

My hymn writing is essentially word-watching. Words are like shy forest creatures: they often seem more willing to come into view if they do not think they are being sought. Thus, when I began working on this hymn, I sent a question (“Why do we sing in worship?”) into the thickets of my unconscious and settled in to wait.

While waiting, I took a cup of morning coffee out to my back porch, picked up a volume of short stories, and began to read. A few pages into a story, a line of hymn text began appearing at the edges of consciousness: “When hearts filled full cannot contain....” Quietly, so as not to startle the words, I reached for pen and paper and began to write. The line rounded itself out into a complete stanza. Looking at the result, I realized I had been given a metric pattern (8.8.4.4.4.), a rhyme scheme (AABBC), and an outline (four lines stating a reason for singing and the repeating refrain: “We sing”). Unthinkingly, I had mirrored form and content; normally, each line of hymn text is a self-contained unit, so that meaning will not get distorted when singers inevitably take a breath between musical phrases. Yet, I had violated this “rule,” letting full hearts not be “contained” within their eight-syllable unit, but “burst their bounds” (“breathlessly,” at that!) to flow over into subsequent lines. I decided I was happy with the transgression.

Other stanzas followed as I filled in the given pattern with further reasons to sing: to lament injustice, repent wrongdoing, remember the past, rekindle poetic visions, and join with the saints who rejoice before the throne of God (Revelation 4:10-11). Jane Marshall agreed to set the text to music, and her sensitive rendering lets the rustling words take wing.



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We Sing!

BY MARY LOUISE BRINGLE

When hearts filled full cannot contain
their breathless joy, but swell and strain
to burst their bounds
in laughing sounds:
We sing. We sing!

When suffering calls us to lament
the wrongs we witness and repent
the hurts we cause,
in tearful voice:
We sing. We sing!

When cherished mem'ries bind us fast
to saints who lived in days long past,
to tend and save
the gifts they gave:
We sing. We sing!

When poets craft with loving care
the dreams and visions that we share,
and words inspire
with tongues of fire:
We sing. We sing!

When dust ensouled by Spirit's breath
is resurrected after death,
before the throne
with all God's own:
We sing. We sing!

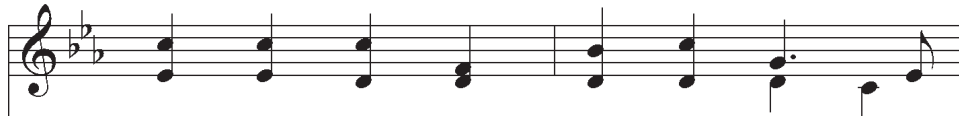
We Sing!

MARY LOUISE BRINGLE

JANE MARSHALL



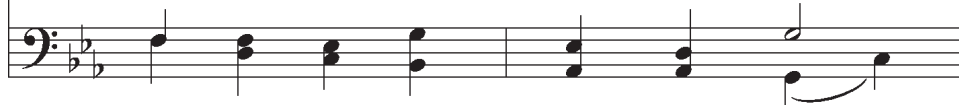
1. When hearts filled full can - not con - tain their
 2. When suff - 'ring calls us to la - ment the
 3. When cher - ished mem - 'ries bind us fast to
 4. When po - ets craft with lov - ing care the
 5. When dust en - souled by Spir - it's breath is



breath - less joy, but swell and strain to
 wrongs we wit - ness and re - pent the
 saints who lived in days long past, to
 dreams and vis - ions that we share, and
 res - ur - rec - ted af - ter death, be -



burst their bounds in laugh - ing sounds:
 hurts we cause, in tear - ful voice:
 tend and save the gifts they gave:
 words in - spire with tongues of fire:
 fore the throne with all God's own:



The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody in the treble staff starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second measure has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, and a half note A4. The third measure has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, and a half note F4. The fourth measure has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, and a half note A4. The bass staff starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G2, a quarter note A2, and a quarter note B2. The second measure has a quarter rest, a quarter note G2, and a half note A2. The third measure has a quarter rest, a quarter note G2, and a half note F2. The fourth measure has a quarter rest, a quarter note G2, and a half note A2. The lyrics are: "We sing, We sing!" on the first line and "(We sing. We sing!)" on the second line.

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Tune: BREVARD
8.8.4.4.4.