Song Seeking Songbook: Voices and optional accompaniment

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Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
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BRIATHAR DÉ MO LÓCHRANN
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Song-Seeking Project

The Song Seeking project sought to enhance musical participation for people within the asylum seeking system in Ireland and connect to broader singing communities. The project was led by Dr Ailbhe Kenny of Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and involved a cross-agency collaboration between Sing Ireland (SI) and the Irish Refugee Council (IRC). This project and partnership was enabled through the Creative Ireland Programme, specifically through the National Creativity Fund 2018-19.

Across six direct provision (DP) centres, the Song Seeking project involved intergenerational group singing workshops with choral facilitators as well as composing workshops. DP was set up in Ireland in the year 2000 as a state system of housing those seeking international protection while in the asylum seeking process. The system was originally conceived as a short-term solution to provide food, board and basic necessities for no longer than six months. Currently there are 7,400 people seeking asylum who are living within 72 DP and emergency accommodation centres. One third of these people are children.

This songbook is a collection of fun, easy, and engaging pieces that have been informed by my experiences with 'Song Seeking' groups across the country, where I joined the choral facilitators in their workshops. My priority is that the singers have an enjoyable time, to allow an opportunity for singers to interact socially, and to share inspiring musical moments with each other.

Mary Amond O'Brien, a choral facilitator on this project, suggested that I look at the concept of 'Ubuntu' when considering texts for use in this songbook. This is a philosophy from South Africa that celebrates the human spirit and focuses on people's relationships with each other within a community. In a nutshell, it means, 'A person is a person through other people'. As observed by President Michael D. Higgins, this philosophy has its Irish correspondence in the word 'Meitheal'—an expression of the ancient and universal notion of cooperation in response to social need.[1] This philosophy is given its musical realization in group singing. In a choir, singers gain satisfaction and joy from blending their own voice with those of others in working together towards the goal of making beautiful music. A choir of one voice, does not exist. This philosophy emphasises the goals of the project, to encourage social inclusion and promote individual, community, and national wellbeing. Accordingly, I used traditional Ubuntu-related proverbs from different parts of Africa, and their English translations, as the texts for these songs.

Dr Seán Doherty, 2020

1. Michael D. Higgins, 'Foreword' in *80:20 Developments in an Unequal World* (Oxford: New Internationalist, 2016).

1. Kali kokha

Text

Kali kokha nkanyama, tili awiri ntiwanthu[2]	*When you are on your own you are as good as an animal of the wild; but when there are two of you, you're part of a community*

Performance note

This song has taken inspiration from the great jazz vocalist and conductor Bobby McFerrin, and his demonstration of the power of the pentatonic scale. In this demonstration, he uses his whole body in an energetic form of cheironomy, a form of musical conducting in which pitch information is conveyed through gesture; he has the non-specialist audience spontaneously sing a pentatonic scale with this method, over which he improvises simultaneously. I intend for the canon to be taught using this method of cheironomy. Leaders are to introduce the concept in the manner demonstrated by McFerrin in the video (https://tinyurl.com/ak2cefz). I have composed the canon entirely in conjunct (step-wise) motion in the pentatonic scale, so that this can be achieved. The singers apply the English translation of the Chichewa text after the canon melody has been learned. The canon melody has a wide range; if this does not suit the singers, or if it is too long to be memorised effectively, split the canon melody into two phrases:

- Lower voices: When you are on your own you are as good as an animal of the wild
- Upper voices: But when there are two of you, you're part of a community

The ostinato is to be taught using call and response, and may be performed as a call and response throughout the song. Singers may imitate the sounds of 'animals of the wild', as described in the text, of their own choosing and at their own discretion during performance.

2. Anna-Lena Østern and Sunniva Skjøstad Hovde, 'Untamed Stories told by artists in Malawi and Norway' in *Performative Approaches in Arts Education: Artful Teaching, Learning and Research*, ed. by Anna-Lena Østern and Kristian Nødtvedt Knudsen (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 175.

