"NYEM EJIMA"
(Give me twins)

Chinedu Nathan Osinigwe Ph.D
Department of Performing Arts and Music
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo town, Oyo State
+234-8085112892, chineduosinigwe@gmail.com

Analysis of *Nyem Ejima*

Textual and Cultural Context

Nyem Ejima is an Igbo sacred choral composition grounded in the language of supplicatory prayer. Its recurring petition, *"Nyem ejima"* ("Give me twins"), invokes a culturally resonant symbol within Igbo cosmology, where twins embody abundance, divine favour, continuity, and communal joy. The invocation of *Chukwu* (God) situates the work firmly within Christian worship, yet the composition retains a strong indigenous linguistic and expressive identity.

The text moves fluidly between petition, affirmation, and exhortation, creating a ritualistic atmosphere shaped by call-and-response patterns characteristic of Igbo communal prayer and folk expression. This fusion of Christian theology with indigenous worldview forms the aesthetic and spiritual core of the composition.

Formal Design and Structure

The work adopts an extended sectional design built on repetition with variation rather than strict Western formal models such as binary or ternary form. This approach aligns with African musical logic, where meaning is deepened through cyclical restatement and gradual intensification.

The structure may be broadly outlined as follows:

- **Opening Invocation:** Introduction of the principal thematic material (*"Nyem ejima, Chukwu biko…"*), establishing tonal centre and rhythmic identity.
- **Developmental Cycles:** Repeated textual units treated with rhythmic, textural, and dynamic variation across the choral parts.
- **Climactic Supplication:** Heightened intensity achieved through thicker choral textures, increased dynamics, and stronger rhythmic propulsion.
- **Closing Affirmation:** A return to the opening prayer, providing structural and spiritual resolution.

This unfolding mirrors the natural progression of communal prayer—from initial request, through emotional heightening, to eventual reassurance.

Melody and Vocal Writing

The melodic writing reflects speech-derived contour, closely following Igbo tonal inflections. The lines are predominantly conjunct, ensuring accessibility for singers while preserving the expressive clarity of the text.

The voice leading demonstrates careful attention to choral balance:

- Sopranos frequently carry the principal melodic statements.
- Altos and tenors provide harmonic grounding with occasional imitative interplay.
- Basses anchor the tonal centre and reinforce cadential gestures.

Short melodic cells recur throughout, enhancing memorability and reinforcing the communal, participatory nature of the prayer.

Harmony and Tonal Language

Harmonically, *Nyem Ejima* operates within an expanded tonal framework. While functional harmony is present, it is not strictly Western in orientation. Harmonic movement often arises from:

- parallel motion,
- drone-like bass support, and
- chordal colouration rather than conventional progression.

The resulting harmonic language supports the emotional and spiritual intent of the text. Cadences tend to feel rhetorical rather than strictly tonal, reflecting broader African vocal traditions.

Rhythm and Metre

Rhythm is a defining feature of the composition. The indicated tempo (♩ = 100, African rhythm) establishes a moderate, dance-inflected pulse. Syncopation, offbeat accents, and rhythmic layering are used extensively, particularly in the interplay between voice parts. These rhythmic devices:

- reinforce textual emphasis,
- evoke traditional Igbo speech rhythms, and
- generate forward momentum essential to congregational and choral engagement.

The piano part functions primarily as rehearsal support, reinforcing pitch and rhythmic stability rather than acting as an independent accompaniment voice.

Texture and Dynamics

Textural contrast is achieved through:

- alternation between homophonic and lightly imitative passages,

- strategic use of solo or semi-choral gestures against full ensemble responses,
- gradual accumulation of voices towards climactic points, and
- dynamic shaping aligned closely with textual meaning, particularly during moments of heightened supplication or communal affirmation.

Performance and Liturgical Relevance

Nyem Ejima is well-suited to cultural and indigenous concert presentations of African sacred choral music, both locally and internationally. Its accessibility makes it appropriate for parish choirs, while its cultural depth and theological resonance render it equally suitable for scholarly, liturgical, and concert performance contexts.

Concluding Evaluation

Nyem Ejima stands as a compelling example of contemporary Nigerian sacred choral composition, successfully integrating:

- indigenous Igbo language and worldview,
- African rhythmic vitality,
- Western choral notation and organisational principles, and
- Christian liturgical function.

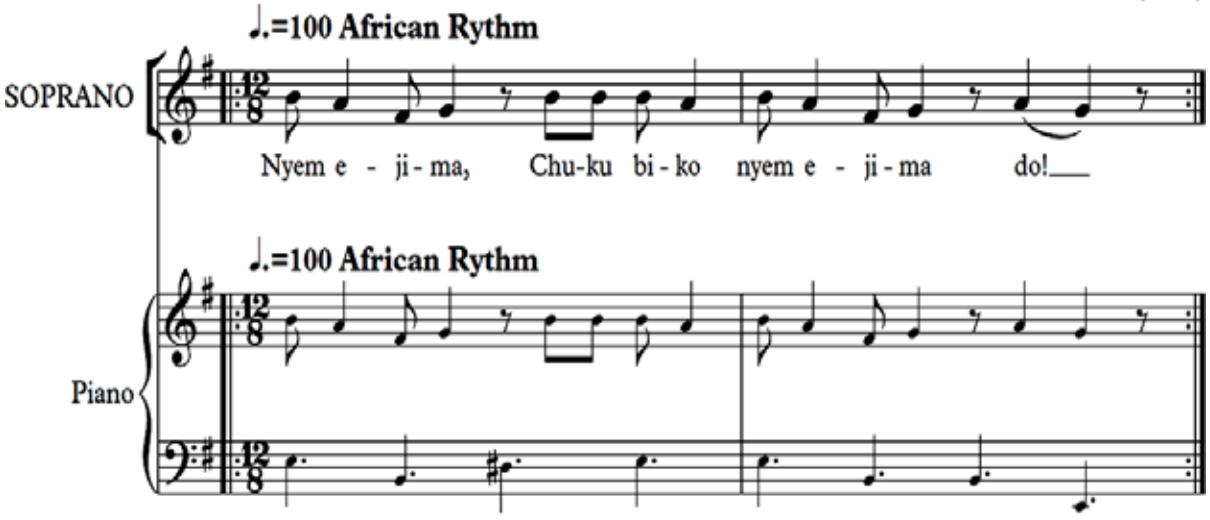
The work contributes significantly to the expanding corpus of African art music and affirms the enduring role of indigenous expression within modern sacred choral practice.

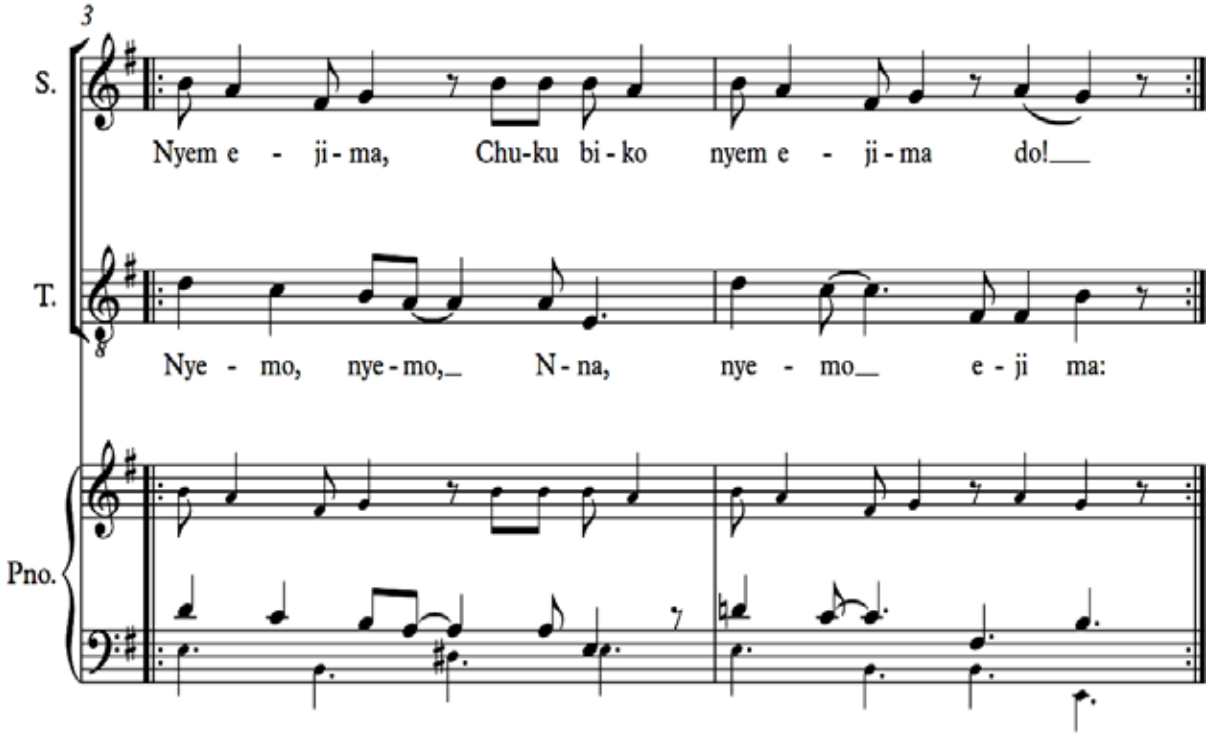
NYEM EJIMA!

