

Bread and Roses - Conductor's Notes

Background: This is a famous union song based on a poem by James Oppenheim. The poem was written to celebrate the movement for women's rights and was first published in *The American Magazine* in December, 1911. It is linked with the Lawrence textile mill strike of 1912. The strike was initiated to protest a reduction in pay. The strikers carried signs that quoted the poem, "we want bread and roses too."

The idea of "bread and roses" is also linked to an early 20th century American women's rights activist and worker's rights activist, Rose Schneiderman, in a speech to a more affluent audience.

What the woman who labors wants is the right to live, not simply exist — the right to life as the rich woman has the right to life, and the sun and music and art. You have nothing that the humblest worker has not a right to have also. The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too. Help, you women of privilege, give her the ballot to fight with.

The poem has been set to music by multiple composers. The melody we are singing is by Mimi Farina who wrote it in the 1970's when it was recorded by singer/songwriter Judy Collins. It has become an anthem for labor rights in the USA and around the world.

Notes from: <https://chawedrosin.wordpress.com>

•Eisenstein, Sarah (1983). *Give Us Bread but Give Us Roses: Working Women's Consciousness in the United States, 1890 to the First World War*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. ISBN 978-0-7100-9479-7.

RHYTHM: NOTICE THAT NOTE VALUES ARE EDITED IN LAST MEASURES

LYRICS: ARE MODIFIED IN PLACES TO MATCH ORIGINAL POEM

Voicing: verse 1: solo; verse 2: S A; verse 3: SII A SI; verse 4: SII A SI Men -may divide on lowest pitches
Men sing verse 4 only; tenors sing at upper octave as needed

Vocal tone – Just sing with your natural voice; this is not oratorio or opera.

I would recommend listening to some of the renditions of this song that are sung by everyday people at union events – rather than those of choral ensembles.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ji4qbOjyps&t=241s>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_6wYVKcARs

and this clip from the film *Pride*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDdvbqbmM4o>

Breathing – these are four bar phrases; It will be more musical if you sing without breathing between phrases. However, breathe as needed. A good guideline is to breathe at rests and punctuation marks.

Phrasing – The text sings about marching and we should hear and feel an underlying pulse in the singing. But this is not Souza – it is more of a heart beat and determination that we want to feel in the pulse. Always have a little lift between the consecutive "Bread and roses" statements at the end of each verse.

Dynamics – Dynamics are heard in the addition of voices with each successive verse. The end of each verse seems to call for a slight decrescendo. Generally, because this song is a protest, the dynamic should be in the mezzo-forte range so that the importance of the message is felt and heard.

Diction – We want our words to be understood, but we also want a very natural sound. This is not a classical piece. It is a union song – a song of the people – so diction needs to be clear. but not over emphasized.

Articulation – Overall, this should be sung legato, while feeling as if you are marching – so a pulse is always present. However, whenever you sing the word “marching” – separate the consecutive statements and give the first syllable a slight accent.