1. Kali kokha

Trad. Malawian Proverb in Chichewa language

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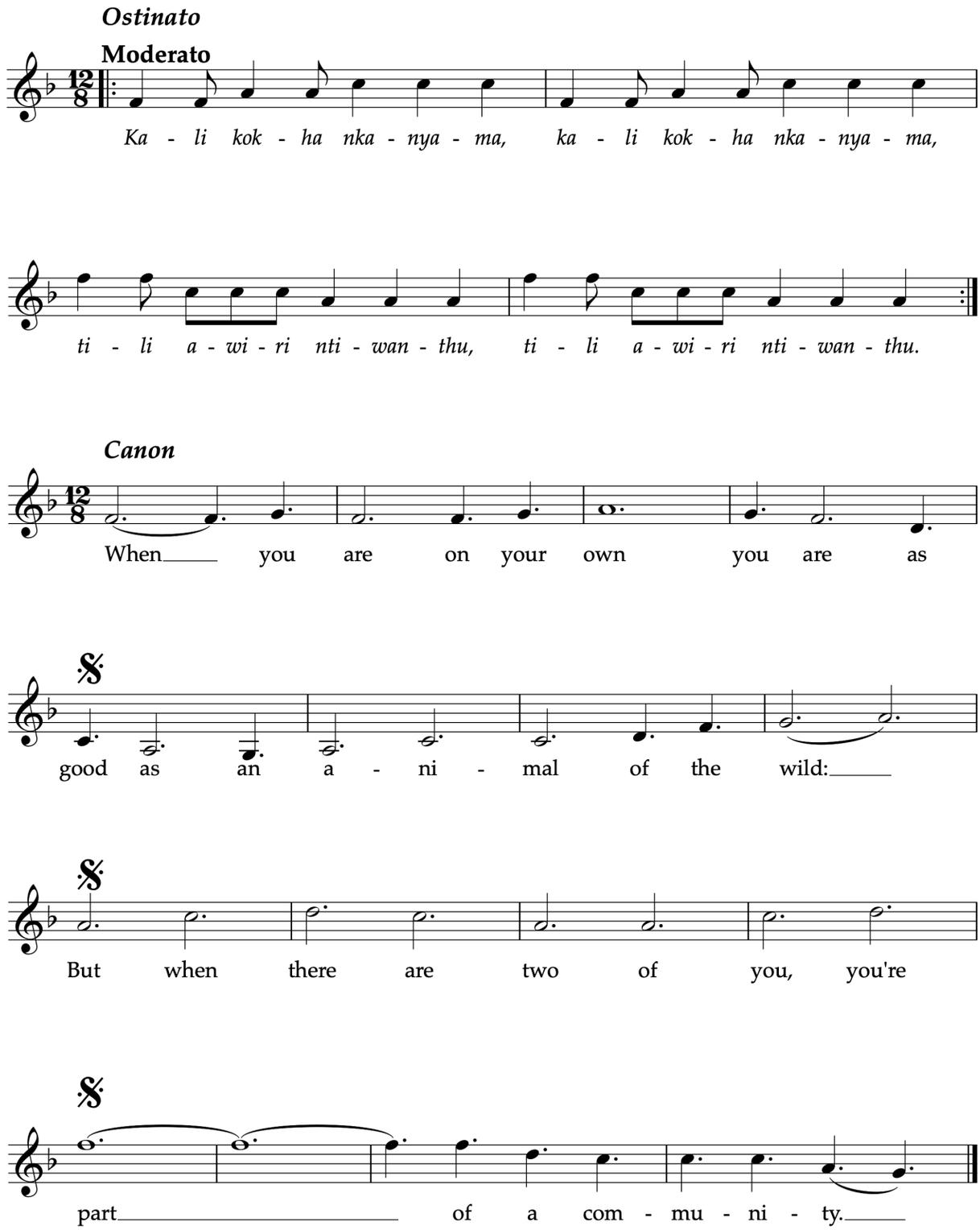

2. Khuluma isintu

Text

Khuluma isintu[3]	*Speak to the people*

Performance note

This song is intended to be taught entirely through the call-and-response method as outlined in the realized score. The call-and-response method not only conveys information on pitch and rhythm, but also, crucially, on phrase length, hence the deliberate piecemeal presentation is for pedagogical as much as for performance reasons. The following gestures should be used to minimize verbal instructions:

- Leader points at themselves: listen to the leader as s/he demonstrates.
- Leader points at singers: singers repeat what the leader has demonstrated.
- Leader makes circle with finger: continue repeating phrase.
- Rudimentary gestures regarding dynamics and cut-offs/entries.

