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Diana Syrse Valdés

Cantos de Primavera (Songs of Spring)

MUSIC RESOURCE GUIDE
VocalEssence ¡Cantaré! Series



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Cantos de Primavera

Music Resource Guide

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Cantos de Primavera (Songs of Spring)

by *Diana Syrse Valdés*

Difficulty Level

Cantos de Primavera (SATB a cappella) uses accessible ranges for young high-school choirs but the rhythmic complexity, part independence, a cappella voicing, vocal percussion effects and particularly the vital role the bass section takes on in the low register might lend themselves more successfully to a more advanced high-school ensemble or collegiate group.

Ranges



Composer's Note

This song was written for the Worthington High School choir in Worthington, MN, and is based on a poem by Nezahualcóyotl titled *Cantos de Primavera* (Songs of Spring). It is a festive piece, danceable, and of light character. As it opens, the song presents sounds of the jungle and various birds. The song was used as part of the ¡Cantaré! residency to encourage pupils to play with various vocal sounds to emulate nature, and also to teach them the sounds of the morning in a different part of the world. The song addresses one bird in particular: the pheasant, the spring singer. The pheasant represents the itinerant musician that goes door to door bringing joy, songs and dances to other locals.

Texts/Translations

Cantos de Primavera

En la casa de las pinturas
Los cascabeles se hacen oír,
A ellos responden
Nuestras sonajas floridas
Sobre las flores canta
El hermoso faisán,
Su canto despliega
En el interior de las aguas
Aél responden
Varia dos pájaros rojos:
Tú eres el cantor.
En el interior de la casa de la primavera
Alegras a las gentes
Flores que embriagan
Flores preciosas
Tú eres el cantor
En el interior de la casa de la primavera.

—Nezahualcóyotl (adapted by the composer)

*In the house of the paintings
The bells are sounding,
And our flowery
Timbrels respond to them
Above the flowers a beautiful
Pheasant sings,
Its singing unfolds
Inside the waters
To him a variety of
Red birds respond:
You are the singer
Inside the house of the spring
You make people happy
Flowers that make us drunk
Precious flowers
You are the singer
Inside of the house of the spring.*

—Translation by Diana Syrse Valdés

Composer Biography: Diana Syrse Valdés



Diana Syrse works with high school choir students in Worthington, Minnesota through the VocalEssence ¡Cantaré! program.

Diana Syrse was born in 1984 in Mexico City. She has gained fame as both a singer and composer. While growing up, Syrse was influenced by her father who is a guitarist and composer and her brother who is now a composer, arranger of popular music and a sound engineer. When she was young, Syrse was a member of numerous professional children's choirs including the children's choir at the Musical Center of the National Music School, which asked her to perform as a soloist and allowed her to travel on several tours throughout the United States, Hong Kong, Beijing and Mexico.

In 2007 Syrse received degrees in composition and vocal performance from the National School of Music of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. While at school she was influenced by her composition teacher, Gabriela Ortiz, who pushed her to continue her musical studies at Indiana University and inspired her to become a composer. She finished her Master in Fine Arts degree at the Performer-Composer program at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles in 2011. Since then, Syrse has won many honors and awards and has had compositions performed in France, Russia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Germany, Venezuela and the United States. Syrse is also a recognized singer and has performed in vocal ensembles, sung in a number of operas and even branched out into popular music!



Syrse considers herself “a young composer who likes to be a reflection of her own time and place.” She wants to express her own culture and life experiences through her music and often uses these ideas as inspiration when composing. She also draws inspiration from events that she considers to be important. She likes to use text from people who are still alive and have something interesting to say that move her to change in some way. As a composer, Syrse hopes to be able to create music that inspires people and moves them to make a positive change.

In 2009-2010, Diana participated in the VocalEssence ¡Cantaré! community engagement program in the Twin Cities. She returned as a ¡Cantaré! composer-in-residence in 2010-2011, in Worthington, Minnesota.