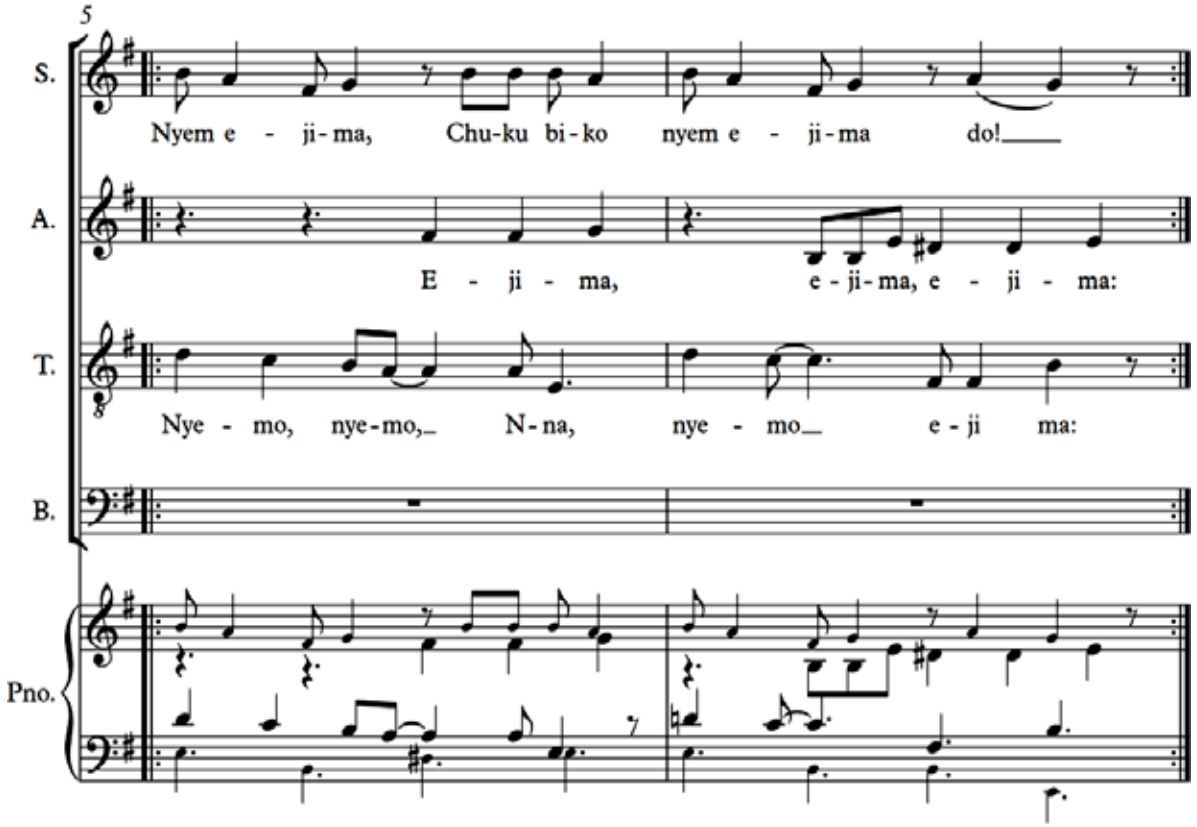
(3:52)

