

GERALD COHEN

*I felt my legs
were praying*

for Solo Voice,
SATB Chorus,
and Piano

PERUSAL SCORE

Program Note: *I felt my legs were praying*

We strive to use our words, our songs, our bodies—our whole being—to work for a better and more just world. When Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma in 1965, they exemplified religious leaders who hear the voice of the prophets and the Psalms as an explicit call to action. In this composition, I combine the words of Rabbi Heschel after the march—most famously remembered in the phrase “I felt my legs were praying”—with a verse from Psalm 35, which also speaks of one’s very body exclaiming praise, and praise of a God who protects the poor from those who would oppress them.

I thank the John Leopold and Martha Dellheim Endowment Fund and the H.L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary, who commissioned this piece for its premiere performance, by the Voces Novae chorus of Louisville, KY, at the May 2019 Cantors Assembly convention in Louisville. Gratitude also to Dr. Susannah Heschel, for permission to use the words of her father in this composition.

—Gerald Cohen

TEXT:

From Psalm 35 and the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Kol atzmotai tomarna Adonai mi chainochei
matzil ani meychazak mimenu, v'ani v'ayyon migozlo.

*[All of my bones exclaim: Adonai, who is like You!
saving the weak from the powerful, the needy from those who would prey on them.]*

And yet our legs uttered songs—
The march from Selma was a protest, a prayer.
Even without words, our march was worship,
I felt my legs were praying!

Psalm 35:10 and
Abraham Joshua Heschel

I felt my legs were praying

Gerald Cohen

Somewhat majestically ♩ = 88
mp *All of my bones*

Solo voice (tenor or soprano)
Kol atz - mo - tai Kol atz - mo - tai Kol atz - mo -

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

Somewhat majestically ♩ = 88
mp

Piano

6 Solo
exclaim: tai to - mar - na *All of my bones*

S
A
T
B
f Kol atz - mo - tai
f Kol atz - mo - tai
f Kol atz - mo - tai
f Kol atz - mo - tai

6 Pno.
f

11 *exclaim:* *Adonai, who is like You!*

S to - mar - na A - do - nai mi cha - mo - cha

A to - mar - na A - do - nai mi cha - mo - cha

T to - mar - na A - do - nai mi cha - mo - cha

B to - mar - na A do - nai mi cha - mo - cha

Pno.

16 *rit.* *ff* *Somewhat faster a tempo* $\text{♩} = 104$ *saving the weak from the powerful,*

S

A *ff* *mp cantabile*
Ma - tzil a - ni me - cha - zak mi - me - nu, v' - a -

T *ff* *mp cantabile*
Ma - tzil a - ni me - cha - zak mi - me - nu, v' - a -

B

16 *rit.* *ff* *Somewhat faster a tempo* $\text{♩} = 104$ *cantabile*

Pno. *mp sempre legato* *with Ped.*

the needy from those who would prey on them.

saving the weak from the powerful,

mp cantabile

22

S
Ma - tzil a - ni me - cha -

A
ni v'-ev-yon mi - goz' - lo Ma - tzil a - ni me - cha -

T
8 ni v'-ev-yon mi - goz' - lo Ma - tzil a - ni me - cha -

B
Ma - tzil me - cha -

Pno.

the needy from those who would prey on them.

28

S
zak mi-me-nu, v'-a - ni v'-ev - yon mi - goz' - lo

A
zak v'-a - ni mi - goz' - lo

T
8 zak v'-a - ni v'-ev - yon mi - goz' - lo

B
zak v'-a - ni mi - goz' - lo

Pno.

34

S *mp* a - ni v'-ev-yon mi - goz' -

A *mp* a - ni v'-ev - yon me - cha - zak, a - ni v' - ev - yon mi - goz' -

T *mp* a - ni v' - ev - yon me - cha - zak, a - ni mi - goz' -

B *mp* a - ni me - cha - zak,

Pno. *dim.* *mp*

40

S *accel.* *rit.* *ff* Ah

A *ff* lo. Kol atz - mo-

T *ff* lo. Kol atz - mo-

B *ff* Kol Kol

Pno. *accel.* *rit.* *ff* *Tempo I: Somewhat majestically* ♩ = 88

All of my bones exclaim:

45

S
Kol atz-mo-tai _____ ah - mo - tai to - mar - na A - do -

A
tai _____ to - mar - na A - do -

T
tai _____ to - mar - na A - do -

B
_____ atz - mo - tai _____ to - to to - mar - na A - do -

Pno.

mp

mp

mp

mp

mp

subito mp

Red.

Adonai, who is like You!

49

S
nai mi cha - mo - cha _____

A
nai mi cha - mo - cha _____

T
nai mi cha - mo - cha _____

B
nai mi cha - mo - cha _____

Pno.

cresc.

rit.

ff

ff

ff

ff

rit.

3

Red.