Cantos de Primavera Pronunciation/Translation Guide

[ehn lah kah-sah dey lahs peen-too-řahs lohs kahs-kah-bey-leys sey ah-seyn oyř]
En la casa de las pinturas Los cascabeles se hacen oír,
(In the house of the paintings The bells are sounding,)

[ah ey-ohs řeh-spohn-dehn nweh-strřahs sohn-ah-has floh-řee-dahs]
A ellos responden Nuestras sonajas floridas
(To them respond our timbrels flowery)

[soh-břey lahs floh-řehs kahn-tah ehl ehř-moh-soh fai-sahn]
Sobre las flores canta El hermoso faisán,
(Above the flowers sings a [the] beautiful pheasant,)

[soo kahn-toh deys-plee-ay-gah ehn ehl een-tehř-ee-ohř dey lahs ah-gwahs]
Su canto despliega En el interior de las aguas
(Its singing unfolds [in] the inside [of the] waters)

[ah-eyl řeh-spohn-dehn vah-řee-ah dohs pah-hah-řohs roh-hohs]
Aél responden Varia dos pájaros rojos:
(To-him respond variety of birds red:)

[too ehř-ehs ehl kahn-tohř ehn ehl een-tehř-ee-ohř dey lah kah-sah dey lah přee-mah-veh-řah]
Tú eres el cantor En el interior de la casa de la primavera
(You are the singer [in] the inside [of] the house of the spring)

[ah-ley-gřahs ah lahs hehn-teys floh-řeys kay ehm-břee-ah-gahn floh-řeys prey-see-oh-sahs]
Alegras a las gentes Flores que embriagan Flores preciosas
(You-make-happy the people Flowers that make-us-drunk flowers precious)

[too ehř-ehs ehl kahn-tohř ehn ehl een-tehř-ee-ohř dey lah kah-sah dey lah přee-mah-veh-řah]
Tú eres el cantor En el interior de la casa de la primavera
(You are the singer [in] the inside [of] the house of the spring)

VOWELS

a–[ah] father

e–[eh] or [ey*] egg or they

*[ay] is also used for the same sound imitating

common English words (kay, day, say)

i–[ee] machine

o – [oh] or [ah] open or off

u–[oo] rule

y – [ee] heavy

VOWEL COMBINATIONS

ai, ay – [ai] side

au – [au] found

ei, ey – [ēi] they

eu – [ēu] may-you

ie- [yeh] yes

oi, oy – [oy] boy

ua – [wa] water

ue – [wē] wait

CONSONANTS

c – [k] before consonant, a, o or u or [s] before e or i

ch – [ch] chill

g–[h] hot

j – [h] hot

ll – [y] yarn

ñ– [ni] onion

q – [k] (u that follows is always silent!) cadence

r – [ř] flipped with tip of tongue

rr – [řř] rolled/trilled with tip of tongue

s – [z] before consonants b, d, g, l, m, n, otherwise [s]

y–[y] yes

z–[s] yes

Meet the Poet: Nezahualc6yotl



Nezahualc6yotl's portrait on 100-peso note

Did you know?

We have the Nahuatl-speaking people to thank for many familiar words that Europeans adopted from this indigenous language including: avocado, chili, chocolate, tomato and coyote (as in the "Hungry Coyote" himself, Nezahualc6yotl).

Nezahualc6yotl (pronounced nets-a-wall-COY-wat, meaning "Hungry Coyote") was born in 1402 and lived 70 years, dying just 20 years before the fateful first voyage of Christopher Columbus. Contrary to the European description of a "New World," many civilizations flourished in the Americas long before the arrival of the Spanish with astounding technological and cultural achievements, including the poetry, philosophy, architecture and aquatic engineering feats of Nezahualc6yotl, king of Texcoco (tets-KO-ko). Nezahualc6yotl ruled over the Acolhua people, closely related but distinct from the Aztec culture, who shared a common language, Nahuatl (NAH-wah-tuhl).

After spending his teenage years escaping from various plots on his life from rival tribes, Prince Nezahualc6yotl led an army of over 100,000 to defeat his enemies and was finally crowned king at the age of 29, setting in motion a golden age of cultural activity for his people. One of the popular ways to spend an evening at Nezahualc6yotl's sophisticated palace would have been to drink hot chocolate, smoke cigars, and have poetry contests (with the readings always accompanied by percussion).

Meet the Original Poem: Nahuatl Language



Nezahualc6yotl (1402-1472), ruler of Texcoco, as depicted in the 16th century Codex Ixtlilxochitl.