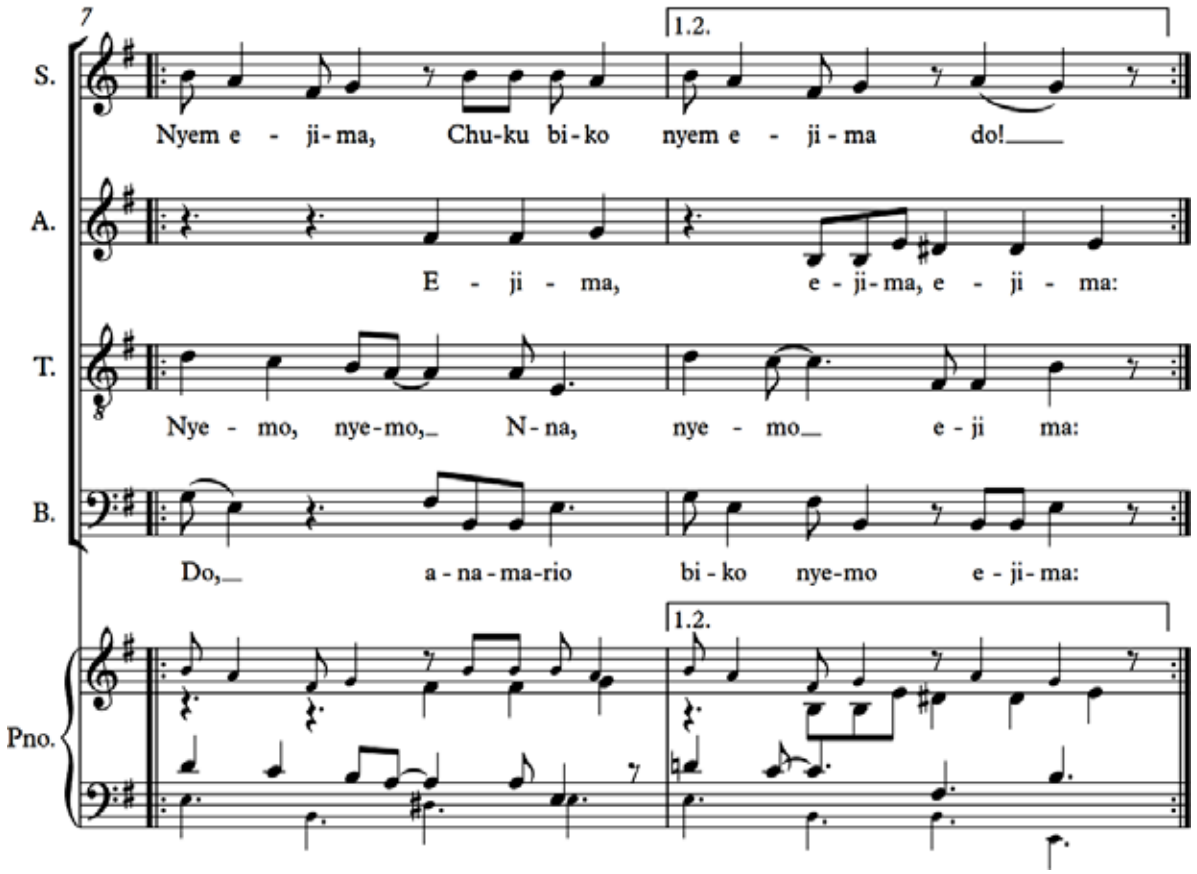
IGBO FOLK

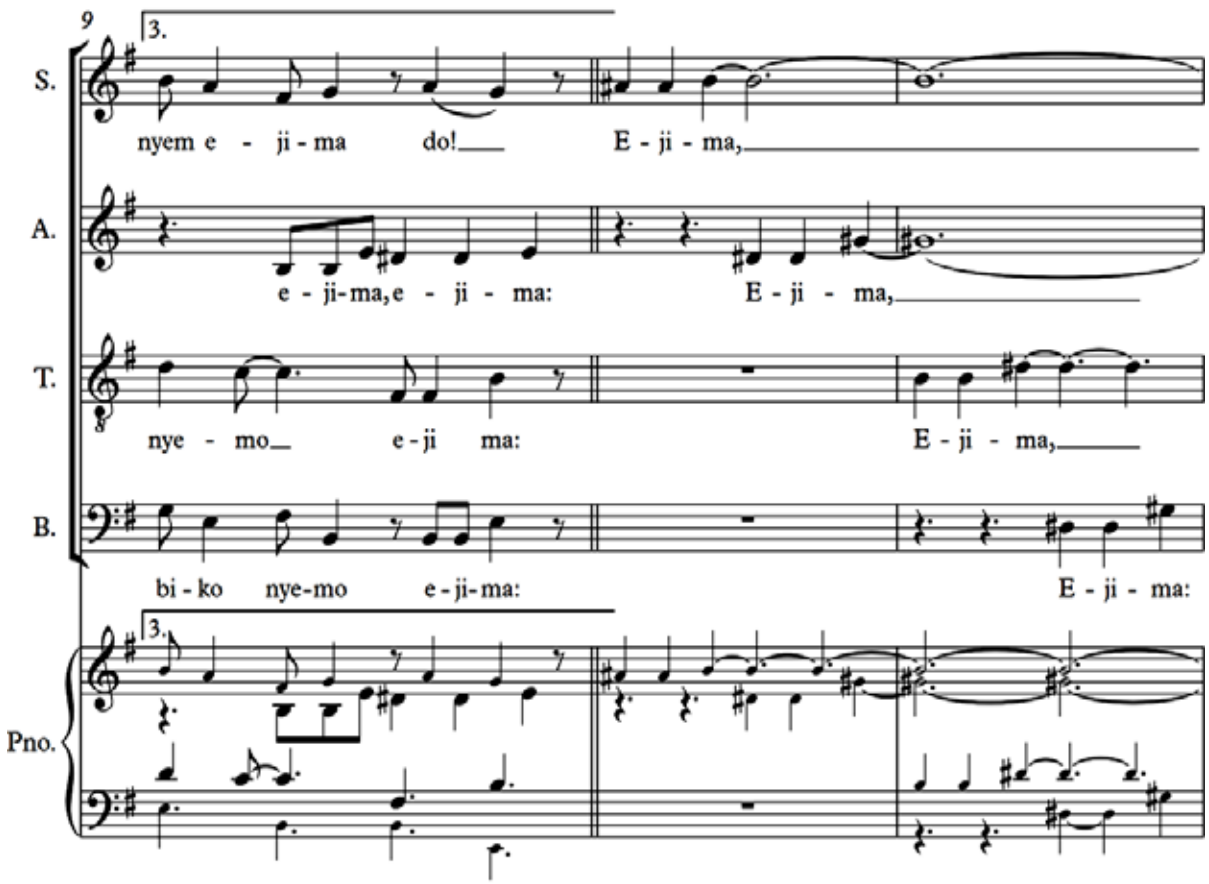
Composed by:
C.N. OSINIGWE (2018)

