

WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN

SATB A CAPPELLA

MUSIC TRAD. APPALACHIAN
TEXT BY CATHY WINTER,
BETSY ROSE, & MARCIA TAYLOR

ARRANGED BY

J . D A V I D M O O R E

The hymn “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” first appeared in the 1908 *Alexander’s Gospel Songs*, with words by Ada Ruth Habershon and music by Charles H. Gabriel. The hymn was substantially reworked (and the lyrics of the verses replaced) by A.P. Carter for The Carter Family in 1935 and experienced a popular renaissance when it was released by The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1972.

The updated lyrics in this arrangement were written by folk singers Betsy Rose, Cathy Winter, and Marcia Taylor, and printed in the marvelous folk song resource *Rise Up Singing* (ed. Peter Blood, ©1988 Sing Out Corporation). These lyrics were requested by Dr. Cathy Roma and the MUSE Women’s Choir of Cincinnati for a concert celebrating the city’s Appalachian cultural heritage in 2001.

The arrangement makes use of two traditional vocal ensemble styles, the bluegrass trio (unapologetically inspired by Dolly Parton’s rendition of “Seven Bridges Road”) and the gospel quartet. Maintain a bright, full, joyful, unaffected tone throughout.

Original Text

There are loved ones in the glory,
Whose dear forms you often miss;
When you close your earthly story,
Will you join them in their bliss?

Refrain:

Will the circle be unbroken
By and by, by and by?
In a better home awaiting
In the sky, in the sky?

In the joyous days of childhood,
Oft they told of wondrous love,
Pointed to the dying Savior;
Now they dwell with Him above.

You remember songs of heaven
Which you sang with childish voice,
Do you love the hymns they taught you,
Or are songs of earth your choice?

You can picture happy gath’rings
’Round the fireside long ago,
And you think of tearful partings,
When they left you here below.

One by one their seats were emptied,
One by one they went away;
Here the circle has been broken –
Will it be complete one day?

~ Ada R. Habershon

1935 Text

I was standing by my window,
On one cold and cloudy day
When I saw that hearse come rolling
For to carry my mother away

Refrain:

Will the circle be unbroken
By and by, Lord, by and by?
There’s a better home a-waiting
In the sky, Lord, in the sky

I said to that undertaker
Undertaker please drive slow
For this lady you are carrying
Lord, I hate to see here go

Oh, I followed close behind her
Tried to hold up and be brave
But I could not hide my sorrow
When they laid her in the grave

I went back home, my home was lonesome
Missed my mother, she was gone
All of my brothers, sisters crying
What a home so sad and lone

We sang the songs of childhood
Hymns of faith that made us strong
Ones that mother Maybelle taught us
Hear the angels sing along.

~ A.P. Carter

THE ARRANGER

J. David Moore is a composer, arranger, conductor, teacher, and Southerner who has lived in the Upper Midwest for most of his life. His music has been called “endlessly inventive,” “glorious...haunting... breathtaking,” and “joyous...wild and elemental.” He publishes through his company Fresh Ayre Music, and is the founder and conductor of The First Readings Project, a chamber choir that acts as a resource for composers in the development and promotion of new work.

He lives with his beautiful wife Anna in Minneapolis, where he bakes bread, drinks tea, and is distracted by shiny objects.

A VERSION OF THIS
ARRANGEMENT IS ALSO
AVAILABLE FOR WOMEN'S
VOICES (FAM - 1072-02)

for the Stuart Cramer High School Choir
Bethany Jennings, director

Will the Circle Be Unbroken

SATB a cappella

lyrics by Betsy Rose, Cathy Winter, and Marcia Taylor

traditional Appalachian
arr. J. David Moore

N.B. grace notes preceding always ON the beat

Slow bluegrass trio (♩ = 52)

f

Soprano
Will the cir - cle be un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a —

Alto
Will the cir - cle be un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a —

Tenor
Will the cir - cle be un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a

5

S
bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try. —

A
bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try. —

T
bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try. —

Quick Gospel Quartet Tempo (♩ = 104)

9

S
mp
— I was sing - ing and my broth - ers, I was sing - ing

A
mf
— I was sing - ing with my sis - ters, — I was sing - ing with my friends

T
mp
I was sing - ing and my broth - ers, I was sing - ing

B
mp
I was sing - ing and my broth - ers, I was sing - ing

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13

S with my friends, And we all can sing to- geth - er, 'cause the cir - cle

A And we all can sing to - geth - er, 'cause the cir - cle__ nev - er__

T with my friends, And we all can sing to - geth - er, 'cause the cir - cle

B with my friends, And we all can sing to - geth - er, 'cause the cir - cle

17 *mf*

S nev - er ends. cir - cle__ be__ un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by,___ There's a__

A *mf* ends. Oh, will the cir - cle__ be__ un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by,___ There's a__

T *mf* nev - er ends. cir - cle__ be__ un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by,___ There's a

B *mf* nev - er ends. cir - cle__ be__ un - brok - en__ oh, by and by, Lord, by and by,___ There's a

22

S bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try._____

A bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we__ try._____ I was

T bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try._____

B bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try._____

26 *mp*

S I ___ was born down in ___ the val - ley where the sun re -

A born down ___ in ___ the val - ley ___ where the sun re - fuse' to shine

T *mp*

8 I ___ was born down in ___ the val - ley where the sun re -

B *mp*

I ___ was born down in - a the val - ley where the sun, where the sun re -

29

S fuse' to shine But ___ I'm climb-ing up to the high - land,

A But I'm climb - ing ___ up to the high - land, ___ gon - na

T fuse' to shine But ___ I'm climb-ing up to the high - land,

B fuse' to shine But ___ I'm climb-ing up to the high-land, gon - na

32 *mf*

S gon - na make that moun-tain mine! cir - cle ___ be ___ un -

A make that moun - tain ___ mine! Oh, will the cir - cle ___ be ___ un -

T *mf*

8 gon - na make that moun-tain mine! cir - cle ___ be ___ un -

B *mf*

make, gon - na make that moun-tain mine! Will the cir - cle

35

S
brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, _____ There's a

A
brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, _____ There's a

T
brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, _____ There's a

B
be _____ un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, _____

38

S
bet - ter home a - wait - in' in the sky, Lord, in the

A
bet - ter home a - wait - in' in the sky, Lord, in the

T
bet - ter home a - wait - in' in the sky, Lord, in the

B
There's a bet - ter home a - wait - in' in the sky, Lord, in the

41

Tempo I°

S
sky, _____ in the sky, Lord, in the sky. _____

A
sky, _____ in the sky, Lord, in the sky. _____

T
sky, _____ in the sky, Lord, in the sky. _____

B
sky, _____ in the sky, my _____ Lord, sky. _____

f, *unis.*, *port.*