Although we now associate Spanish with Mexico in this modern era, it was the arrival of Europeans (particularly Spaniards) that brought their language, cultural practices, religion (particularly Catholicism) and diseases that forever shaped the indigenous population of Mexico. The time period that encompasses the reign of Nezahualc6yotl is often referred to as "Pre-Hispanic," because of this huge shift in the history of much of the continent.

The composer chose to use a Spanish translation of the original Nahuatl poem, so "Cantos de Primavera" is Spanish for "Songs of Spring" — the original title was "Xopan Cuicatl," which translates as "Green-time-of-year Song."



Xopan Cuicatli (Green Time Of Year Song)



Amoxcalco
pehua cuica,
yeyecohua,
qimoyahua xochitl
on ahuia cuicatl.
**Hue, hahuayya, ohuaya, ohuaya.*

Amoxtlacuilotl in moyollo,
to cuicaticaco,
in tictzotzona in mohuehueuh,
in ticuicanitl.



Icahuaca cuicatl,
oyohualli ehuatihuitz,
zan quinanquiliya
toxochayacach.

Xopan cala itec,
in tonteyahuiltiya.



Quimoyahua xochitl,
on ahuia cuicatl.

Zan tic moyahua
in puyuma xochitli,
in cacahua xochitli.



Xochiticpac cuica
in yectli cocoxqui
ye con ya totoma
aitec.
**Ho ililiyaha, ililiyo, hui, ohui, ohui,
ohuaya, ohuaya.*

In ticuicanitl.

Xopan cala itec,
in tonteyahuiltiya.
**Yao yliyaha, ilililililaya, ohamahayya,
ohuaya, ohuaya.*



Zan ye connanquilia
in nepapan quechol,
in yectli quechol
in huel ya cuica.
**Ho ililiyaha, ililili, ohui, ohui, ohui.*

—*Nezahualcōyotl*
(April 28, 1402 – June 4, 1472)



Did you know?

While the vast majority of Mexicans speak Spanish, it is not recognized as an official language by the Mexican government. 68 indigenous languages are official state languages and their use in government documents, public communication and continuous preservation is seen as a national priority. Over one million people still speak Nahuatl today.

**untranslated, wordless refrain of unknown meaning or significance, perhaps similar to “tra la la”*

Meet the Original Performers: Nahuatl Music

Although many traditional practices of Nezahualc6yotl's people have been lost through the centuries of European colonization, we do know a few things from pictorial and written histories that have been preserved (often by missionaries who then returned to Europe with these precious manuscripts). Here are a few insights into what it was like to be a musician performing under the reign of Nezahualc6yotl.

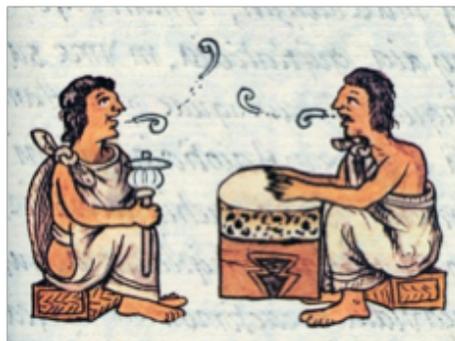
- The musicians were under great pressure to follow the rules exactly. Errors in performance were scandalous and severely punished.



A musician in error is punished, Florentine Codex Book 8 (a 16th century Nahuatl-language manuscript).

- Musicians performed using various instruments — flutes, trumpets, shells, shakers and drums like the huehuetl.

Performing 'flower-songs' using a huehuetl drum, Florentine Codex Book 3. The scroll shapes near their mouths indicate they are singing.



- When you were born determined your musical fate: if your astrological/agricultural calendar sign was "Ce: Ozomatli" (one monkey), you were predestined to be a singer, dancer or painter.
- Nahuatl poetry was always meant to be sung or at least accompanied by music, specifically a drum cadence (repetitive rhythmic pattern).
- Concerts were held outside and lasted from early morning till at least dusk. Instrumentalists were in the center, and singers stood or sat around them and their drums. Men and women sang together and songs began with one man and one woman starting slowly (the most skilled of the group and called the cuicaito, "the speaker of the song"). Drums entered next and then the whole chorus would begin to enter a few at a time until all were singing and moving to the music (including the audience, sometimes as large as several thousand in a village).