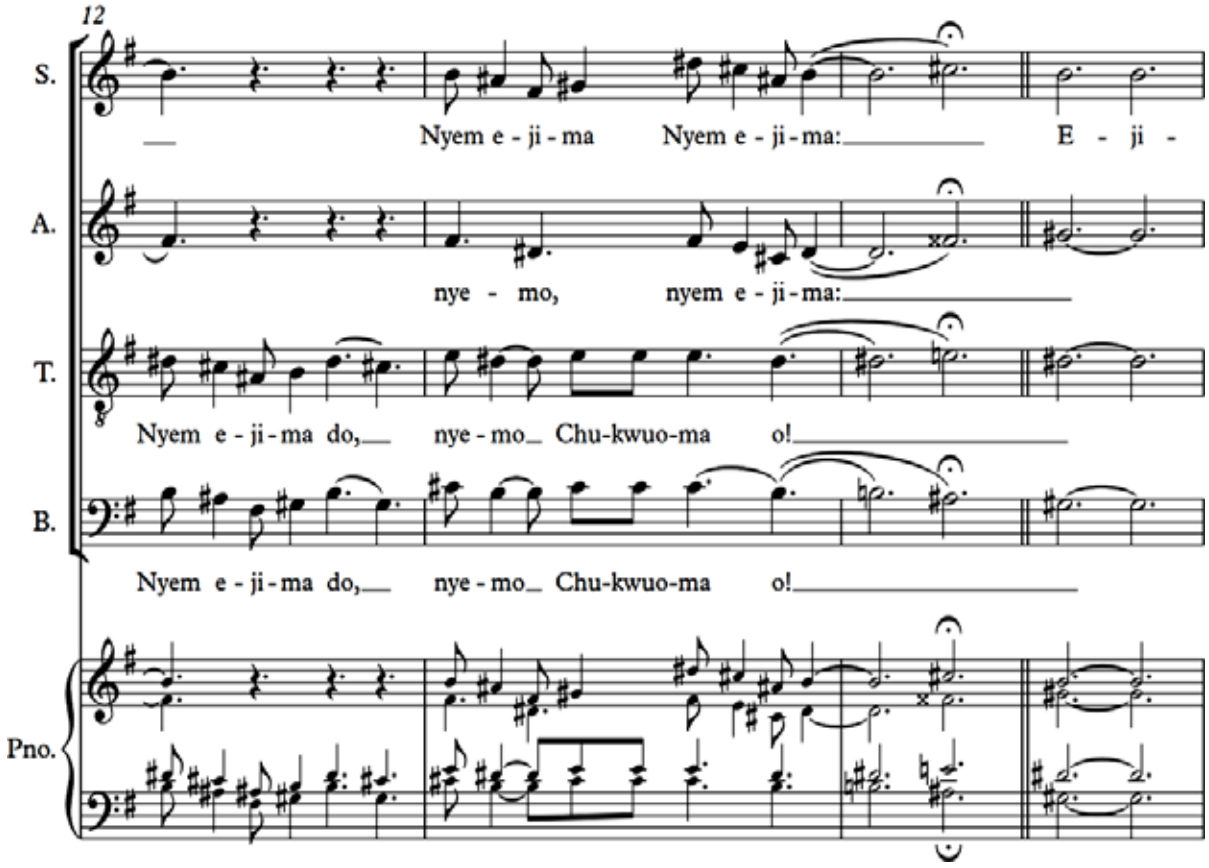


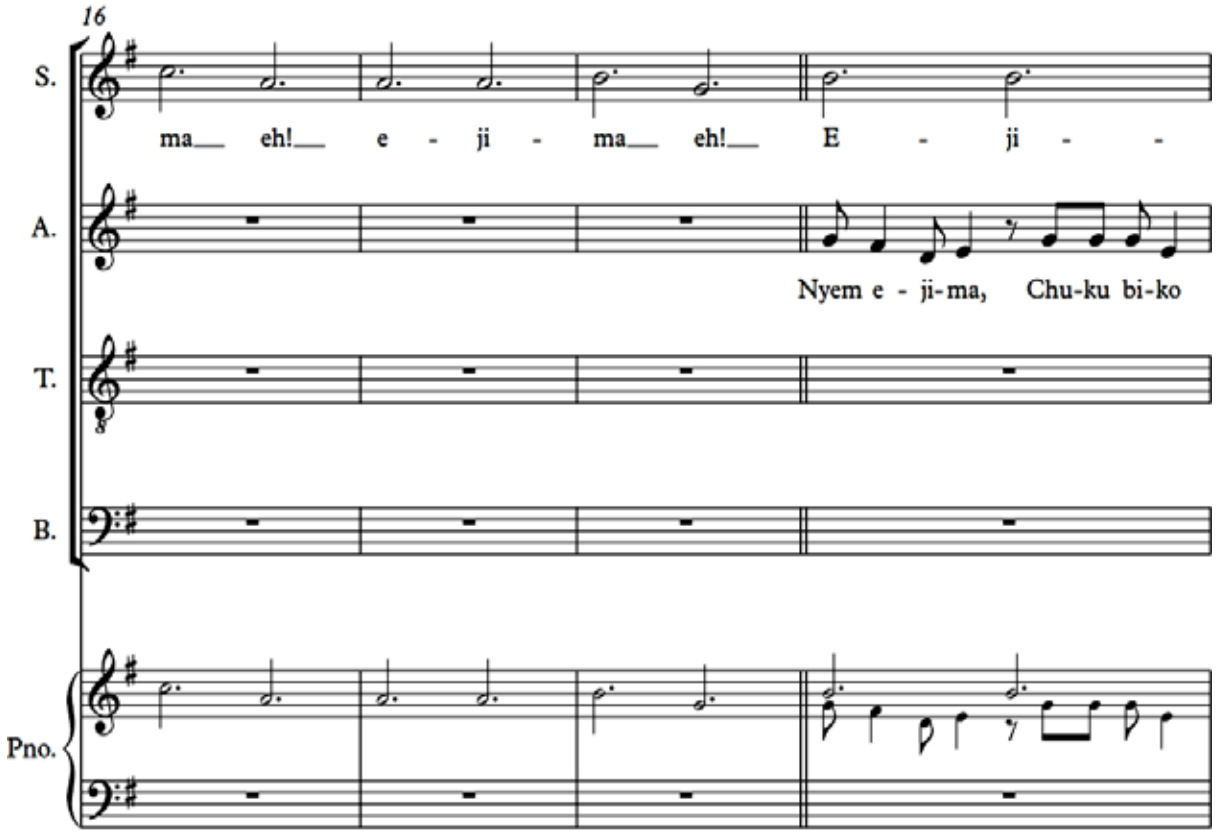


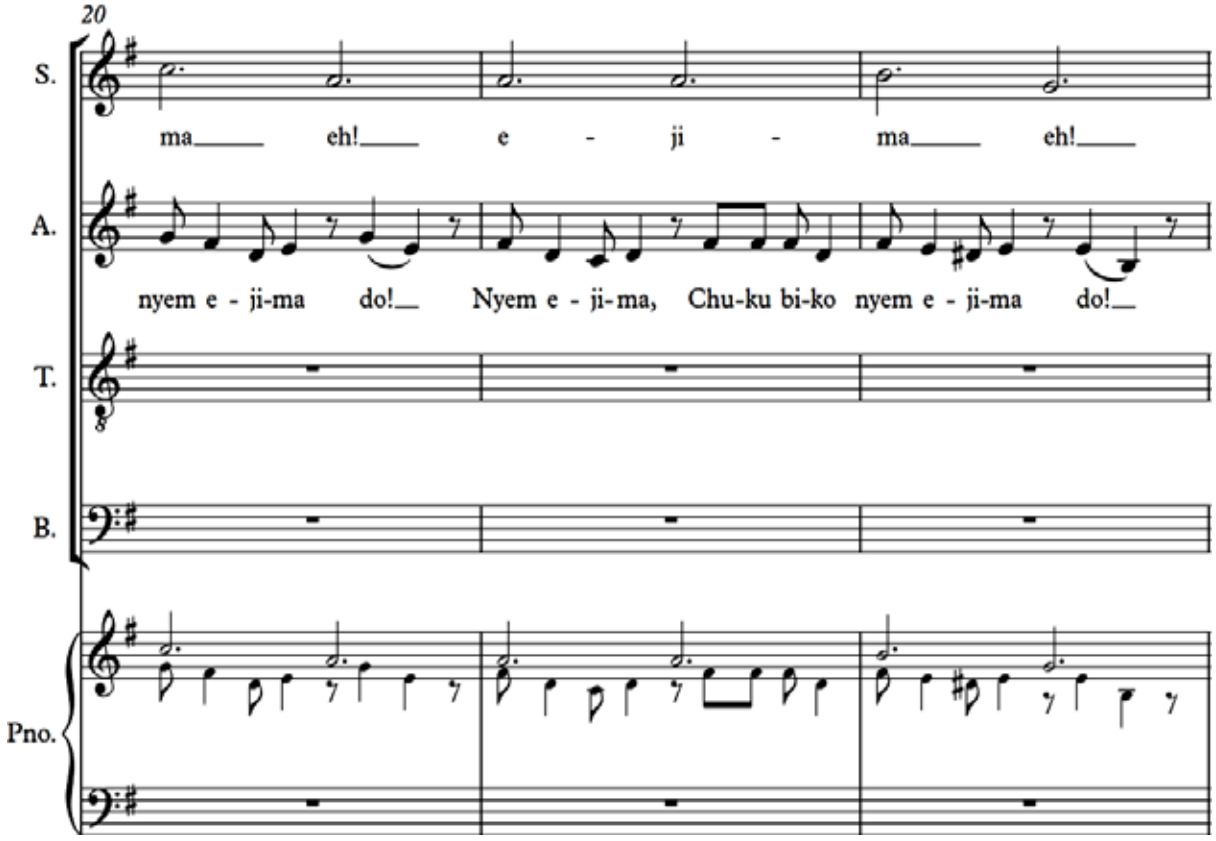

5
S.
Nyem e - ji-ma, Chu-ku bi-ko nyem e - ji-ma do!
A.
E - ji - ma, e-ji-ma, e - ji - ma:
T.
Nye - mo, nye-mo, N-na, nye - mo e-ji ma:
B.
Pno.

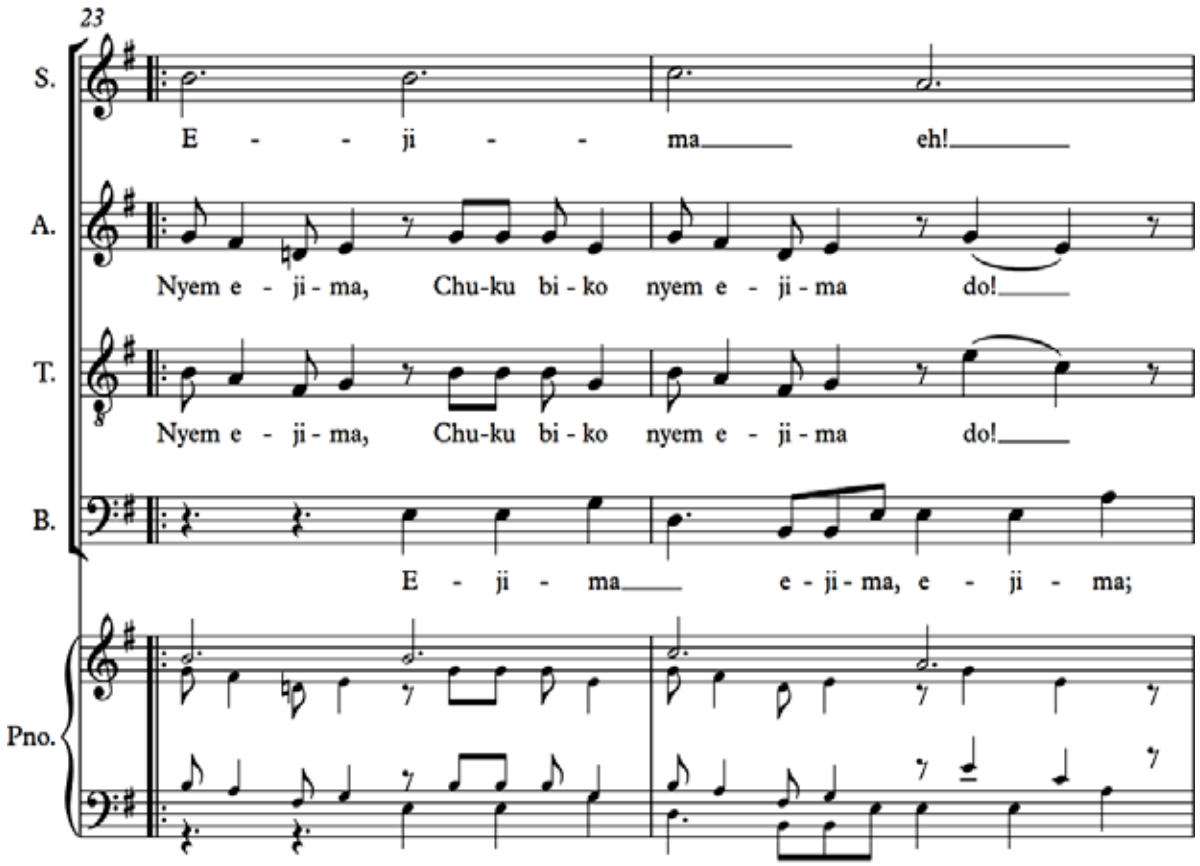

7
1.2.
S.
Nyem e - ji-ma, Chu-ku bi-ko nyem e - ji-ma do!
A.
E - ji - ma, e-ji-ma, e - ji - ma:
T.
Nye - mo, nye-mo, N-na, nye - mo e-ji ma:
B.
Do, a-na-ma-rio bi-ko nye-mo e-ji-ma:
1.2.
Pno.