Somewhat faster, a march ♩=96
beginning quietly

a tempo

52

S

A

T

B

p quiet, but with determination

And yet our legs ut - tered songs, And yet our legs ut -

p quiet, but with determination

And yet our legs ut - tered songs, And yet our legs ut -

Somewhat faster, a march ♩=96
beginning quietly

52

a tempo

Pno.

subito p

59

S

A

T

B

m

- tered songs, The march from Sel - ma was a pro - test, a prayer. The march from Sel - ma was ___ a pro - test, a ___

mp

- tered songs, The march from Sel - ma was a pro - test, a prayer. The march from Sel - ma was ___ a pro - test, ___ a

59

Pno.

mp

64 *mf* *p*

S And yet our legs ut - tered songs, And yet our legs ut - tered songs,

A And yet our legs ut - tered songs, And yet our legs ut - tered songs,

T *mf* *p*
8 prayer And yet our legs ut - tered songs, And yet our legs ut - tered songs,

B prayer And yet our legs ut - tered songs, And yet our legs ut - tered songs,

Pno. *mf* *p*

70 *mp* *mp* *mp*

S *mp* saving the weak from the power of the *mp* the needy from those who would *mp* prey on them.
Ma - tzil a - ni me - cha - zak mi - me - nu, v' - a - ni v' - ev - yon

A *mp* All of my bones proclaim:
Kol atz - mo - tai Kol atz - mo - tai to - mar - na A -

T

B

Pno. *mp*
sempre legato with Ped.

76 *accel.* **With more energy** ♩ = 112

S mi - goz' - lo

A do - nai

T

B

Pno. *accel.* **With more energy** ♩ = 112 *mf*

Note: here and in the next phrase, the phrase accent should be on "words", not "-out."

80 *mp*

S E - ven with - out words, our march was wor - ship,

A E - ven with - out words, our march was wor - ship,

T E - ven with - out words, our march was wor - ship,

B

80 *mp simile*

Pno.

Simile: in the 2-note figure in the rh in mm. 79=87, sustain all notes (i.e. hold the upper dyad for a half note, not just an eighth note)

84

S
E-ven with-out words, our march was wor-ship,

A
E-ven with-out words, our march was wor-ship,

T
E-ven with-out words, our march was wor-ship,

B

Pno.

88 *mf cresc.*

S
I felt my legs were pray-ing, I felt my legs were pray-ing, I felt my legs were

A
cresc.
I felt my legs were pray-ing, I felt my legs were

T
mf cresc.
I felt my legs were pray-ing, *mf cresc.* I felt my legs were pray-ing, I felt my legs were

B
I felt my legs were pray-ing, I felt my legs were

Pno.

cresc.

92 *f* *mf cresc. poco a poco*

S pray - ing! E - ven with - out words, our

A pray - ing! *mf cresc. poco a poco* Ma - tzil a - ni me - cha - zak mi - me - nu,

T pray - ing! *mf cresc. poco a poco* Ma - tzil a - ni me - cha - zak mi - me - nu, Ma - tzil a - ni

B *mf* Kol atz - mo - tai to - mar - na A - do - nai

Pno. *f* *mf cresc. poco a poco*

less Ped.

98

S march was wor - ship, And yet our legs ut - tered songs, And yet our legs

A E - ven with - out words, our march Ma - tzil a - ni v' - ev -

T Ma - tzil a - ni v' - ev -

B mi cha - mo - cha And yet our legs ut - tered songs, And yet our legs

Pno.

Tempo I: Somewhat majestically ♩ = 88

rit.

ff

103

S ut - tered songs, Ah Kol atz - mo - tai

A yon Kol atz - mo - tai

T yon Kol atz - mo - tai

B ut - tered songs, ut - tered songs Kol atz - mo - tai

Tempo I: Somewhat majestically ♩ = 88

rit.

ff

Pno.

103

with Ped.

107

Solo

S ah to - mar - na Ah I felt my legs were pray -

A mar - na Ah

T to - mar - na Ah

B to - to - to - mar - na Ah

mf

subito mp

Pno.

107

ff

subito mp

110 **Freely** *rit.*

Solo 8 ing, I felt my legs were pray - ing, I felt my legs were

S

A

T 8

B

110 **Freely** *rit.*

Pno. *p*

Somewhat slower ♩ = 76
quiet, but with determination

116 Solo 8 pray - ing!

S *p* A - do - nai mi cha - mo - cha I felt my

A *p* A - do - nai mi cha - mo - cha

T 8 *p* Kol atz - mo - tai to - mar - na

B *p* Kol atz - mo - tai to - mar - na

Somewhat slower ♩ = 76
quiet, but with determination

116 Pno. *p*

122

S
legs were pray - ing, And yet our legs

A
And

T
8
p
Kol atz - mo - tai to - mar - na A - do - nai

B
p
A - do - nai

Pno.

126

S
mf ut - tered songs, *p* And yet our legs ut - tered songs,

A
mf songs, *p* And yet our legs ut - tered songs,

T
8
p
Kol atz - mo - tai to - mar - na

B
p
Kol atz - mo - tai to - mar - na

Pno.

mf *subito p*

Leg. Leg.

Somewhat slower ♩ = 60

131 *p* *rit.*

S I felt my legs were pray - ing!

A I felt my legs were pray - ing!

T I felt my legs were pray - ing!

B I felt my legs were pray - ing!

131 *rit.*

Pno. Somewhat slower ♩ = 60

PERUSAL SCORE

Ad. * *Ad.* (to end)