

Performing Notes on “Hlohonolofatsa”

Musical and Textual Origins

The song “Hlohonolofatsa” is listed as “traditional” on the *African Spirit* album.

Performance Notes

This transcription of the Soweto Gospel Choir’s “Hlohonolofatsa” is from the group’s 2005 album, *African Spirit*. There are also some live recordings of the piece on YouTube. Listening to and imitating Soweto Gospel Choir recordings of this piece and others is one way to uncover a rewarding and authentic performance.

Where the ranges are very low for sopranos and altos (e.g. the opening measures of the arrangement, and bars 22-23), lower voices (TB) may be added to the upper lines, for reinforcement. Conversely, if the TB parts are too high for the people singing those parts (e.g. bar 29, tenor), the conductor could mix in some treble voices for support. If the repetitive bass motives are too low for the basses in the choir, the whole piece could also be transposed up.

The Soweto Gospel Choir rarely stands still when performing. Their music works well as a processional or recessional, and limited choreography (usually still on the risers, in a choral formation) should be added. The music should be performed with authentic joy, a quality the group brings to everything it does.

Here’s the YouTube link for a 2017 Soweto Gospel Choir performance with choreography:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lFUFiKiwao>

The bass figure at measure 5 (and all other places like this throughout the transcription) is written with “I-yo-ho-ho, ho ho ho” lyrics, using an “h” rather than the sharp, glottal attacks as heard on the recording.

Soweto Gospel Choir sings at a *forte* dynamic for the majority of the piece (from bar 33 to the end), but conductors could easily add some contrasting dynamics, if desired. The repeated sections at 49 and 57 are good possibilities for this.

Text, Translation, and Pronunciation

“Hlohonolofatsa” has only a few lines of text, in Zulu.

Iyo, Hlohonolofatsa

ee-yoh, hloh hoh noh loh faht sah

[ijə hlo hɔ nɔ lo fat sa]

Ka lebitso la ntate

kah lee beet soh lahn tah teh

[ka li bit sɔ lan ta tɜ]

One additional pronunciation note: in bar 65, when “Iyo” is on one syllable, it can be pronounced “yoh”

Translation (from the Soweto Gospel Choir website):

Bless. Bless in the name of the Father.

For the Djembe Player

Most South African djembe players play a steady rhythm (putting a note on every subdivision of the ongoing rhythm) while accenting and shading the most important beats with volume and by using different parts of the drum. This applies throughout much of this piece and the notation indicates whether the pitch of the note is low, middle, or high. The neutral middle notes are always unstressed and soft while the high and (especially) low notes are played more loudly, and function as rhythmic drivers. Low notes are the loudest, played in the middle of the drum, while high “slap” notes are near the outer edge of the drum.

Soweto Gospel Choir regularly performs with at least two drum players, and that’s particularly aurally evident on their recording of “Hlohonolofatsa,” where one drum reinforces the syncopated bass rhythms while the other tends to ornament with faster rhythms on the higher parts of the drum. The written out djembe part included here incorporates elements of both of these. The djembe player(s) should always feel free to improvise, reacting to the vocal soloist and the choir’s musical material. Use the Soweto Gospel Choir’s recordings as aural guides.

Soweto Gospel Choir

Soweto Gospel Choir was formed in Soweto (**South West Townships**), a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002, and was initially led by its founding musical director, David Mulovhedzi. The group’s first album, *Voices of Heaven*, was released in 2005, and reached the No. 1 spot on Billboard’s World Music Chart three weeks after its release in the United States. The group tours worldwide and has appeared in nearly all of the world’s most prestigious venues and festivals, including Carnegie Hall, the Sydney Opera House, the Nelson Mandela Theatre, and the Royal Festival Hall in London. Soweto Gospel Choir has performed for such world dignitaries as President Bill Clinton, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Nelson Mandela, and has shared the stage with such diverse artists and groups as the Black-Eyed Peas, Johnny Clegg, Celine Dion, Josh Groban, the Harlem Gospel Choir, Herbie Hancock, John Legend, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Ozzy Osborne, Andre Rieu, Diana Ross, U2, Bebe Winans, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Soweto Gospel Choir has won nearly every award available in the gospel and world music categories, including three Grammy Awards for their albums *Blessed* (2007), *African Spirit* (2008), and *Freedom* (2018). Soweto Gospel Choir has founded its own AIDS orphans foundation, Nkosi’s Haven Vukani, and the choir performs for a variety of charitable organizations in South Africa. For more and current information on Soweto Gospel Choir, including updated touring information, please visit their website at <http://www.sowetogospelchoir.com>. The choir’s Twitter feed is @sowetogospel and their Facebook page can be found by searching for “Official Soweto Gospel Choir.” Recordings of the group can be viewed on YouTube and purchased at all the major online music retailers.

Arranger Lucas Bok

Arranger Lucas Bok Lucas Deon Bok was first introduced to music by his father, a guitarist. By the age of seven, Lucas was playing the bass guitar, then moved on to acoustic guitar and joined a church choir. He writes music, plays many instruments, and has performed not only with Soweto Gospel Choir but also with the group In Harmony. He was the music director of the Berea Christian Tabernacle prior to his joining Soweto Gospel Choir. He arranged several pieces for Soweto Gospel Choir and was instrumental to the group's success, both on and off the stage, serving as assistant director and accepting two Grammy Awards on behalf of the group. He earned ESPN's Sports Emmy for "Outstanding Music Composition" for the arrangements he wrote for U2 and Soweto Gospel Choir. He owns his own company, Lucas Bok Productions, and currently conducts the choir "Africa in Praise," as well as music directing at "Conquering Through Prayer Ministries International." He also runs a training program, "Music Empowerment Academy," which allows him to educate musicians and singers on music business, praise and worship, and the art of merging these important elements. He worked with Peter Gabriel on the song "Down to Earth" which appeared on the 2008 movie Wall-E. That song was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song. Lucas says that "Everything concerning my life is music, music, music." He and his wife Michele have two daughters.

Transcriber / Arranger Dr. Kurt Runestad

American choral conductor Kurt Runestad has been privileged to teach at Doane University (Crete, Nebraska) since the fall of 2004. In the summer of 2010, Runestad transcribed Soweto Gospel Choir's "Khumbaya" for use with his choirs at Doane the following academic year. This first partnership with the Soweto Gospel Choir has led to additional collaboration; he has attended several concerts with and without Doane students, transcribed additional pieces, and in May 2018 had the great pleasure of bringing a group of Doane singers to Johannesburg, South Africa, where the American singers and Soweto Gospel Choir spent a couple of hours together in a rehearsal and clinic. At Doane, Runestad conducts several choirs, including the acclaimed Doane Choir, which under his direction has performed in 14 countries on 4 continents, and throughout the United States. Runestad graduated from St. Olaf College (Northfield, Minnesota) with a B.A. in music education, taught 10 years in the public schools of Iowa and Minnesota, and earned two graduate degrees in choral conducting from the University of Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa). He is a frequent clinician, arranger, and adjudicator for choirs throughout the Midwest. He and his wife, Carly Woythaler-Runestad, have two children, daughter Avery and son Owen.

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