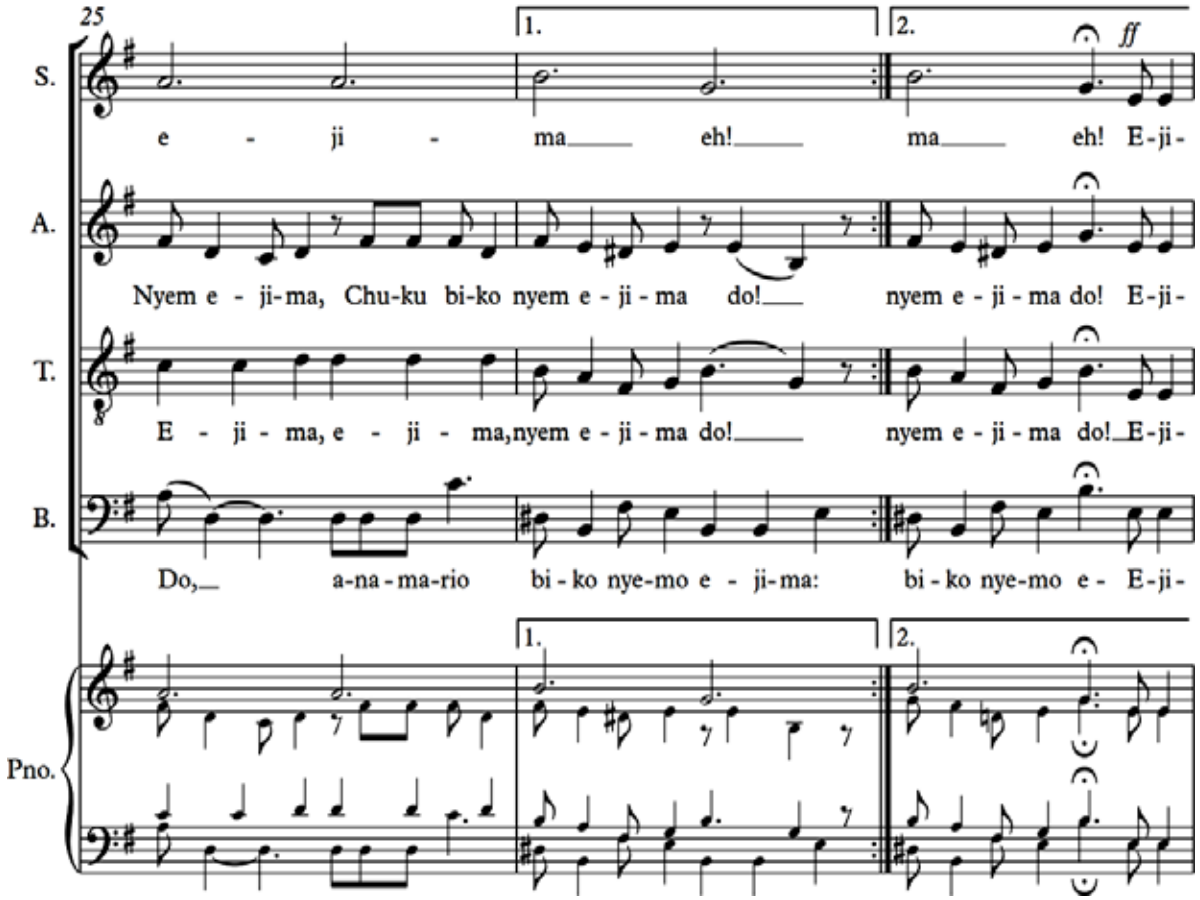

9
3.
S.
nyem e - ji - ma do!
E - ji - ma,
A.
e - ji-ma, e - ji - ma:
E - ji - ma,
T.
nye - mo
e - ji ma:
E - ji - ma,
B.
bi - ko nye-mo e - ji-ma:
E - ji - ma:
3.
Pno.

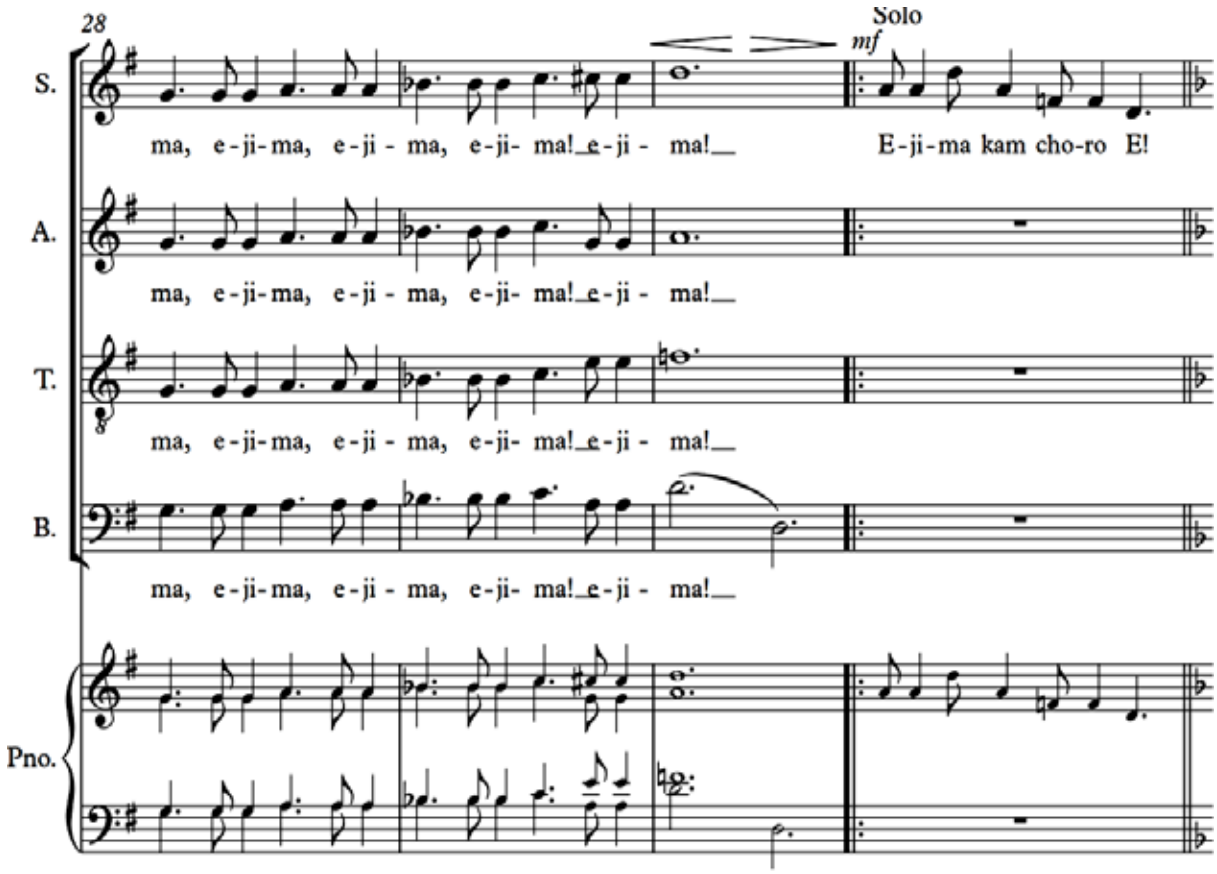

12
S.
Nyem e - ji - ma
Nyem e - ji - ma:
E - ji -
A.
nye - mo,
nyem e - ji - ma:
T.
Nyem e - ji - ma do,
nye - mo Chu-kwuo-ma o!
B.
Nyem e - ji - ma do,
nye - mo Chu-kwuo-ma o!
Pno.