The syncopated upper vocal parts of this song should be underpinned by improvised percussion that emphasise the underlying 4/4 beat pattern. A 'box-step' dance would work well with this song.

3. Davies M.M Chanda, 'The African Identity Crisis', *Times of Zambia* www.times.co.zm/?p=79069 [accessed 7 May 2019]

2. Khuluma isintu

Trad. Ubuntu proverb, Zulu language

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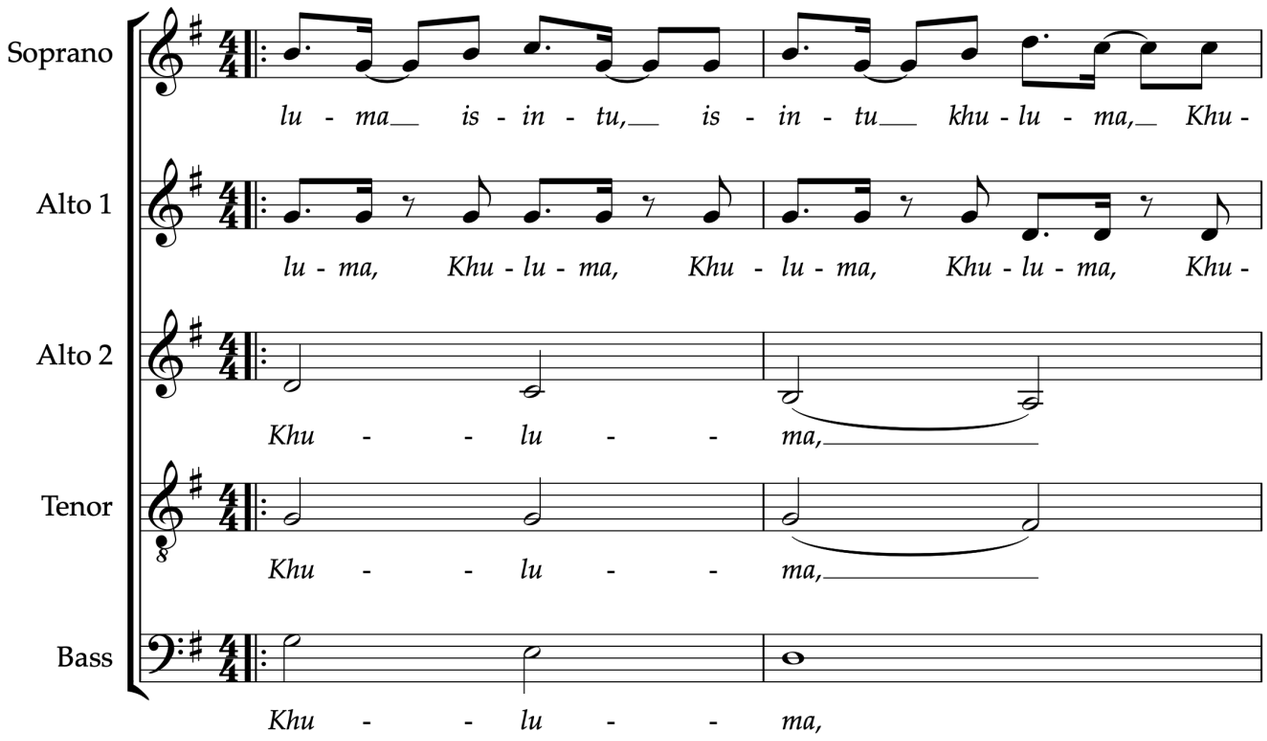
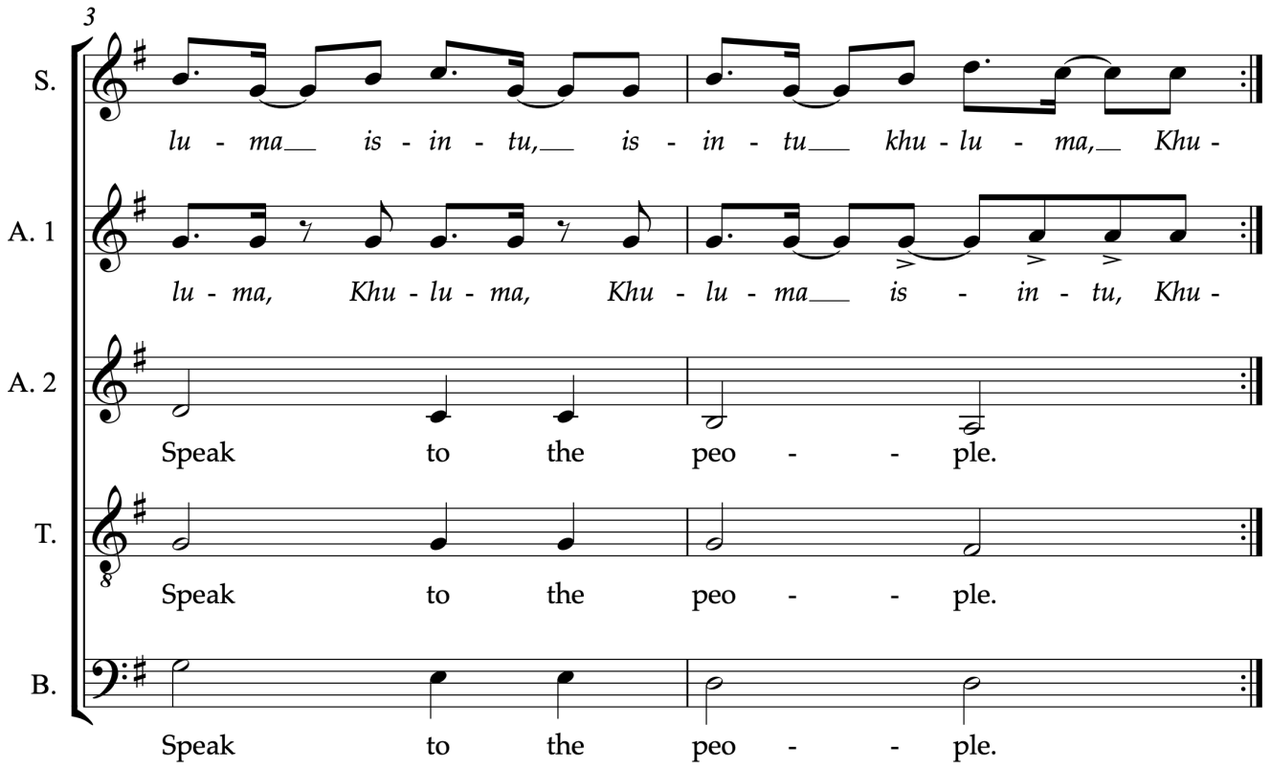
Moderato

