

Conductor's Notes – Shenandoah – arr. James Erb

There are many beautiful arrangements of this American folksong. This is one is particularly well crafted. It opens with the unaccompanied unison women's voices singing verse 1, followed by the unaccompanied unison men's voices in verse 2. In verse 3, the lower voices harmonize below the melody in pulsing dotted rhythms (evoking the movement of waves?). Toward the end the women's voices reprise verse 1, singing in canon. With dotted quarter rhythms the lower voices evoke the feeling of waves, harmonizing below the melody in the later verses.

Vocal tone: Keep those vowels open and resonant;

Always sing "see" through an "ooh" vowel; also "years", "hear"

Sing an Italian "o", every time you sing "Shenando"

Sing "wide" – ah-ee (diphthong); sing "bound" – ah-ooh; "smiling" – ah-ee;

Sing "Missouri" – mih – soo – ree (ee – sung through "ooh" shape)

"She – n-n-an- do" – the "n" is an "n" hum

Always breathe intelligently to support the tone!

Breathing: These phrases are best sung as long phrases without "catch breaths" (unless necessary); Try to breath at punctuation marks – commas (some) and periods in the text.

S/A:

vs. 1: Do not breathe after the first "Shenando". After "hear" or between "wide" and "Missouri"

T/B

vs. 2: Do not breathe after "see" or "hear" or between "wide" and "Missouri"

vs. 3: Do not breathe after "years," or "hear" or between "wide" and "Missouri"

vs. 4: Melody breathe as in verse 1

Phrasing: These musical lines tell you how to phrase. Follow them. With "see you", "hear you" – accent the first word, taper the second.

Articulation: This should be sung legato throughout. In the closing "She – n-n-an- do" section on the last two pages be sure to emphasize each of the hummed "n"s. You will really hear the "rolling river" when you do that.

Dynamics:

The entire song is a slow crescendo – peaking in verse measure 22-23, followed by an even longer decrescendo.

The last four pages are a gradual decrescendo. You cannot be too soft at the end.

Tenors and basses your last "Shenando" is marked "barely audible" and should be sung in a very light falsetto.

Diction: Watch the "r"s carefully. Drop the "r"s followed by a consonant or those at the end of a word "river", "years", "hear", "your". Just eliminate them – let the vowel carry the word.

There usually is no need to "flip" an "r" preceding a vowel in folksongs.

The "sh" sound in "Shenando" should be clear (more waves); This is especially an effective sound when the voices are in canon; This holds true for the mens voices below in both verse three and in the final verse.

Rhythm: Lower voices - be very clear and accurate with your dotted quarter rhythms in verse 3. Give the dotted quarter and eighth note pattern emphasis without rushing. Your part is very important there to give contrast and harmonic support to the melody without rushing the tempo.