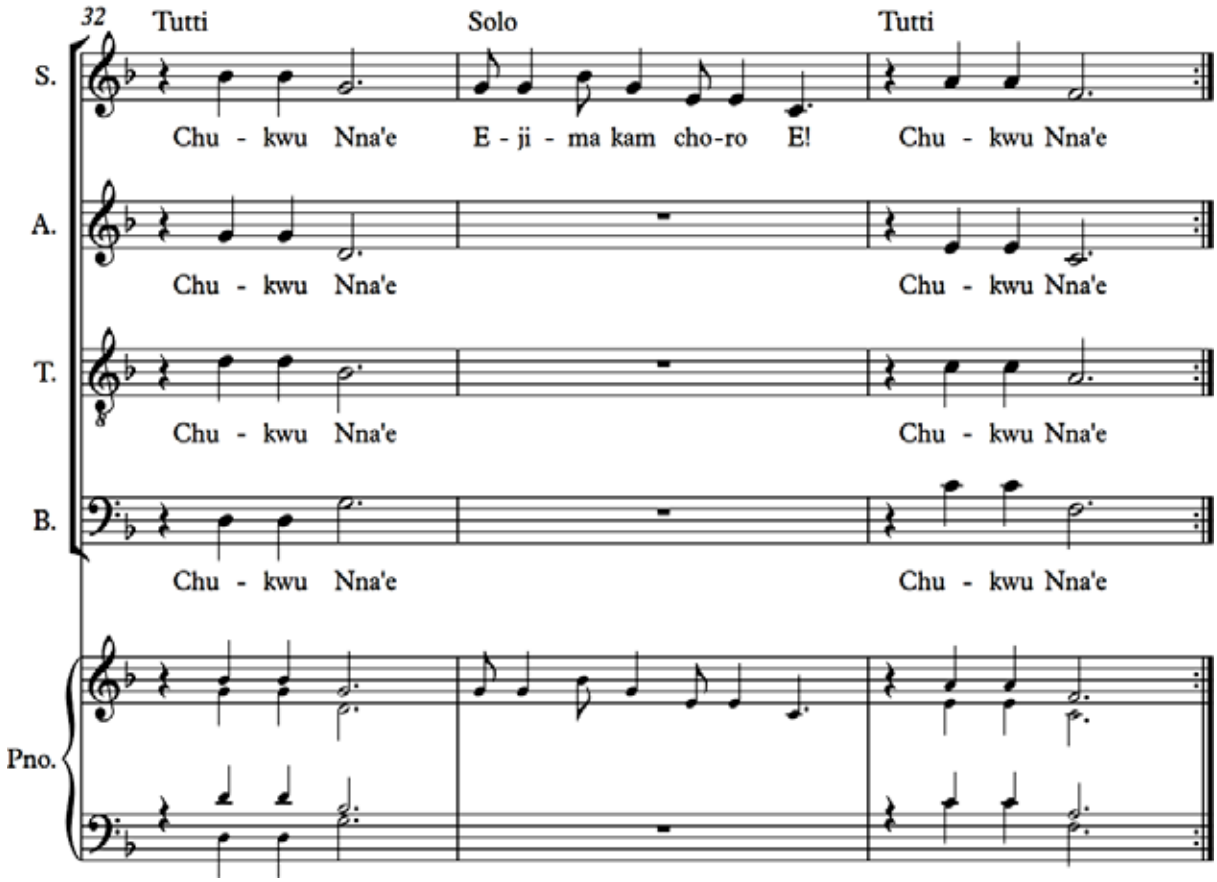

16
S.
ma eh! e - ji - ma eh! E - ji - -
A.
Nyem e - ji-ma, Chu-ku bi-ko
T.
B.
Pno.

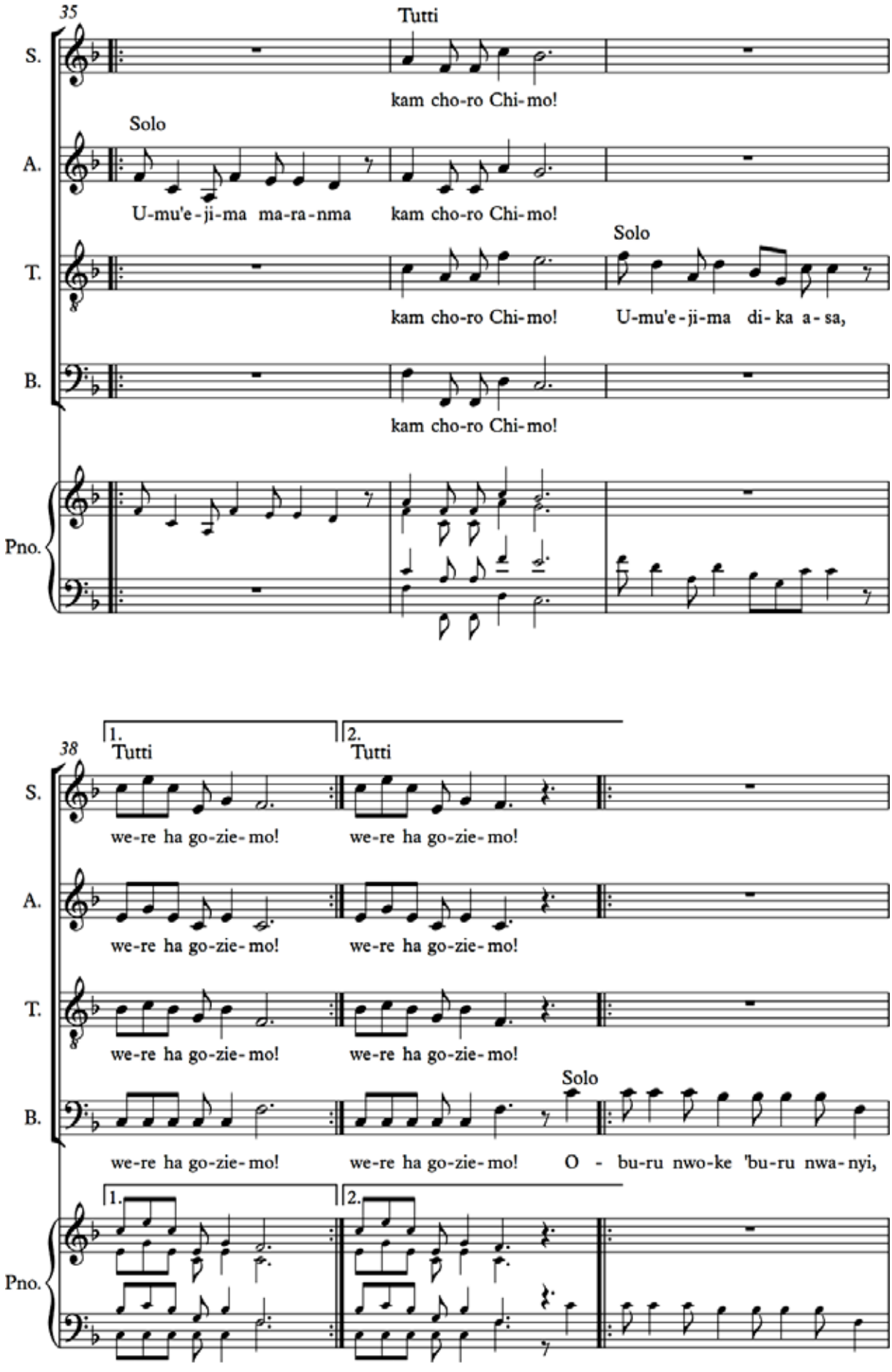

20
S.
ma eh! e - ji - ma eh!
A.
nyem e - ji-ma do! Nyem e - ji-ma, Chu-ku bi-ko nyem e - ji-ma do!
T.
B.
Pno.

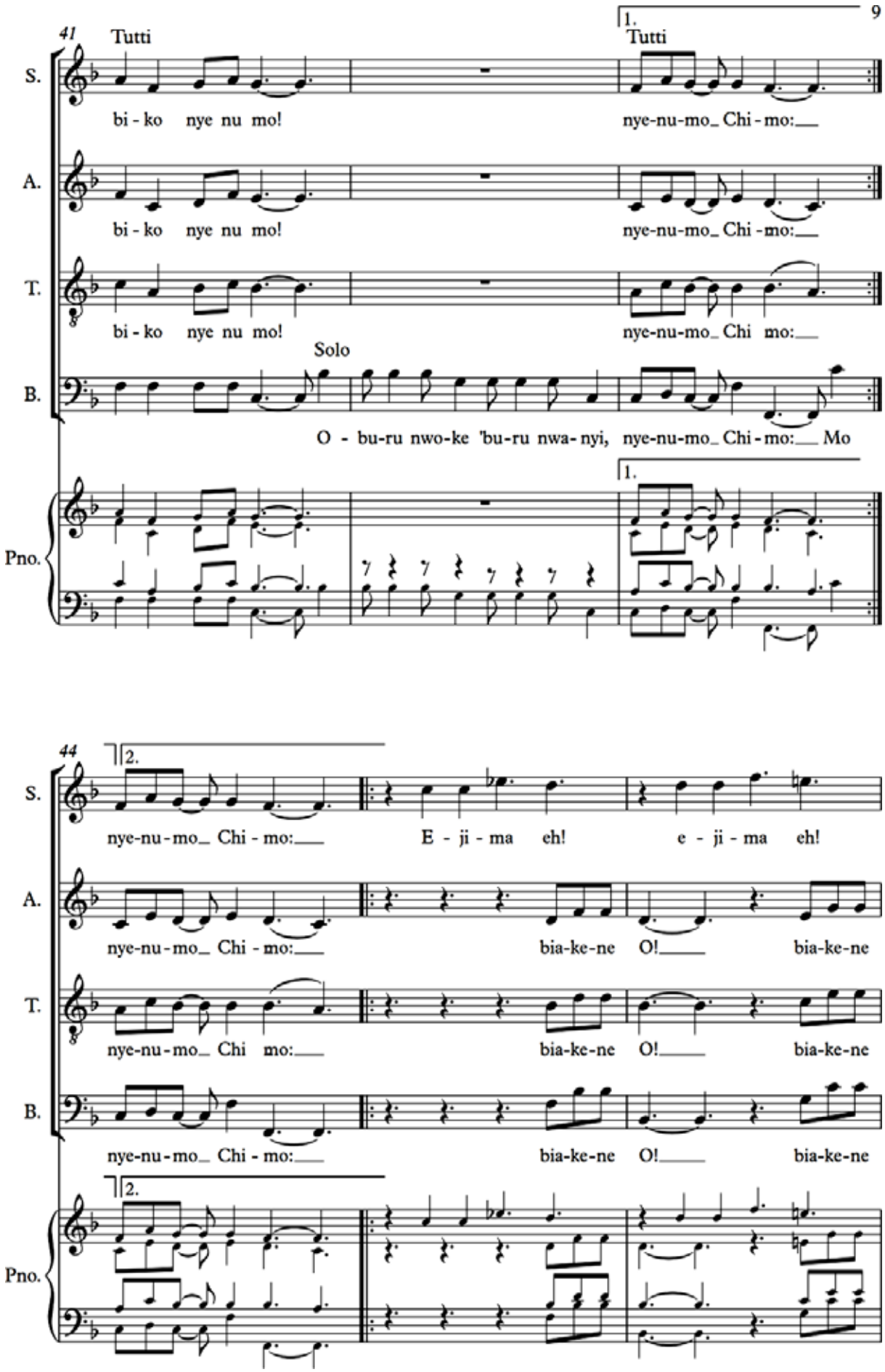

23
S.
E - - ji - - ma eh!
A.
Nyem e - ji - ma, Chu-ku bi - ko nyem e - ji - ma do!
T.
