

Conductor's Notes – I Hear America Singing

Background: This is a setting of a poem from American poet, Walt Whitman's famous work, *Leaves of Grass*. With this collection of poetry, Whitman was attempting to reach out to "everyday Americans." The 1855 publication of *Leaves of Grass* was a much celebrated event in literary history. In his review of the work, Ralph Waldo Emerson described the book as "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom America has yet contributed."

Composer, Neil Ginsberg (b. 1969) is a teacher, pianist, music director, and conductor based in New York City.

You may hear the SSA setting of this piece at www.sbmp.com

Breathing: breaths are clearly indicated by rests, and punctuation marks.

Phrasing: phrases are generally only 2-4 bars in length; it is important to sustain the longer note values at the end of many of the phrases; follow the dynamic markings to shape phrases and sustained notes

Diction: This is the first song in our program and it sets the tone for everything that follows. Words need to be clear with an American diction that does not flip "r"s but nonetheless, drops any "r" followed by a consonant or a rest. ("I he-uh" / "I hear America")
Consonant endings followed by a rest - can fall on that rest - as in "singing his." (pages 5-7)
Always attend to "t", "d", "p", "k"; initial "b", "c", "p", "d", "f"

Dynamics: These are clearly marked throughout the score, follow them carefully.
Take note of the following: pages 3-6 follow a gradual crescendo; so do pages 7-14 (although this crescendo is more gradual)

Articulation:

everyone: the motif for "I hear America" (first state in alto part at beginning) put emphasis on the 16th notes on "I" and the first two syllables of "America"; sustain final syllable when it is a longer note value (measure 4,6 etc.)

measures 11-38; legato except for syncopations "singing his"; give that a little "punch";

page 13 in 6/8 and 3/8 meter strong accent on first of each triplet

pages 14 -17 legato, all voices

page 19 – measures 91,92 – accent syncopations; Page 20 – legato to the end

soprano: legato – measures 7 and 8: pages 8 and 9 -boatman", "the deckhand" – legato; page 11 and 12 legato;

alto: page 9 through page 13 first measure: marcato through that entire section; observe the accent on "singing" everytime; pages 15-16 legato

men: whenever you sing “I hear, I hear” – separate the two statements with a lift; sustain quarter notes; this motif occurs throughout the piece; page 16, measure 71 -72 legato

tenor: page 10 legato; measures 68 – 69 – bring this melody and words out; any time you are the main voice, sing out fully

bass: page 10 – legato; page 11, measure 45 – page 12, measure 49