

Simple Gifts

Arranged by Matt Conaway

Simple Gifts was written by Shaker Elder Joseph Brackett, Jr. in 1848. It was first published in *The Gift to be Simple: Shaker Rituals and Songs*.

Simple Gifts was a work song sung by the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (more commonly known as the Shakers), whose last community in America (Hancock Village) died in 1960. It is now a museum.

The lyrics are timeless:

*'Tis the gift to be simple,
'Tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
It will be in the valley of love and delight.*

*When true simplicity is gained,
to bow and to bend, we will not be ashamed
To turn, turn, will be our delight,
'Til by turning, turning, we come round right.*



Matt Conaway is the Director of Bands for the West Lafayette Community School Corporation in West Lafayette, Indiana. Originally from Woodhaven, Michigan, Conaway completed his undergraduate degree at Indiana University-Bloomington, earning his Bachelor of Music Education-Teaching Area degree with distinction. Following graduation, he served as the Graduate Assistant Director with the Purdue University Bands. In that capacity, he served as an assistant with the "All-American" Marching Band and the concert bands. In addition, he served as a director of the "Gold and Black Sound" women's basketball pep band.

Conaway is currently on the board of directors for the Indiana University Alumni Band and was recently elected to the state board of the Indiana State School Music Association. He is a member of MENC, Indiana Bandmasters Association, Indiana Music Educators Association and Tau Beta Sigma. Matt is also active with the Lafayette Citizens Band and Lafayette Civic Theatre. He has over 150 arrangements and compositions to his credit, including works for the Bloomington "Pops" Orchestra, Indiana University, Purdue athletic bands and several high school and university ensembles in the Midwest.

General Notes

- The lower Clarinet part is probably the most important part in this piece because of its harmonic role. I would suggest having 1/3 of your clarinet players on the upper notes, and 2/3 on the lower.
- The snare drum part covers several rudiments (flam, flam tap, flamacue, single paradiddle, long closed roll), so pay extra attention to their sticking throughout. Most percussionists who have played for two weeks are capable of playing the rhythms themselves – the sticking takes some extra thought!
- I have found it useful to add either a piano or synthesizer to the trombone/tuba part – many younger students have difficulty hearing their notes in this register, and that simple addition gives them a central pitch reference (not to mention a pretty cool tone color in your younger band!).

Specific Sections

mm. 8-9

There should be no break between these measures. Flute and Clarinet players will have to “sneak” a breath at some point afterwards.

mm. 9-20

The clarinets and flutes need to understand that their part here is basically percussion. These sections are usually very confident in beginning bands; this is meant to help them realize that they won't always be at the forefront! This is also an excellent exercise in stagger-breathing.

The melody here should be as smooth as possible. Let the trombones know that they have to make their hands fast but their air smooth.

mm. 21-28

Take a breath on beat 4 of measure 28, but do not allow the *f* level to fade out into that breath. The new dynamic at measure 29 should be *subito*.

mm. 29-36

If the band can accomplish a 4-measure phrase from 29-32, it would be great to take out the quarter rest in measure 30 and hold through it.

Make sure that the band doesn't peak early on the crescendo – ask the wind players to save some of the crescendo for the last two beats so the percussion can propel it along.

mm. 37-end

Take care with the trumpet part – just as the flutes and clarinets learned earlier, they don't get the melody all the time!

Make sure the band doesn't breathe right before the last note – this is one of the hardest things to get across to young players (at least it was with my last five beginning bands!!) I'll say something to them like this:

Imagine you're watching the big ball come down on New Year's Eve. Everybody's counting down... the excitement is building... and with one second left, the ball stops. The big "2006" doesn't light up. Nobody is counting... everyone's confused, maybe even sad. This is what happens to your audience when you interrupt the last thought in a piece of music. It just doesn't seem as special anymore.

It almost always eliminates the problem. After that point, I can just refer to the "New Year's Ball" and they'll get the point.

Enjoy the piece!