Nyem e - ji - ma, Chu-ku bi - ko nyem e - ji - ma do!
B.
E - ji - ma e - ji - ma, e - ji - ma;
Pno.

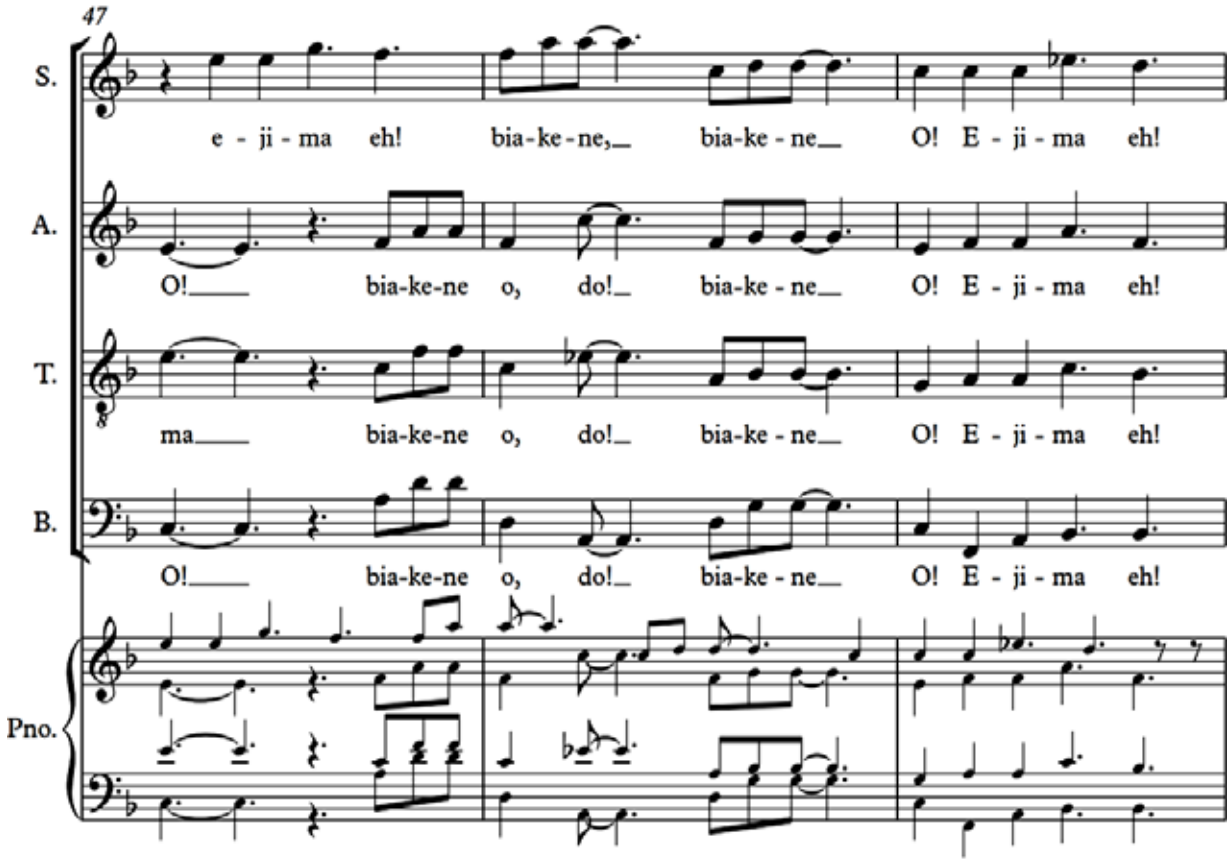

25
1.
2.
ff
S.
e - ji - ma eh! ma eh! E-ji-
A.
Nyem e - ji-ma, Chu-ku bi-ko nyem e - ji - ma do! nyem e - ji - ma do! E-ji-
T.
E - ji - ma, e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma do! nyem e - ji - ma do! E-ji-
B.
Do, a-na-ma-rio bi - ko nye-mo e - ji-ma: bi - ko nye-mo e - E-ji-
Pno.