Percussion *ad lib.*





3. Masakhane

Text

Masakhane![4]	*Let us build one another up!*

Performance note

The learning and performance of this song may be approached in different ways and at the discretion of the leader. The melody is learned first as call and response, before adding the rhythmic repetitions of 'Masakhane'. These parts should then be instructed to sing very quietly, or drop out entirely while the lower voices learn their parts, beginning from the very lowest voice, to give the impression of 'building up' as described in the text. At the direction of the leader, all parts should re-enter in full voice, and with added percussion.

Aspects of the song may be changed according to the context of the performance: it may be transposed, vocal parts omitted, or extra vocal parts improvised, and extra percussive or harmonic accompaniment added. Once all vocal parts have entered, the leader may introduce variety by altering the dynamics, texture, and tempo. A clearly signalled ritardando and held final note will serve as an appropriate ending.

4. Chris Vervliet, *The Human Person, African Ubuntu and the Dialogue of Civilisations* (London: Adonis & Abbey, 2009), p. 27.

3. Masakhane

Trad. Ubuntu proverb, Zulu language

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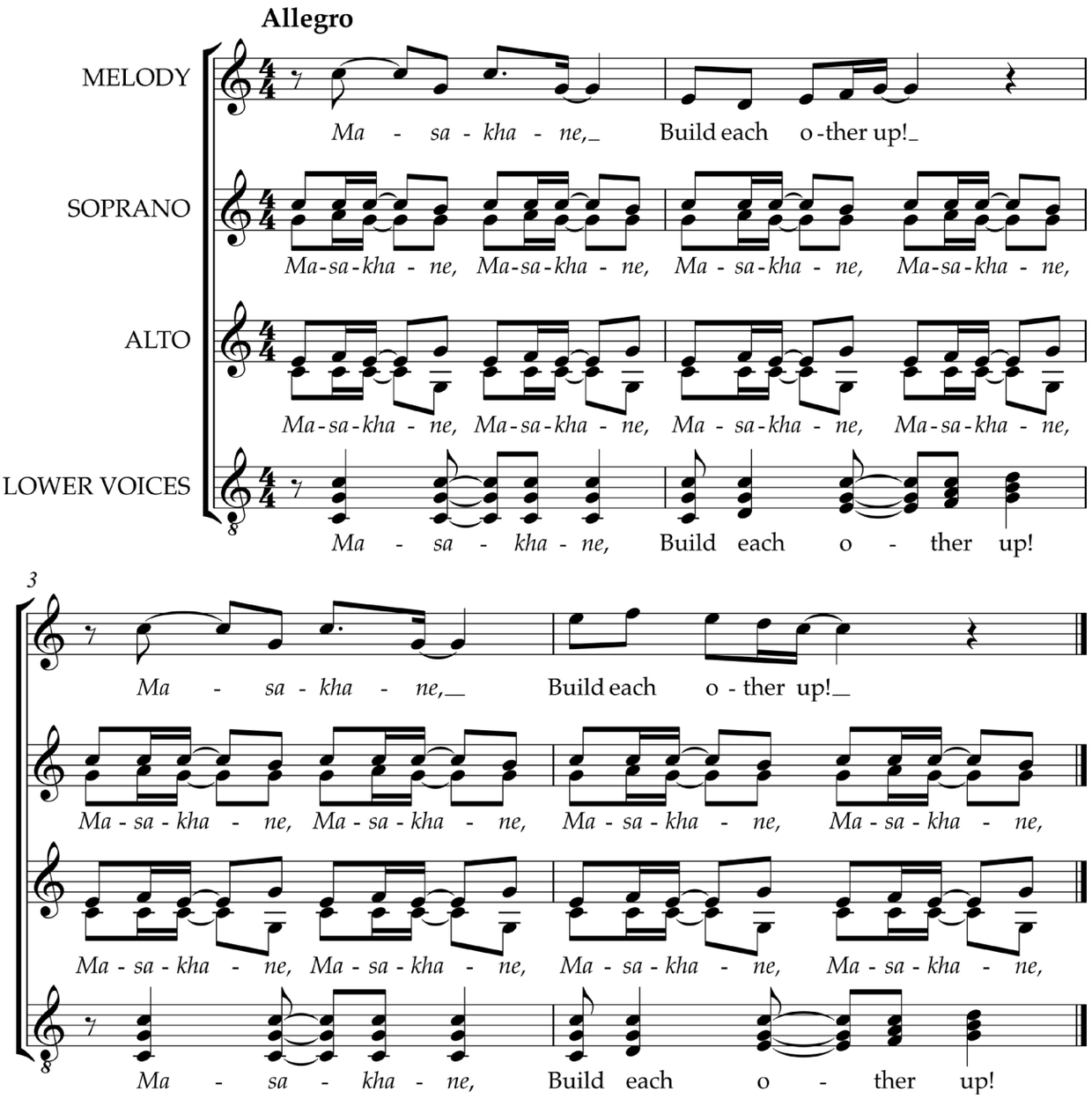

4. Motho ke motho ka

Text

Motho ke motho ka batho babang	*I am because you are*	Setswana language
Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu[5]	*A person is a person because of other people*	Zulu language

Performance note

These texts present perhaps the clearest encapsulation of the philosophical concept of 'Ubuntu'. They have been composed with a view to being learned spontaneously, using call and response, in performance. The order of entries and number of repetitions in the score is for demonstration purposes only. Leaders should react to the skill and retention level of the singers. One phrase and its translation may be used for a complete performance, with the two phrases being retained for larger groups, or in performance with more leaders, who can carry the line independently. A repeated chordal pattern on the keyboard using chords I, ii and V would ensure that tuning is accurate throughout the learning/performance process. A gentle djembe beat would suit as a rhythmic accompaniment.

