

*Si, se puede*  
for SATB choir, baritone soloist and crotale

5 minutes

Brooke Joyce (2010)

Commissioned by the Iowa Choral Directors Association  
Premiered by Chorale Midwest, July 2010

Program Note:

*Si, se puede* was composed in response to the ICE (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raid of Agriprocessors, a kosher meat packing plant in Postville, IA. Nearly 400 immigrants, most from small villages in Guatemala, were arrested on May 12, 2008, and charged with a variety of crimes, including identity theft. The raid devastated the Northeast Iowa town and led many to question the United States' current immigration policies. Later that summer, I participated in a protest rally in Postville to help raise awareness of the dire legal and humanitarian crisis in Postville. Organizers encouraged us to chant classic protest slogans such as “*si, se puede*” (yes, we can) and “*el pueblo unido jamás será vencido*” (the people united will never be defeated).

At the same time that the raid was making international news, the presidential election of 2008 was in full swing. Presidential hopeful Barack Obama used the slogan “Yes, we can” to transmit a message of hope and a desire to affect governmental change. The connections between the English and Spanish versions of this slogan, with all their embedded meanings, brought politics and local events together in a way I hadn't experienced before.

A crotale, set of finger cymbals or a handbell, set to “bright,” is required at the beginning of the piece. Two musical quotations inform the music:

- 1) the rhythmic ostinato that begins in m. 14 is drawn from a transcription of music from the *Rabinal Achí*, an ancient Mayan play performed annually in Guatemala;
- 2) the Guatemalan folk song “*Nací en la cumbre de una montaña*”

A literal translation of the text is provided, courtesy of Juan Tony Guzmán:

I was born on a mountain top  
Conquering dangerous lightning  
I grew up in the bottom of a hut  
And today I am a man dying of love

The music was composed in 2010 for the Iowa Choral Directors Association and was supported, in part, by the Iowa Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts