

# 3 Take me to the water

RESOURCES ▶ CD1 track 3 (performance)

## Information

This song can be used in worship or in concert. It is, on one level, about baptism: a symbolic contact with water that for Christians symbolizes new life, forgiveness, and the cleansing of sins. Like many African American songs, the words have a double meaning: 'I'm going back home' can refer to the African homeland or any place of freedom from slavery, and also to heaven—a place of comfort, freedom, and spiritual community. This is a gentle, spiritual song which can build, through repetition, to a spectacular and uplifting climax, or finish quietly and with intimacy. Nina Simone first recorded it in 1966 on *Nina Sings Nina* and it is available on a number of compilations. This song works well in unison but can also be sung in three parts or with improvised solos and backings.

## Starting

- This is a slow, warm song, so warm up with some humming; focus on creating a resonant sound, with vibrating lips and a loose jaw.
- Sing some slow scales to 'ah' and 'ee', initially just up and down a 5th (E♭–B♭), then perhaps extending up to E♭.
- Finally, change the 'ah' and 'ee' to vowels found in the song. The 'wa-' of 'water', in particular, needs care on the top note (bar 3). Add a touch of 'ah' to brighten the sound and create a big space at the back of the throat.

## Teaching and rehearsing

- Start at the beginning, and teach the melody phrase by phrase, in three or possibly four sections. Note that the words repeat and the easiest phrase comes first. Aim for a quiet but energetic sound.
- Next, cover the words to verse 2, still in unison at this stage.
- Decide on a dynamic shape for the song—perhaps a big climax in verse 2 before returning to a quiet final verse, or a big and bombastic finish, with pauses on the final notes ('to', 'be', 'bap-', '-tized') and a final held chord.

## Ideas

- Consider refining the arrangement by adding parts. If your choir is less experienced but wants to add some harmonies, sing the first bars in unison, splitting into three parts at the beginning of bar 3. Alternatively, one verse could have harmony throughout. Ensure that each

part contains at least one more confident singer to hold the line.

- A soloist, or a number in relay, could sing the first verse, which could then be echoed by the choir. They could also sing the last verse, or just the last line, to bring down the dynamic and emphasize the final mood.
- Try adding some backing 'oo's behind any solo verses, or perhaps behind the last verse. Teach one line initially or all three, depending on the level of your group. Use 'ah' on the louder verses.
- How about a piano-only verse in the middle, as a meditation? Or why not play a solo version of the melody on a recorder, violin, or saxophone?

## Improvising toolbox

- In her recording, Nina Simone improvises her own line above the last verse. If you have a soloist, suggest they have a go at doing the same. Ask the soloist to focus on the gaps between phrases, where they will be heard and can sing in question and answer with the group. You could base your version on her words (shown on p. 9) or improvisation, or add your own ideas around 'going home', 'peace in my heart', or anything else you feel fits.
- If your group has learnt the 'oo's, encourage singers to invent their own versions in performance, so that everyone has their own individual backing.

## Listen out

- Watch out for a tendency to go flat on the way down the scale at the end of each verse.
- Are the singers singing with energy right through to the end of the line on long notes?
- Listen out for a slight emphasis on the first beat.

## Performing

- With this kind of simple repeating song, it is important to be clear about the final form. In some performances it can be appropriate to keep things flexible, so that whoever is leading the group indicates a repetition with a hand signal of some kind. Listen to the CD for an example of this—this was recorded in one take, and you can hear the singers listening to each other and creating a new structure as they work. Alternatively, decide on a definite form, and ensure that everyone in the group knows exactly in which order the various elements happen, so a flexible workshop rehearsal turns into a tight performance.

- Try an initial sing-through of all the verses, building gradually, followed by a verse on the piano and a final quiet verse by a soloist, with 'oo's from other singers behind.
- Before the performance, it is worth reiterating the meaning of the words and the peaceful, spiritual quality of the song.

## Background voices

*Optional lead line above last verse:*

I'm going back home,  
 Gonna stay here no longer.  
 I'm going back home  
 To be baptized.

# 3 Take me to the water

Slow committed ballad ♩ = 75

Trad., arr. Charles Beale

Lead

1. Take me to the wa - ter, take me to the  
(2.) right - eous, none\_ but the

Upper harmony  
Lower harmony

1. Take me to the wa - ter, take me to the  
(2.) right - eous, none\_ but the

Slow committed ballad ♩ = 75

Ab Eb

Piano

2

*Fine* (repeat v. 1)

wa - ter, take me to the wa - ter to be bap - tized. 2. None but the  
right - eous, none but the right - eous shall be saved. 1. Take me to the

wa - ter, take me to the wa - ter to be bap - tized. 2. None but the  
right - eous, none but the right - eous shall be saved. 1. Take me to the

*Fine*

Bb7sus Eb Ab Eb/G Fm/Ab Eb/Bb Bb7sus Eb Ab (repeat v. 1)