BONSE ABA
(Traditional Zambian Song)

Arranged by
Andrew Fischer

LAWRENCE KAPTEIN
Choral Series

Alliance Music Publications, Inc.
BONSEABA

Translation: All that sing have the right to be called the children of God.
[from the original Bemba (Chibemba) language which is spoken primarily in Zambia]
Providing a word-for-word English translation of any Bemba text is challenging since many
Bemba words have multiple meanings and can vary depending upon the context in which
they are used. The English translation provided here (similar to John 1:12) is intended to
convey the broad sentiment of the piece.

"Bonse Abo" is a Christian song of celebration that is popular throughout Zambia.
Though often sung without accompaniment, "Bonse Abo" may be performed with drums
or other percussion instruments. Using a combination of several low- and high-sounding
drums (playing contrasting rhythms) with several types of hand-held African percussion
instruments can be very effective. For both aural and visual authenticity, African
percussion should be utilized rather than Latin American instruments such as maracas,
tambourines, etc. The use of movement within the choir is also stylistically appropriate
and adds tremendously to the overall impact of the piece. Uniform swaying from side-to-
side on one verse, with the addition of hand claps (usually on primary beats: one and
three) is but one of many movement possibilities. Encouraging the singers to suggest and
experiment with movement can also enrich the learning experience for the chorus. Keep
in mind, the piece has a sacred text, so regardless of the energetic character of the music,
movement should remain dignified.

This short piece may be repeated as many times as desired. It could be effectively used as a
choral processional or as a free-standing piece on a choral program. The soloist(s) could be
male or female or a combination of voices. "Bonse Abo" could be performed using all
women, all men, all children, or any combination that is practical. This flexibility is also
part of the idiom and singers should be encouraged to try the piece in a variety of voicings.
Experiment with voice parts; male and female choristers should find the part that feels the
most comfortable and is the most enjoyable to sing. Vocal embellishments are easily
improvised (also part of the idiom) and should be tastefully executed and in the style of the
song. Celebratory whoops and shouts could be added and are used to indicate an
intensification of feeling and excitement as the piece progresses. A tone that has a sturdy,
folklike quality should be utilized on "Bonse Abo." A more conventional choral tone
appropriate for most western art music, including the use of vibrato (at least for the
chorus), should be avoided.

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Ku-ba ba-na ku-ba ba-na ku-ba ba-na ba-kwa le-sa

D.C. al Coda

Mu-ya-ya mu-ya-ya mu-ya-ya ba-kwa le-sa
Muya-ya-ya muya-ya-ya muya-ya-ya bakwa le-sa

Muya-ya-ya Muya-ya-ya bakwa le-sa

Muya-ya-ya Muya-ya-ya bakwa le-sa

Kubana eh!

oh-oh eh!

oh-oh eh!