

# WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN

SATB A CAPPELLA

MUSIC TRAD. APPALACHIAN  
TEXT BY CATHY WINTER,  
BETSY ROSE, & MARCIA TAYLOR

*Fresh Aire*

ARRANGED BY

J. DAVID MOORE

The hymn "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" first appeared *Alexander's Gospel Songs*, with words by Ada Ruth Habershon and music by Charles H. Gabriel. The hymn was substantially reworked (and the lyrics of the verses replaced) by A.P. Carter for The Carter Family and later experienced a popular renaissance when it was released by The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1972.

The lyrics in this arrangement were written by folk singers Betsy Rose, Cathy Winter, and Marcia Taylor, and printed in the marvelous folk song resource *Rise Up Singing* (ed. Peter Blood, ©1988 Sing Out Corporation).

This arrangement makes use of two traditional vocal ensemble styles - the bluegrass trio and the gospel quartet. Recent performances often include one or more of the following variations: 1) opening with a soloist on the refrain; 2) a solo trio singing the first verse, followed by the score as printed; and 3) repeating the final chorus a few times (sometimes adding claps) before returning to the slower opening tempo. Any or all of these variations are perfectly fine with me.

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### Original Lyrics (1908)

There are loved ones in the glory,  
Whose dear forms you often miss;  
When you close your earthly story,  
Will you join them in their bliss?

#### Refrain:

Will the circle be unbroken  
By and by, by and by?  
In a better home awaiting  
In the sky, in the sky?

In the joyous days of childhood,  
Oft they told of wondrous love,  
Pointed to the dying Savior;  
Now they dwell with Him above.

You remember songs of heaven  
Which you sang with childish voice,  
Do you love the hymns they taught you,  
Or are songs of earth your choice?

You can picture happy gath' rings  
'Round the fireside long ago,  
And you think of tearful partings,  
When they left you here below.

One by one their seats were emptied,  
One by one they went away;  
Here the circle has been broken -  
Will it be complete one day?

~ Ada R. Habershon

### Carter Family Lyrics (1935)

I was standing by my window,  
On one cold and cloudy day  
When I saw that hearse come rolling  
For to carry my mother away

#### Refrain:

Will the circle be unbroken  
By and by, Lord, by and by?  
There's a better home a-waiting  
In the sky, Lord, in the sky

I said to that undertaker  
Undertaker please drive slow  
For this lady you are carrying  
Lord, I hate to see here go

Oh, I followed close behind her  
Tried to hold up and be brave  
But I could not hide my sorrow  
When they laid her in the grave

I went back home, my home was lonesome  
Missed my mother, she was gone  
All of my brothers, sisters crying  
What a home so sad and lone

We sang the songs of childhood  
Hymns of faith that made us strong  
Ones that mother maybelle taught us  
Hear the angels sing along

~ A.P. Carter



### **THE ARRANGER**

J. David Moore is a composer, arranger, conductor, teacher, and Southerner who has lived in the Upper Midwest for most of his life. His music has been called "endlessly inventive," "glorious...haunting... breathtaking," and "joyous...wild and elemental." He publishes through his company Fresh Ayre Music, and is the founder and conductor of The First Readings Project, a chamber choir that acts as a resource for composers in the development and promotion of new work.

He lives with his beautiful wife Anna in Minneapolis, where he bakes bread, drinks tea, and is distracted by shiny objects.



# Will the Circle Be Unbroken

SATB a cappella

lyrics by Betsy Rose, Cathy Winter, and Marcia Taylor

traditional Appalachian  
arr. J. David Moore

N.B. grace notes preceding always ON the beat

Slow bluegrass trio (♩ = 52)

*Soprano*  
Will the cir - cle be un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a

*Alto*  
Will the cir - cle be un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a

*Tenor*  
Will the cir - cle be un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a

5  
S  
bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try.

A  
bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try.

T  
bet - ter home a - wait - in' if we try, Lord, if we try.

Quick Gospel Quartet Tempo (♩ = 104)

9  
S  
I was sing - ing and my broth - ers, I was sing - ing

A  
I was sing - ing with my sis - ters, I was sing - ing with my friends

T  
I was sing - ing and my broth - ers, I was sing - ing

B  
I was sing - ing and my broth - ers, I was sing - ing



13

S with my friends, And we all can sing to-gether, 'cause the cir-cle

A And we all can sing to-gether, 'cause the cir-cle nev-er

T with my friends, And we all can sing to-gether, 'cause the cir-cle

B with my friends, And we all can sing to-gether, 'cause the cir-cle

17 *mf*

S nev-er ends. cir-cle be un-brok-en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a

A ends. Oh, will the cir-cle be un-brok-en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a

T nev-er ends. cir-cle be un-brok-en by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a

B nev-er ends. cir-cle be un-brok-en oh, by and by, Lord, by and by, There's a

22

S bet-ter home a-wait-in' if we try, Lord, if we try.

A bet-ter home a-wait-in' if we try, Lord, if we try. I was

T bet-ter home a-wait-in' if we try, Lord, if we try.

B bet-ter home a-wait-in' if we try, Lord, if we try.

26 *mp*

S I was born down in the val - ley where the sun re -

A born down in the val - ley where the sun re - fuse' to shine

T *mp*  
8 I was born down in the val - ley where the sun re -

B *mp*  
I was born down in - a the val - ley where the sun, where the sun re -

29

S fuse' to shine But I'm climb-ing up to the high - land,

A But I'm climb - ing up to the high - land, gon - na

T *8* fuse' to shine But I'm climb-ing up to the high - land,

B fuse' to shine But I'm climb-ing up to the high-land, gon - na

32 *mf*

S gon - na make that moun-tain mine! cir - cle be un -

A make that moun - tain mine! Oh, will the cir - cle be un -

T *8* gon - na make that moun-tain mine! cir - cle be un -

B *mf*  
make, gon - na make that moun-tain mine! Will the cir - cle



35

S  
brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, — There's a —

A  
brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, — There's a —

T  
brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, — There's a

B  
be — un - brok - en by and by, Lord, by and by, —

38

S  
bet - ter home a - wait - in' in the sky, Lord, — in the

A  
bet - ter home a - wait - in' in the sky, Lord, — in the

T  
bet - ter home a - wait - in' in the sky, Lord, in the

B  
There's a bet - ter home a - wait - in' in the sky, Lord, in the

41

**Tempo I°**

S  
sky, — in the sky, Lord, in the sky. —

A  
sky, — in the sky, Lord, in the sky. —

T  
sky, — in the sky, Lord, in the sky. — *unis.*

B  
sky, — in the sky, my — Lord, sky. — *port.*