Cantos de Primavera’s Hoja de Ruta: Songs of Spring Roadmap

Seeing a new song, especially one as rhythmically complex as *Cantos de Primavera*, can be intimidating for some singers. Empower your choristers to develop a “roadmap” of their particular voice section and its journey through the piece by using the blank chart on the following page with students working individually or in small groups. An overview chart for reference is below.

Hoja de Ruta, the Spanish phrase that translates as “roadmap” is not literally a map of roads (*mapa de carreteras*), but rather the metaphorical version: a strategy, a plan, a step-by-step method of achieving a goal. Here our goal is to become familiar with the form, textures and motifs of *Cantos de Primavera* in order to make our rehearsals efficient and our appreciation of the composer’s craft that much more informed.

In order to encourage the use of appropriate and accurate musical terminology, discuss the terms “motif” (here best defined as a distinct rhythmic and melodic shape) and “texture” (unison, layers of motives versus unison rhythms, simultaneous text declamation, antiphonal are most evident in this work). Encourage students to color-code or otherwise indicate sections that use the same material again.

	Soprano	Alto	Tenor	Bass
M.1-4	Bird sounds 15 seconds Very soft to very loud and back to very soft	Clapping on legs 15 seconds Very soft to very loud and back to very soft	Wind sounds 15 seconds Very soft to very loud and back to very soft	Stomping/Jungle sounds 15 seconds Very soft to very loud and back to very soft
m.5-14	Rest till m.11 m.11= ‘du run’ 2 bar motif, sung twice	Rest till m.9 m.9=‘du ap’ 2 bar motif, sung three times	Rest till m. 7 m.7=‘da rin’ 2 bar motif, sung four times...	‘dum te re’ 2 bar motif sung five times...
m.15-22	Rest till m. 18 One bar echo of altos (m.17) Four bars of texted melody, rhythmically simple/smooth	3 bars of texted melody (sopranos echo last measure so altos rest), ‘du ap’ 2 bar motif but altered, sung twice	‘da rin’ motif continues 4 MORE times (total of 8)	‘dum te re’ motif continues 4 MORE times (total of 9)
m.23-44*	Antiphonal between S/A and T/B – sometimes 2 bars each, but mostly 2 beats each (which are usually rhythmic but not melodic echoes) one moment in m. 28 of the whole group responding (responsorial) to S/A either unison or in sixths or thirds			
*m.31-32,m.35-36, m.39-40, m.43-44	Refrain of sorts Unison rhythms except for basses on the first time “en el interior de la casa de la primavera” the first three times, last time ends with “tu eres el cantor” instead Except for first time bass line, harmonies are in parallel thirds/sixths or octaves Refrain is always mezzo-forte (medium loud)			
m.45-53	Begins a 6-bar melody made up of all the material from m.23-44 that is now treated canonically in all voices	Rests for 2 bars, then begins 6-bar canon	Vocal percussion four bars 4 ½ bars of canon	‘dum te re’ motif sung three times (6 bars), then sings the first two bars of canon
m.54-end	Entering after 4 bars of rest, ‘du run’ motif sung twice, then first 2 bars of canon melody, bird sounds to end	Entering WITH tenor (not after like the beginning) ‘du ap’ motif sung seven times	2 bar rest (as in the beginning), then ‘da rin’ motif sung seven times	‘dum te re’ 2 bar motif sung eight times perdendosi = dying away

Cantos de Primavera’s Hoja de Ruta: Songs of Spring Roadmap

Hoja de Ruta, the Spanish phrase that translates as “roadmap” is not literally a map of roads (*mapa de carreteras*), but rather the metaphorical version: a strategy, a plan, a step-by-step method of achieving a goal. Here our goal is to become familiar with the form, textures and motifs of *Cantos de Primavera* in order to make our rehearsals efficient and our appreciation of the composer’s craft that much more informed.

Fill out the chart below with information about your voice part from the musical score.

Section (circle one): SOPRANO ALTO TENOR BASS

Measure #	Text (nonsense syllables imitating drums or poetry text?)	Texture (what’s going on around your part – are there others singing with you in the same rhythm, echoing you, or are you on your own?)	Motifs (What kind of melody or rhythm do you have? Does it repeat? Have you sung this before in the piece?)
M.1-4			
m.5-14			
m.15-22			
m.23-44*			
*m.31-32,m.35-36, m.39-40, m.43-44			
m.45-53			
m.54-end			