

BROCK WILLARD

# WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN

SSAA VOICES



**TUX PEOPLE'S**



**MUSIC.**



## ABOUT:

Brock Willard taps into the uncertainty of life and the afterlife in this stunning and unique reinterpretation of the classic hymn. The suspended harmonies that envelop the hymn's expressive tune are equally effective in its SATB and SSAA arrangements.

### FROM THE COMPOSER:

This setting of "will the circle be unbroken" is starkly different from other settings of the same hymn tune and that is on purpose. A majority of the settings I have heard of this hymn tune usually have quite happy connotations or at the very least, harken back to the tune's popularity during Southern Baptist revivals. This setting is inspired by a rejection of that interpretation of the text. The way I was first introduced to this hymn was through the arrangement featured in the 2013 video game "Bioshock Infinite" released by Irrational Games. In the game, the characters of Booker Dewitt and Elizabeth Comstock grapple with questions of morality and metaphysics, and eventually come along an abandoned guitar. The player can initiate a sequence where Dewitt and Comstock sing a version of this hymn characterized by sadness and grief. The joyful hope of joining your loved ones in Heaven turns into serious contemplation about questions of the afterlife. The version from the game is very improvisatory (as much as a constructed scene in a video game can be) which only lends itself more to the personal nature of the performance.

In this arrangement, I tried to capture this same contemplative nature. Gone are the secondary dominants and soaring descants typical of hymn arrangements of Baptist favorites. Instead, the piece utilizes much simpler ingredients: a sustained pedal tone representing the loneliness of surviving family members, mostly homophonic writing, a single verse of a hymn characterized by many verses. I wanted to peel back the curtain, so to speak, on an interpretation of this text that is strikingly uncommon. When I think of this text, I don't think of tearful reunions with loved ones. I think of the enormity of the afterlife and the very real fact that no one knows what happens when we die. We can imagine but we cannot know because no one has verifiably returned from the dead to tell us.

This arrangement is primarily inspired by the choral music of Jake Runestad, Stephen Paulus, Gabriel Jackson, and Frederik Sixten. Additionally, the piece is dedicated to my parents Lori Rae Willard (née Whetzel), who died in 2020 from complications of high blood pressure and diabetes, and Timothy Ray Willard, who died in 2021 from exposure, as well as my grandfather Harold "Hut" Gene Whetzel, who died following a car crash in late 2021.

DURATION: 4'00"



Scan to let the composer know that you are playing their piece!



Scan to learn more about this composer!

First printing, May 2023

Additional octavos are available for purchase from the publisher online.



**TUX PEOPLE'S  
MUSIC.**

Dedicated to my mother Lori Rae Willard (née Whetzel), my father  
Timothy Ray Willard, and my grandfather Harold "Hut" Gene Whetzel.

# WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?

Traditional

for SSAA Voices

Brock Willard  
2022

*♩ = 70*  
*p* *mf* *pp* *p sub.*

Soprano 1  
oo, oo,

Soprano 2  
oo,

Alto 1  
oo, oo,

Alto 2  
oo, oo,

Reduction

5 *mf* *rit.* *p*

*mf* *p*

*mf* *p*

*mf* *p*

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*a tempo*

10

One by one their seats were emp - tied, One by one — they went a -

*p*  
One by one their seats were emp - tied, One by one — they went a -

(stagger breathe)

(oo)

(oo)

14

way, Now the fam'-ly is par - ted, Will it be com-plete one

way, Now the fam'-ly is par - ted, Will it be com-plete one

*mf*  
(oo)

*mf*  
(oo)

(oo)

19

*p*

*p*

day?

ah, —

day?

ah, —

ah, —

ah, —

ah, —

ah, —

24

♩ = 80

*mf*

Will the cir - cle be un -

*mf*

Will the cir - cle be un -

*mf*

Will the cir - cle be un -

*mf*

Will the cir - cle be un -

28

bro - ken by and by, by and by, Is a bet - ter home a -

bro - ken by and by, by and by, Is a bet - er home a -

bro - ken by and by, by and by, Is a bet - er home a -

bro - ken by and by, by and by, Is a bet ter

32

*f* wait - ing in the sky, in the sky? ah, \_\_\_\_\_

*f* wait - ing in the sky, in the \_\_\_\_\_

*f* it - ing in the sky, in the sky? \_\_\_\_\_

*f* home, in the sky, in the sky? \_\_\_\_\_

*rit.* *a tempo*

♩ = 70

36

*mp* *mf* *mp* *p sub.* *mp* *pp*

ah, ah,

*mp* *mf* *mp* *p sub.* *mp* *pp*

ah, ah,

*mp* *mf* *mp* *p sub.* *mp* *pp*

ah, ah,

*mp* *mf* *mp* *p sub.* *mp* *pp*

ah, ah,

41

*mp* *rit.* *pp* *f* *a tempo*

ah, Will the

*mp* *pp* *f*

ah, Will the

*mp* *pp* *f*

ah, Will the

*mp* *pp* *f*

ah, Will the

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45

cir - cle be un - bro - ken by and by, by and by? Is a

cir - cle be un - bro - ken by and by, by and by? Is a

cir - cle be un - bro - ken by and by, by and by? Is a

cir - cle be un - bro - ken by and by, by and by? Is a

49

bet - ter home a - wait - ing in the sky, in the sky? —

bet - ter home a - wait - ing in the sky, in the sky? —

bet - ter home a - wait - ing in the sky, in the sky? —

bet - ter home, in the sky, in the sky? —