



# ON MY WAY TO CANADA

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SATB, Piano  
RM ACH 263

**RENFORTH MUSIC**  
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# On My Way to Canada

Joshua McCarter Simpson (ca.1820–1876)

Harris Loewen

Adapted by Harris Loewen

*mf*  $\text{♩} = 72$

Soprano  
I'm on my way to Can - a - da, that cold and drear - y land; the

Alto  
*mf*  
I'm on my way\_ to Can - a - da, that cold and drear - y land;\_ the

Tenor  
*mf*  
I'm on my way\_ to\_ Can - a - da, that cold and drear - y land;\_ the

Bass  
*mf*  
I'm on my way to Can - a - da, that cold and drear - y\_ land;\_ the

Piano  
*mf*  
8va\_

7

S.  
dire ef - fects of slav - er - y I can no long - er stand. My soul is vexed with -

A.  
dire ef - fects\_ of slav - er - y I can no long - er stand. My soul is vexed\_ with -

T.  
dire ef - fects\_ of\_ slav - er - y I can no long - er\_ stand. My soul is vexed with -

B.  
dire ef - fects of slav - er - y I can no long - er stand. My soul is vexed with -

Piano  
8va\_

12

S. *- in me so, to think that I'm a slave. I now re - solve to strike the blow for*

A. *- in\_\_ me\_\_ so, to think that I'm a slave. I now re - solve\_\_ to strike the blow for*

T. *- in\_\_ me so, to think that I'm a slave. I now re - solve\_\_ to\_\_strike the blow for*

B. *- in\_\_ me so, to think that I'm\_ a slave. I now re - solve to strike the blow for*

17

S. *free-dom or the grave. Oh, right - eous trav - el - er, will you not pit - y me, and*

A. *free-dom or the grave. Oh,\_\_ right - eous trav - el - er,\_\_ will you not pit - y, pit - y me, and*

T. *free-dom or the\_ grave. Oh,\_\_ right - eous trav - el - er, will you not pit - y, pit - y me,*

B. *free-dom or the grave. Oh, trav - el - er, will you not pit - y me, and*

## On My Way to Canada

23 *mp*

S. aid me on to Can - a - da, where suff' - ring souls are free. I

A. aid me on to Can - a - da, where suff' - ring souls are free. I

T. aid me on to Can - a - da, where suff' - ring souls are free.

B. aid me on to Can - a - da, where suff' - ring souls are free.

28 **A**  $\text{♩} = 82$

S. heard the queen of Eng - land say, if we would all for - sake our

A. heard the queen of Eng - land say, if we would all for - sake our

*mp*

32

S. na - tive land of slav - er - y, and come a - cross the lake, that she was stand - ing

A. na - tive land of slav - er - y, and come a - cross the lake, that she was stand - ing

37

S. on the shore with arms ex - tend - ed wide, to give us all a peace - ful home be -

A. on the shore with arms ex - tend - ed wide, to give us all a peace - ful home be -

42

S. - yond the roll - ing tide. *mf* Fare - well, my dear fam - i - ly, yes, that's e - nough for

A. - yond the roll - ing tide. *mf* Fare - well, my dear fam - i - ly, yes, that's e - nough for

T. *mf* Fare - well, my dear fam - i - ly, yes, that's e - nough for

B. *mf* Fare - well, yes, that's e - nough for

47

S. me. I'm go - ing straight to Can - a - da, where for - mer slaves are free.

A. me. I'm go - ing straight to Can - a - da, where for - mer slaves are free.

T. me. I'm go - ing straight to Can - a - da, where for - mer slaves are free.

B. me. I'm go - ing straight to Can - a - da, where for - mer slaves are free.

53

S. (mouth slightly open) Mm, mm,

A. *mf* I served my mas - ter night and day, with -

T. (mouth slightly open) Mm, mm,

B. *mf* I served my mas - - ter night and day,

58

S. *mm,* *mm,* *mm,* *mm,*

A. - out a dime's re - ward, but now I'm forced to run a - way, and

T. *mm,* *mm,* *mm,* *mm,*

B. — with - out a dime's re - ward, but now I'm forced to run a - way, —

(8<sup>va</sup>)

62

S. *mf*

A. *p*

T. *mf*

B. *p*

S. *mm,* The hounds are bay - - ing on my track, the

A. flee the lash ab - horred. *Mm,* *mm,*

T. *mm,* The hounds are bay - - ing on my track,

B. — and flee the lash ab - horred. *Mm,* *mm,*

(8<sup>va</sup>)

66

S. mas - ter just be - hind, *p* Mm, mm,

A. mm. re - solved that he will bring me back be -

T. the mas - ter just be - hind, *p* Mm, mm,

B. mm. re - solved that he will bring me back

*mf*

*mf*

(8<sup>va</sup>)

70

S. mm. *f* Oh, cru - el mas - ter, now don't come af - ter

A. - fore I cross the line. *mp* Mm, mm,

T. mm. Oh, cru - el mas - ter, now don't come

B. be - fore I cross the line. *mp* Mm, mm,

*f*

*mp*

*mf*

(8<sup>va</sup>)

75

S. me. I'm go - ing up to Can - a - da, where hound - ed folk are free.

A. mm, mm.

T. af - ter me. I'm go - ing up to Can - a - da, where hound - ed folk are free.

B. mm, mm.

80

*poco accel.* **C** ♩ = 78 *mf*

S. I heard old mas - ter pray last night, I heard him pray for

A. *mf* I heard old mas - ter pray last night, I heard him pray for

T. *p* Oh, pray, pray,

B. *p* Oh, pray, pray,

(Piano optional from m83 through m108.)

