The Boll Weevil

Traditional Folk Song

Arranged by Doris Gazda

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About the Composition

Over 100 years ago when the American South had immense cotton fields, a tiny beetle that feeds on cotton buds and flowers called the boll weevil came into the country from Mexico and Central America. Adult weevils emerge in the cotton fields from early spring through mid-summer. They lay eggs on the cotton bolls. A boll is the seed-bearing capsule on the cotton plant. The eggs hatch in three to five days and feed on the cotton bolls for eight to ten days at which time the larva typically undergoes complete transformation within a protective cocoon or hardened case called a pupa. After five to seven days the weevil emerges and starts laying eggs on new bolls to make the process start over again. The weevils ruined the cotton crops throughout Texas and the American South.

The cotton farmers used to sing blues songs about the boll weevil. The tune for the "The Boll Weevil" is a traditional blues song that is also known by similar titles such as “Boweavil” or “Boll Weevil Blues.” Although many songs about the boll weevil were recorded by blues musicians during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, this one has become well known, thanks to Lead Belly’s rendition of it as recorded in 1934 by folklorist Alan Lomax.

The song has many verses and many versions. Following is one of the best know verses:
Oh, de boll weevil am a little black bug,
Come from Mexico, dey say, Come all de way to Texas,
Jus’ a-lookin’ foh a place to stay,
Jus’ a-lookin’ foh a home,
Jus’ a-lookin’ foh a home.

Use either the above version or the following version.
It may not be politically correct to use the original version:
Oh, the boll weevil is a little black bug
Come from Mexico, they say,
Come all the way to Texas
Just looking for a place to stay,
Just looking for a home,
Just looking for a home.

About the Arranger

Doris Gazda is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and Penn State University. She enjoyed many years as a string specialist in the Montgomery County, Maryland public schools, where she founded and conducted the Frederick County Youth Orchestra, and conducted the Potomac Valley Youth and Frederick Community Orchestras. Most recently, Ms. Gazda was on the faculty at Arizona State University. She has served nationally as Secretary for the American String Teachers Association, President of the National School Orchestra Association and Member-at-Large for the ASTA with NSOA.

A proponent of new music for student musicians, Ms. Gazda composes for strings and string orchestra. She is the author of High Tech for Strings (Carl Fischer), a set of technical studies for middle and high school orchestras, and co-author of the beginning method Spotlight on Strings (Neil A. Kjos). Nationally known for her leadership and expertise in string instruction. Ms Gazda presents workshops and conducts conference and regional student orchestras. She is a frequent presenter at state and national meetings for MENC (Music Educators National Conference), ASTA (American String Teachers Association) with NSOA (National School Orchestra Association), MTNA (Music Teachers National Association), regional school systems, and string workshops.
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Steady Beat ($J = 120$)

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- Limited instrumentation - Violin 2 and Viola the same part, Cello and Bass the same part
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