5. Vervliet, *Human Person*, p. 20.

4. Motho ke motho ka

Trad. Ubuntu proverbs in Sotho and Setswana languages

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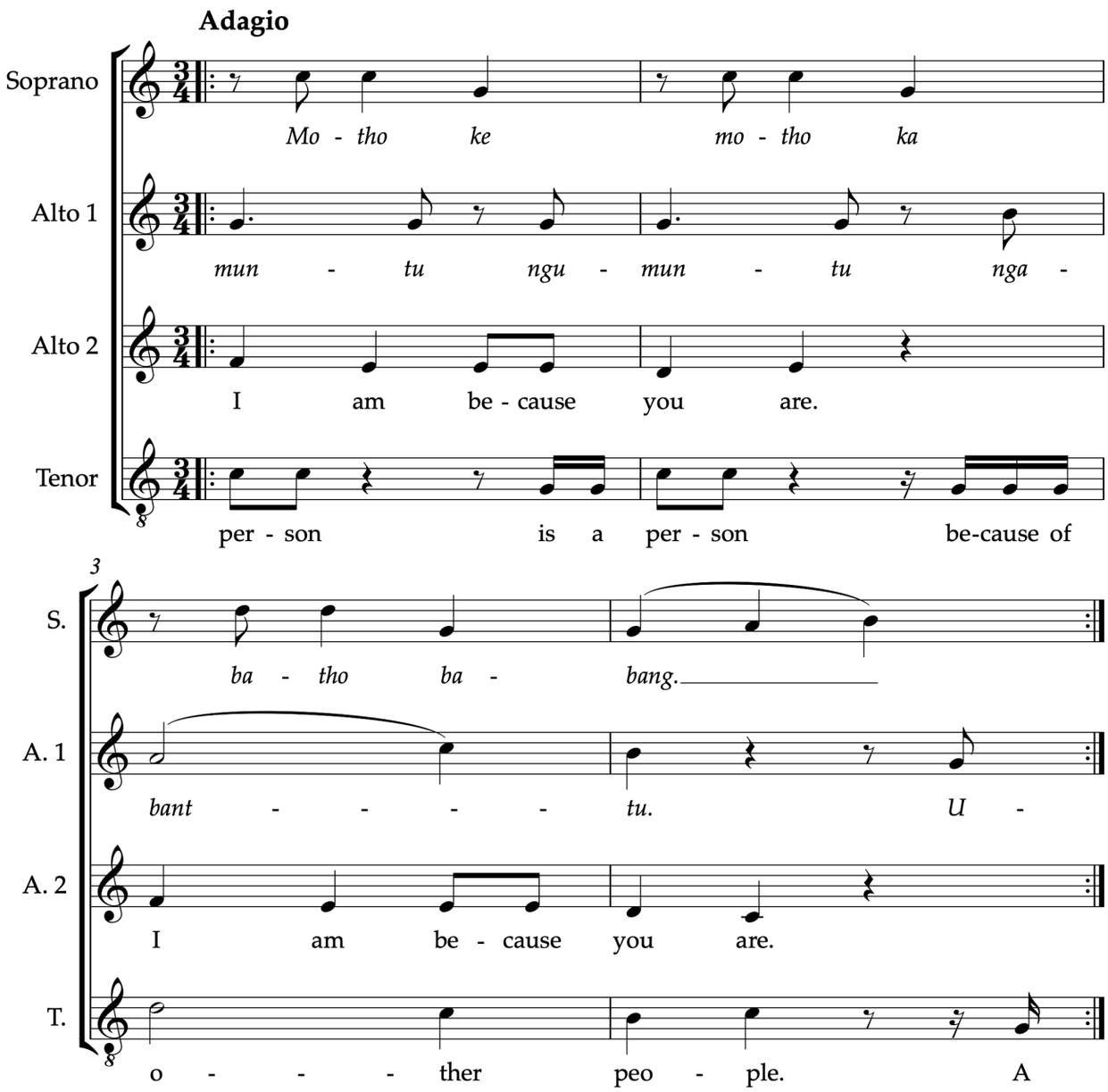

5. Mwana wa nzako

Text

Mwana wa nzako ngwako yemwe, uk-achenjera manja udya naye[6]	*A neighbour's child is yours as well; their success is yours too.*

Performance note

This is a gentle, lilting song in the style of a lullaby. This song is a double canon, with other voices entering at the segno signs, and is intended to be learned and performed in a variety of ways: the first workshop may focus on the melody of one canon alone; the second workshop may introduce more independence in part-singing by having the melody in canon; the third workshop may focus on the second canon; the fourth workshop may combine the two canons.