*p*

86

S. me, that God would come, and in his might, from Sa - tan set me free, so

A. me, that God would come, and in his might, from Sa - tan set me free, so

T. pray for me. God, \_\_\_\_\_ come, \_\_\_\_\_ set \_\_\_\_\_ me, set me free.

B. pray for me. God, \_\_\_\_\_ come, \_\_\_\_\_ set \_\_\_\_\_ me, set me free.

91

S. I from e - vil would es - cape, and flee the wrath to come; but if

A. I from e - vil would es - cape, and flee the wrath to come; but if

T. I \_\_\_\_\_ would es - cape and flee; \_\_\_\_\_ come and let me flee. \_\_\_\_\_

B. I \_\_\_\_\_ would es - cape and flee; \_\_\_\_\_ come and let me flee. \_\_\_\_\_

# NOTES

In 2015, I came across an anonymous 9-stanza poem titled *Away to Canada*. I decided to adapt 6 selected stanzas and create a musical setting, a mini-saga, for choir and piano. This setting, retitled *On My Way to Canada*, was performed jointly by *Avanti Singers of St. Catharines, Ontario*, and *Harmonia Singers of Buffalo, New York*, in February 2017, once in each choir's home area. By this time, I had discovered that the author of the poem was *Joshua McCarter Simpson (ca.1820-1876)* and was surprised to find that the version I had set to music included the interpolation of a stanza (stanza 3 in my setting) from another one of Simpson's poems, *Emancipation Car*.

Simpson was an orphaned, black man born free (but later indentured until age 21) in *Windsor, Ohio*, not far from *Lake Erie*. Although having almost no formal education, he taught himself to read and write and became literate enough to attend *Oberlin College (1844-48)*. While making his living as an herbalist and store proprietor, he later attained some renown as an abolitionist writer (poet, lyricist, essayist), publishing several collections of his works. Both *Away to Canada* and *Emancipation Car* appeared in his 1852 collection titled *Original Anti-Slavery Songs*. A number of his poems and songs from this and other collections became popular on the *Underground Railroad*, where he also served as a conductor.

Simpson's anti-slavery poems were often designed as lyrics to be sung to the tunes of familiar hymns or popular songs. He was disgusted by blackface song lyrics but borrowed their tunes, explaining that "my object in my selection of tunes, is to kill the degrading influence of these comic Negro Songs [...], and change the flow of these sweet melodies into more appropriate and useful channels." Simpson's *Away to Canada* (subtitled "Adapted to the case of Mr. S., Fugitive from Tennessee") may be based on real events but was written to be sung to the tune of *Oh, Susanna (1848)*, a blackface song by American songwriter *Stephen Foster (1824-64)*, whose original version used the word "nigger."

Simpson did not consider even his northern state of *Ohio* to be a safe place for escaped slaves. *Upper Canada (Ontario)*, however, which was just "across the lake," had passed the *Act Against Slavery in 1793* and *The British Empire* had enacted the *Slavery Abolition Act*, which came into force in 1834. *Canada* eventually became a haven for 30,000 or more escaped slaves, so it is no surprise that *Canada* is a recurring theme in Simpson's poems *Away to Canada*, *Emancipation Car*, *The Fugitive in Montreal* and others. His poems clearly found their way to *Canada* via the *Underground Railroad*. A faded, handwritten version of *Away to Canada* sits in the *Canadian Museum of History*. An anonymous revised version appeared in *The Voice of the Fugitive (1851-52)*, the first black newspaper in *Canada*.

The story arc of *On My Way to Canada (revised 2025)* is as follows: *Stanza 1* sets the scene by declaring the subject's emotional urge to flee slavery. *Stanza 2* explains why *Canada* is the goal, referring to an invitation from the *British Empire*, represented by "the *Queen of England*." *Stanza 3* recalls the flight from the master's cruelty, his lash and his hounds. *Stanza 4*, another recollection, focuses on the *Christian master's* hypocrisy, evident in an overheard prayer. Here, the men sing a "derived text," adding an additional layer of inner monologue. *Stanza 5* finds the subject crossing the lake, already feeling relief from captivity and flight, eager to "shake the lion's paw" (enter the *British realm*). *Stanza 6* completes the journey with a safe and exultant landing on "yonder shore," accompanied by mourning for those left behind in slavery and the hope that they may also flee to *Canada*.

My hope is that this lengthy (10-minute) piece may find use in suitable contexts.

– Harris Loewen

Thank you to the *New Brunswick Black History Society* for comments and advice.

– Renforth Music