

Gatatumba

Words & Music: **Traditional Andalusian Villancico** | Arranger: **Greg Gilpin**
 Rehearsal Resource Page by **Victor C. Johnson**, *Sing!* Choral Editor

VOCABULARY

mp *mezzo piano* medium soft
cresc. *crescendo* to gradually get louder
mf *mezzo forte* medium loud
f *forte* loud

ABOUT GATATUMBA

Gatatumba is one of the most famous and spirited examples of the traditional Andalusian villancico. The word villancico derives from villano, meaning villager or peasant. It is characterized by lively rhythms, simple harmonies, and a refrain-and-verse structure that encouraged communal singing. *Gatatumba* is an **onomatopoeic** word, imitating the sound of a drum or tambourine being struck: ga-ta-TUM-ba. This rhythmic energy is embedded in the piece itself, and singers should understand from the first rehearsal that rhythm, articulation, and text are as essential as pitch.

MUSICAL FORM

Section	Measures	Tonality	Rehearsal Focus
Intro.	1 - 22	D Major (I – IV – V)	Layered entrances of the spoken vocal ostinato, each voice part entering in sequence. Focus on rhythmic precision and clarity of spoken text before any pitch is introduced. Establish a steady, energetic pulse from the first measure.
Verse 1	23 - 39	I (D) – V (A) – IV (G)	Unison melodic line enters while the spoken ostinato continues beneath it. Teach the melody and the ostinato separately, then layer them. Singers must listen horizontally to their own line and vertically to what the other parts are doing simultaneously.
Chorus	42 - 49	IV – I – V – I	Original music by the arranger, seamlessly styled in the villancico tradition. The IV–I–V–I progression should feel ceremonial and buoyant. Ensure text and rhythmic stress align with the chordal arrivals.
Interlude	51 - 58	D Major	Return of spoken vocal ostinato only. Use this section to reset rhythmic energy and rebuild anticipation. Precision of ensemble rhythm here is what drives the momentum into Verse 2.
Verse 2	59 - 76	I (D) – V (A) – IV (G)	Same format as Verse 1, but the melodic line and spoken ostinato are reversed between voice parts. This demands that singers who previously held the melody now drive the ostinato, and vice versa. Rehearse the reversal explicitly before singing through.
Chorus (return)	77 - 84	IV – I – V – I	Return of the chorus. Singers should bring greater confidence and celebratory energy than the first appearance. This is the emotional high point of the piece before the concluding section.
Concluding Section	86 - 101	D Major	Retrun of the full-layered spoken ostinato from the introduction. The architecture mirrors the opening, giving the piece a satisfying symmetry. Build intensity through the layered entrances toward the coda.
Coda	102 - 108	D Major	Elongated final phrase of the melody, ending with the spoken statement of <i>Gatatumba</i> . The spoken final word should be delivered with conviction and rhythmic precision; it is the piece’s exclamation point. Discuss its meaning and character before rehearsing the final measures.

PREPARATION

Practice clapping or tapping the following rhythms as you prepare to sing *Gatatumba*.

I

II

FOCUSED TEACHING STRATEGIES

Verse 1 (mm. 23–39)

After the melody and ostinato are each learned separately, combine them in a structured way: melody singers hum while ostinato singers speak, then reverse, then perform as written. This gradual layering prevents the melody from disappearing into the texture and helps singers understand their role in relation to the whole.

Chorus (mm. 42–49)

Clap the rhythmic profile of the chorus before singing it, emphasizing the stress pattern that aligns with the IV–I–V–I progression. Then speak the text in rhythm with those stresses and finally sing. The chorus should feel ceremonial and joyful. Connect that character to the historical context of villancicos sung in Spanish church plazas.

Verse 2 (mm. 59–76)

Make the reversal of melody and ostinato an explicit teaching moment. Stop before rehearsing Verse 2 and ask each singer to name which role they held in Verse 1 and which they will hold now. Then rehearse only the seam between the interlude and Verse 2 (mm. 57–61) as a loop until the exchange is automatic and confident.

Coda (mm. 102–108)

Rehearse the spoken final word “Gatatumba” in isolation with the full ensemble, practicing rhythmic unison, dynamic level, and vocal color. Ask: “How do we want the audience to feel in the final second of this piece? Joyful? Surprised? Triumphant?” Let the singers choose and commit to that character collectively.

STUDENT ENRICHMENT QUESTIONS

1. This piece uses spoken vocal ostinato layered beneath a sung melody. How is performing a spoken ostinato different from singing a harmonic part? What kind of listening and concentration does it require, and how does it change the overall texture of the piece?
2. In Verse 2, the voice parts that sang the melody in Verse 1 now perform the spoken ostinato, and vice versa. What did it feel like to switch roles? Did your experience of the piece change depending on which role you were performing, and which did you find more challenging or more satisfying?
3. The word *gatatumba* is **onomatopoeic** (it imitates a sound). What sound do you think it imitates, and how does knowing that change the way you approach performing this piece? Can you think of other examples of onomatopoeia in music or language?