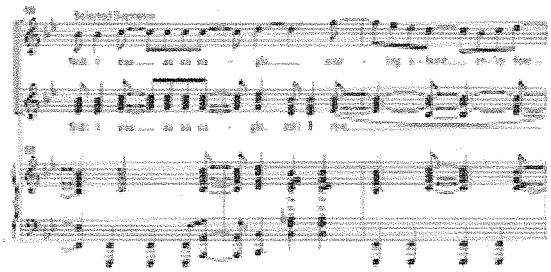
...Triple Play: Choral Scores *Of, By* and *For* Women

No Mirrors is the story of a young African-American woman who grew up knowing her own value not by looking into a mirror but by looking into her reflection in her grandmother's eyes: "There were no mirrors in my Nan's house, and the beauty that I saw in everything was in her eyes ... I only knew love and I didn't know hate."

A powerful, up-tempo gospel piece is **Rosephanye Powell**'s *Still I Rise*, scored for ssaa, soloist and piano with optional bass and drum set. As the composer explains, "*Still I Rise* was inspired by the poem of the same name by poet laureate Maya Angelou. It is a women's anthem, saluting the strength of women to persevere through life's difficulties: low self-esteem, physical and emotional abuse, rape, incest, prejudice, abandonment, and such like. In summary, though a woman's life or past may be filled with tears and heartaches, with each day that she finds herself still living, she finds that she has grown stronger and risen a little higher because her circumstances have not overcome her. Thus, every new day can be one of hope and joy because regardless of the past, today, 'still I rise!'" Scored for ssaa divisi, *Rise* is rhythmically powerful and energetic for the chorus, and takes a good gospel soloist who can improv in the 'shout' section of the score. An audio sample is on the composer's website.



Ex. 3 – Rosephanye Powell, Still I Rise, m.68-70

Carol Barnett's *The Day of Hope* is an accessible three-movement, 12 minute work in honor of Shirin Ebadi, Iranian human rights lawyer and recipient of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize. The score includes Ebadi's texts along with those of Persian poets of the 11th through 14th centuries, all of which speak of human rights and freedom from violence. "The music is a free translation into the Western choral idiom of traditional Persian music, its exotically ornamented monody..." explains the composer. Oboe, harp and percussion instruments including doumbek, sistrum, rain stick and rattles accompany voices, mainly homophonic, which are often in two or three parts. Truly a beautiful and very powerful score.

Chant for Great Compassion was written by **Abbie Betinis** in response to the earthquake that took the lives of nearly 70,000 people in Sichuan Province, southwestern China, in May 2008. Betinis explains that her score "is for anyone in any need or trouble. It is about calling out for strength and courage – as individuals and also on behalf of our generation. The opening melody is inspired by the traditional chant to the Buddhist goddess Guan Yin, whose name means 'she who hears the cries of the world'. To comprehend the needs of so many, her head split into eleven pieces, hence the 11-part chords in the score." Voiced for ssaa-divisi, the texts in the score are from Chinese writer and elegant orator Qiu Jin, Sichuan journalist and editor Wang Erbei, and the 7thc Great Compassion Mantra.

- **Joan Szymko** (www.joanszymko.com): *Beauty of Your Dreams* (Eleanor Roosevelt; Eng; ssaa, pf; 5'; Santa Barbara #564), *Always Coming Home* (Ursula LeGuin; Eng; ssaa, vc, pf; 6'; Roger Dean #15/2447R), *The Singing Place* (Lily Long; Eng; ssaa, pf; 6'30; Earthsongs S-305), *Circle* (Hadewijch II, 13c; Eng; ssaa; 2'30; Treble Clef TC-192), *As a Woman* (Virginia Woolf; Eng; ssa; 2'10; via composer); *You are the Music* (Amy Lowell; Eng; ssaa, pf; 5'; Santa Barbara #804).
- **Ysaye Barnwell** (www.ysayebarnwell.com): *Wanting Memories* (Y. Barnwell; Eng; ssaaa; 5'; Musical Source YMB-103), *No Mirrors in My Nana's House* (Y. Barnwell; Eng; ssaaa; 3'; Musical Source YMB-101).
- **Rosephanye Powell** (www.rosephanyepowell.com): *Still I Rise* (R. Powell; Eng; ssaa, solo; 4'; Gentry #JG2346)
- **Carol Barnett** (www.carolbarnett.net): *The Day of Hope* (Shirin Ebadi, et al; Eng; ssaa, ob, perc, harp; 12'; Roger Dean 45/1159R), *Song of Perfect Propriety* (Dorothy Parker; Eng; ssa, pf; 4', Earthsongs S-291)
- **Abbie Betinis** (www.abbiebetinis.com): *Chant for Great Compassion* (Qiu Jin, Wang Erbei, trad. 7c; Eng; ssaa-divsi; 5'30; self-published)

Other scores:

- **Gwyneth Walker** (www.gwynethwalker.com): *To Sing is to Fly* (Joan Baez; Eng; ssaa, pf; 3'; "Love is a Rain of Daimonds" from *Songs for Women's Voices* (set of six texts by May Swenson; Eng; ssaa, pf; ECS Publishing #5023)
- **Jocelyn Hagen** (www.jocelynhagen.com): *Joy* (Sara Teasdale; Eng; ssa, vln, pf; 3'30; self-published); *Under the Stars, One Holy Night* (Anna Driscol; Eng; treble + women, 2 C instr, pf; 3'; self-published)