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Michael M. Momohara  
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# My Plea: A Musical Portrait of a Japanese Internment Poem by Mary T. Matsuzawa

Michael M. Momohara, B.S. Music

Primary Adviser: Dr. Kenneth Logan; Secondary Adviser: Ms. Marianne Kordas

## ABSTRACT

The internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II caused the suffering and fragmentation of many families. One internee, Mary T. Matsuzawa, authored a prayerful poem entitled "My Plea" that I see as expressing her thoughts on freedom, equality, and servitude as a "cross-bearer" for the Japanese-American people. Musical imagery, text painting, and historical context are used to craft a choral setting of Matsuzawa's poem, scored for SATB mixed choir and cello. The purpose of this work is both to draw attention to the Japanese-American internment and to portray Matsuzawa's suffering and longing while displaying the hope and comfort she had as a result of her faith in God.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research of Historical Background

Prior to composing, I studied historical context. Matsuzawa lived in Pasadena, California, but was interned in Gila River War Relocation Center in Rivers, Arizona. She attended the center's Butte High School. Her poem was published, with poems by others from this school, in the collection *Cactus Blossoms 1945*. Although Gila was one of the less-oppressive internment camps, having for examples only a single watchtower and no barbed wire, overcrowding and harsh desert climates caused water shortages and heatstroke/hypothermia. Other concerns included exposure to poisonous wildlife such as rattlesnakes and scorpions. Knowledge of these conditions was important in guiding my interpretation of Matsuzawa's poem and ultimately served as a foundation upon which I shaped the musical atmosphere.

### Analysis of Poem Text/Mapping Keywords for Musical Imagery

Following background study, I examined the poem for meaning and keywords (as boldfaced below). These elements served as bases for developing musical ideas that effectively could illustrate the text.

Oh **God**, I **pray** that I may bear a **cross**  
To set my people **free**,  
That I may help to take **good-will** **across**  
An **understanding** sea.  
Oh, God, I pray that someday every race  
May stand on **equal** **plane**  
And **prejudice** will find no **dwelling** place  
In a **peace** that **all** may **gain**.

## METHODOLOGY (CONTINUING)

### Development of the Musical Themes

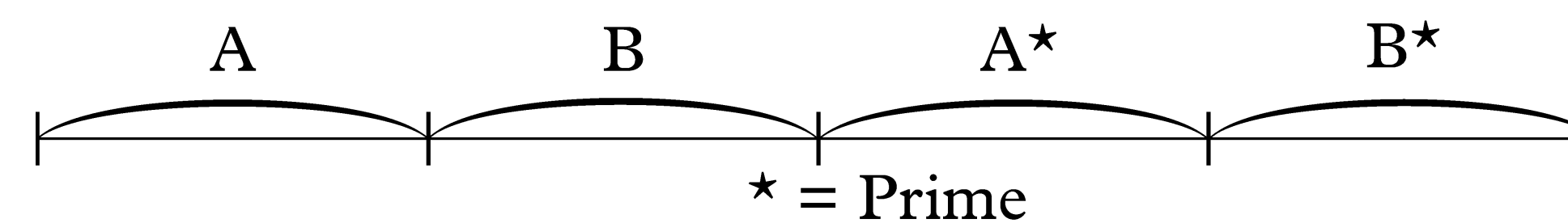
Cello Solo

S

Cello Solo

5

### Establishing Form and Structure



### Composing the Music and Setting the Text

S

Oh God, Oh God,

S

good will a - cross an

A

good will a - cross an

T

good will a - cross an

B

good will a - cross an

## RESULTS

The composition will be an SATB (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) choral score with cello that utilizes the text of Mary T. Matsuzawa:

My Plea

A Musical Portrait for SATB Choir and Cello Solo

Text By Mary T. Matsuzawa

Music By Michael M. Momohara

Slowly and solemnly with expression (♩ = c. 70)

ppuo scud. A tempo

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BMM All Rights Reserved. In partial completion of the J.N. Honors Program

(See Full Score Draft)

## CONCLUSION

This project has been challenging, particularly since Matsuzawa's text is sparse in obvious verbiage and descriptors toward a direct understanding of the emotional and social context. I have sought to use skillful musical illustration to effectively and elegantly portray the emotion and meaning behind her plea. I hope this work will impact the heart of the listener and vividly illustrate Matsuzawa's experience. Upon completion, this work will be performed and recorded by the Andrews University Singers.

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