6. Kondwani Bell Munthali, *Malawi — Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture* (Kuperard, 2018), n.p.

5. Mwana wa nzako

Trad. Ubuntu proverb, Chichewa language

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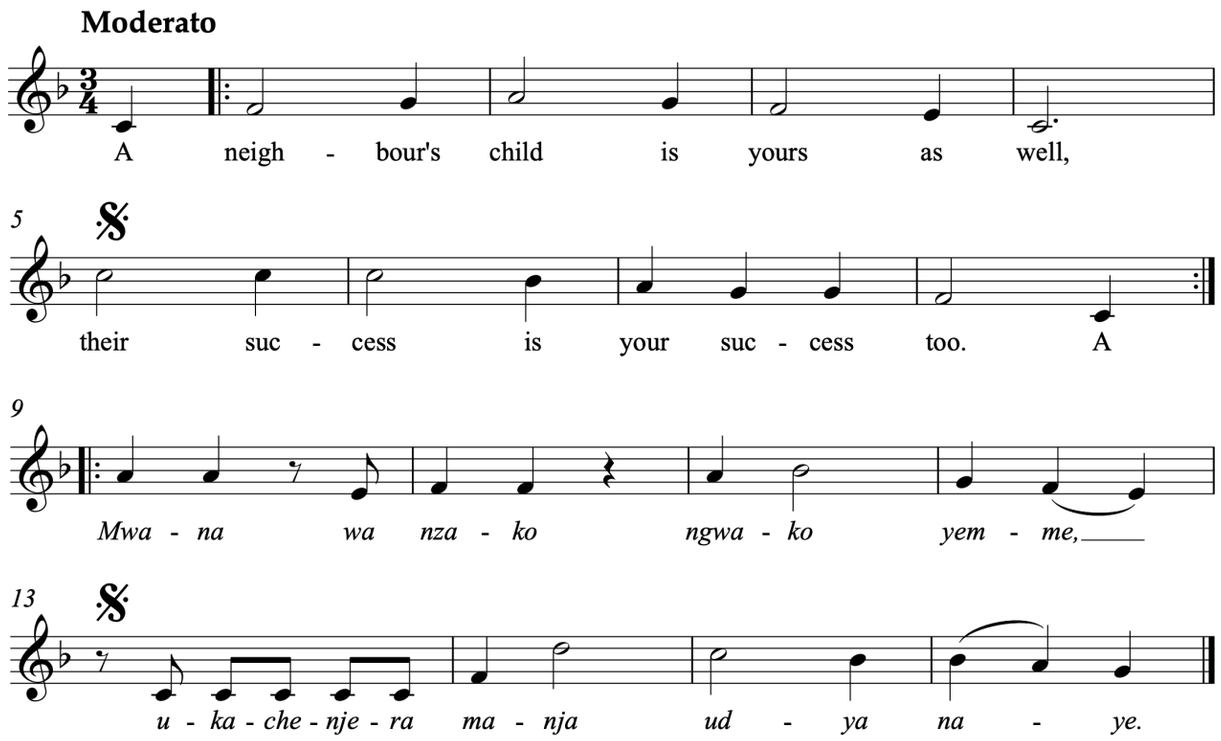


6. Broken Heart

Text

No text. Perform to ‘ahh’ or similar sound.

