers
or drive fast or look good
in the moment;
but about how completely
we are committed
to movement
both inner and outer:
and devoted to transformation
and to change.

3 in a “fresh, revolutionary” style

6

random, ascending dyads
Reading 1:

Every revolution needs fresh poems
that is the reason
poetry cannot die.
It is the reason poets
go without sleep
and sometimes without lovers
without new cars
and without fine clothes
the reason we commit
to facing the dark
and
resign ourselves, regularly, to the possibility
of being wrong.

Tapping stops and Piano continues, with Singer clapping as indicated
Singer claps

random, ascending dyads

Begin Reading 2 (next page)
continue tapping during reading

Singer taps leg, quietly, in a relaxed manner

Tap Piano ledge, High and Low

Walker | Why We Must Change | 2. Every Revolution Needs Fresh Poems
Reading 2:

Poetry is leading us.

It never cares how we will

be held by lovers

or drive fast

or look good in the moment:

STOP tapping (continue reading unaccompanied)

but about how completely

we are committed

to movement (Play)

both inner and outer (Play)

and devoted to transformation

and to change.

Piano continues, with Singer clapping
Singer claps

random, ascending dyads

Singer snaps fingers, both hands, raising hands from low to high, from 1st to 4th snap

Walker | Why We Must Change | 2. Every Revolution Needs Fresh Poems
May it be said of me
That when I saw
Your mud hut
I remembered
My shack.
That when I tasted your
Pebble filled beans
I recalled
My salt pork.
That when I saw
Your twisted Limbs
I embraced
My wounded
Sight.

That when you
Rose from your knees
And stood
Like women
And men
Of this Earth –
As promised to us
As to anyone:
Without regrets
Of any kind
I joined you –
Singing.

With gentle motion \( \dot{\text{j}} = 92 \)
\[ \text{pp (as a gently pulsing background)} \]
\[ \text{with much pedal} \]
That when I tasted your pebble-filled beans

That when I saw your twisted limbs I embraced my wounded

May it be said of me... May it be said of
That when you rose from your knees and stood like women and men of this Earth—

as promised to us as to anyone: Without regret of any kind I joined you singing.
Slightly faster $\frac{\text{q}}{\text{f}} = 112$

triumpantly and flowing

I joined you singing. My life flows on in

Slightly faster $\frac{\text{q}}{\text{f}} = 112$

triumpantly and flowing

endless song

above earth's lamentation.

I hear the real tho'