Performance note

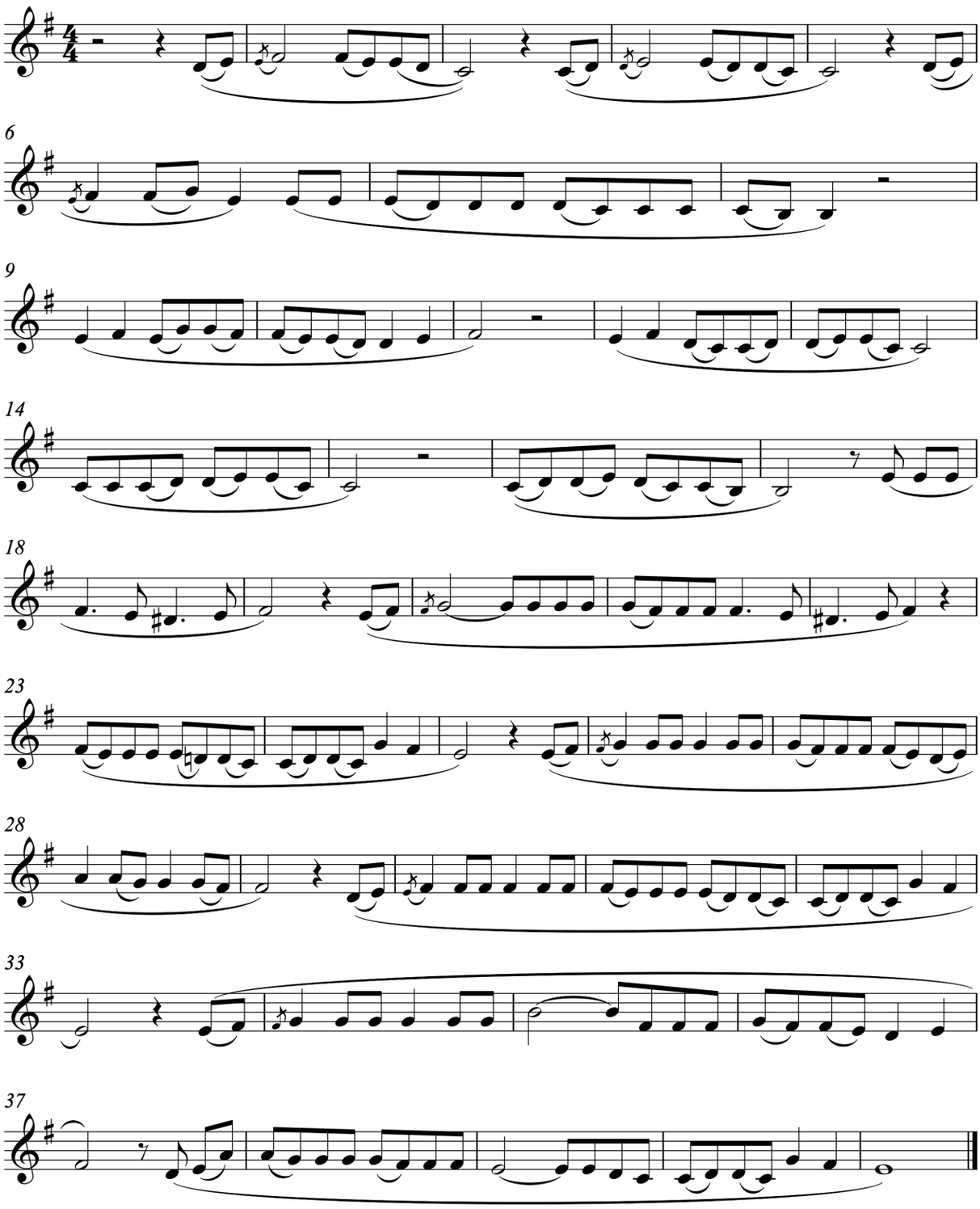
This is a transcription of an original composition by a refugee who has been part of the ‘Song Seeking Project’ and who performed this song for me on a guitar. He had told the choral facilitator of how the composition of this song helped him to come to terms with the trauma that he endured during the civil war that ravaged his home country and caused him to flee.

The song is to be learned through a ‘lining out’ method. This method, also called hymn lining, is a form of a cappella hymn-singing or hymnody in which a leader gives each line of a hymn tune as it is to be sung, usually in a chanted form. It can be considered a form of call and response. The resulting response is not expected to be exact, especially in the longer phrases, and indeed, an effect of heterophony, like that of Gaelic psalm singing, is desirable in performance. This effect could be heightened with some male singers holding a drone on the note E.

6. Broken Heart

Original composition by a refugee

arr. Seán Doherty



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