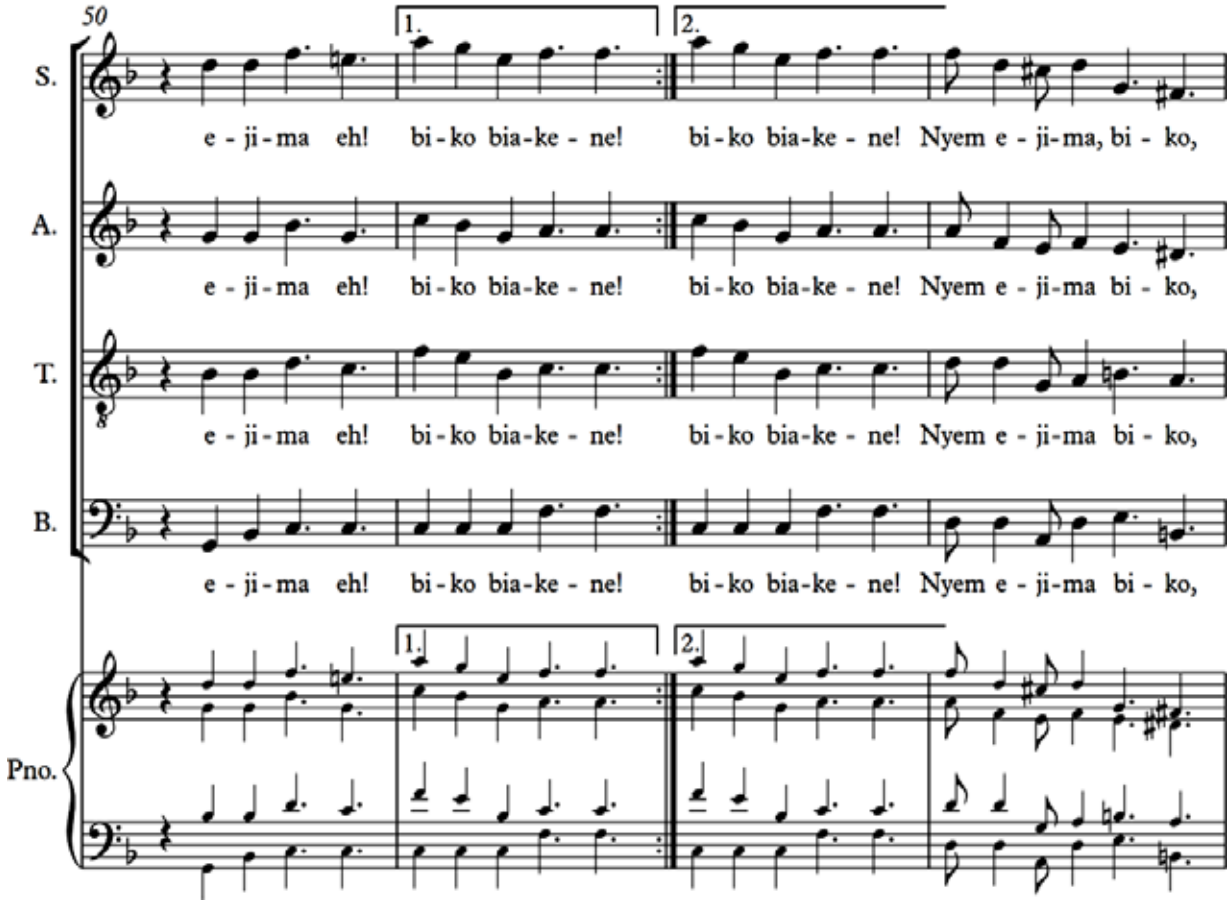

28
Solo
mf
S.
A.
T.
B.
Pno.
ma, e-ji-ma, e-ji - ma, e-ji- ma!_e-ji - ma!_
E-ji-ma kam cho-ro E!

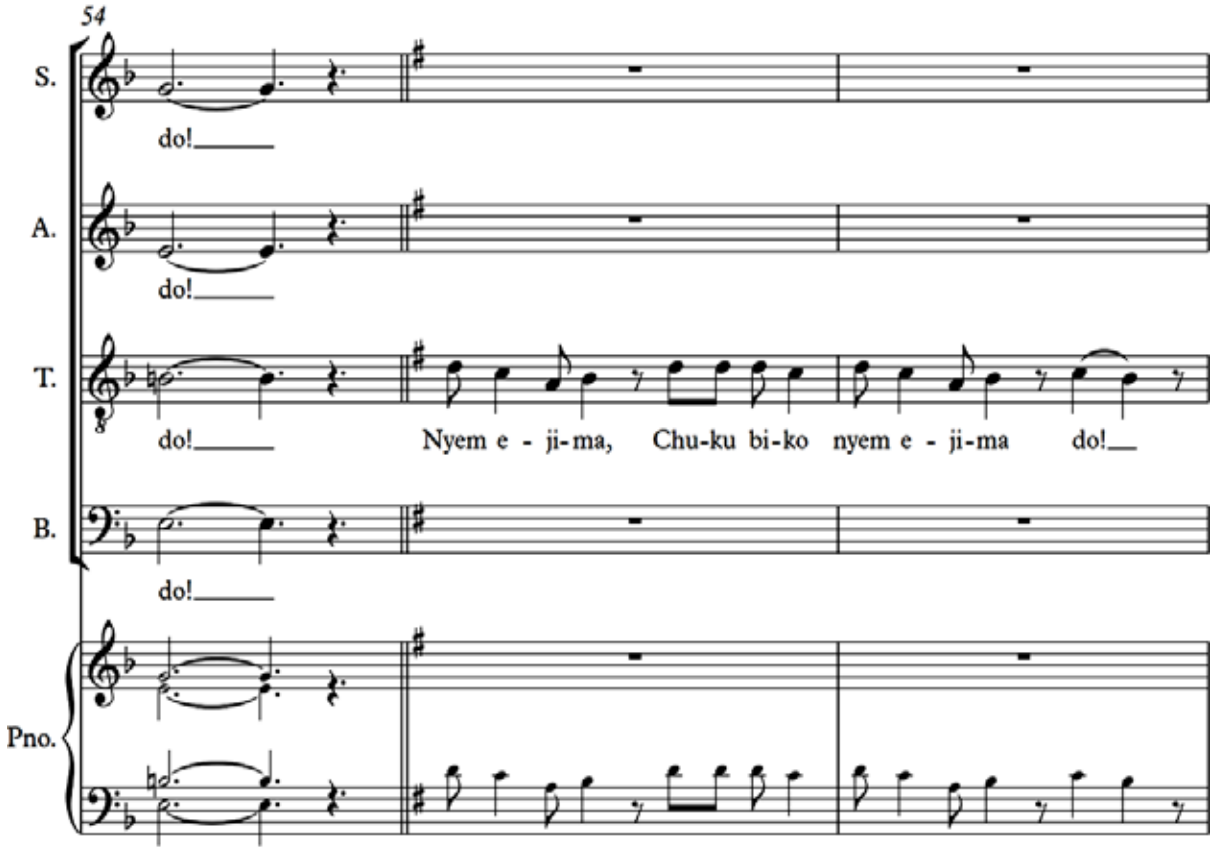

32
Tutti
Solo
Tutti
S.
A.
T.
B.
Pno.
Chu - kwu Nna'e
E - ji - ma kam cho-ro E!
Chu - kwu Nna'e

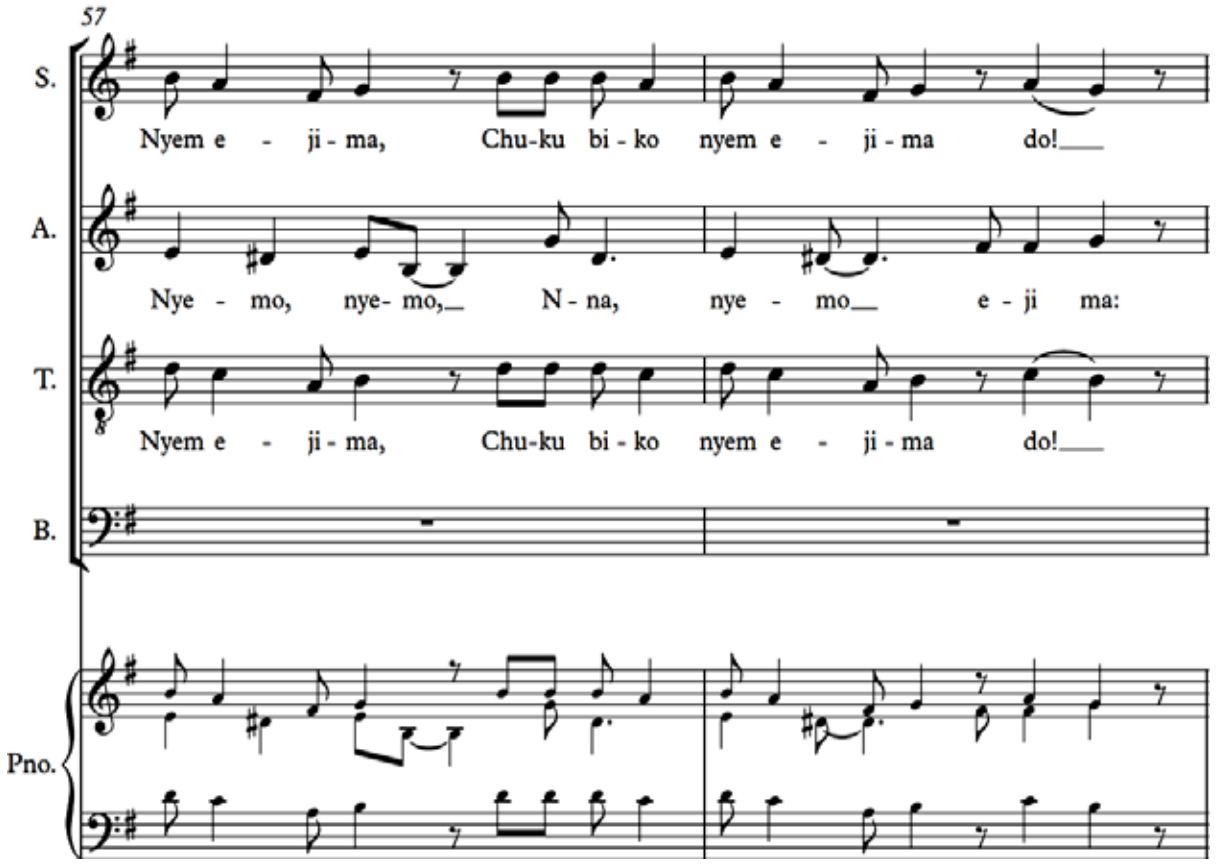

35
Tutti
S.
kam cho-ro Chi-mo!
Solo
A.
U-mu'e-ji-ma ma-ra-nma
kam cho-ro Chi-mo!
Solo
T.
kam cho-ro Chi-mo!
U-mu'e-ji-ma di-ka a-sa,
B.
kam cho-ro Chi-mo!
Pno.
38
1.
Tutti
2.
Tutti
S.
we-re ha go-zie-mo!
we-re ha go-zie-mo!
A.
we-re ha go-zie-mo!
we-re ha go-zie-mo!
T.
we-re ha go-zie-mo!
we-re ha go-zie-mo!
Solo
B.
we-re ha go-zie-mo!
we-re ha go-zie-mo!
O - bu-ru nwo-ke 'bu-ru nwa-nyi,
Pno.

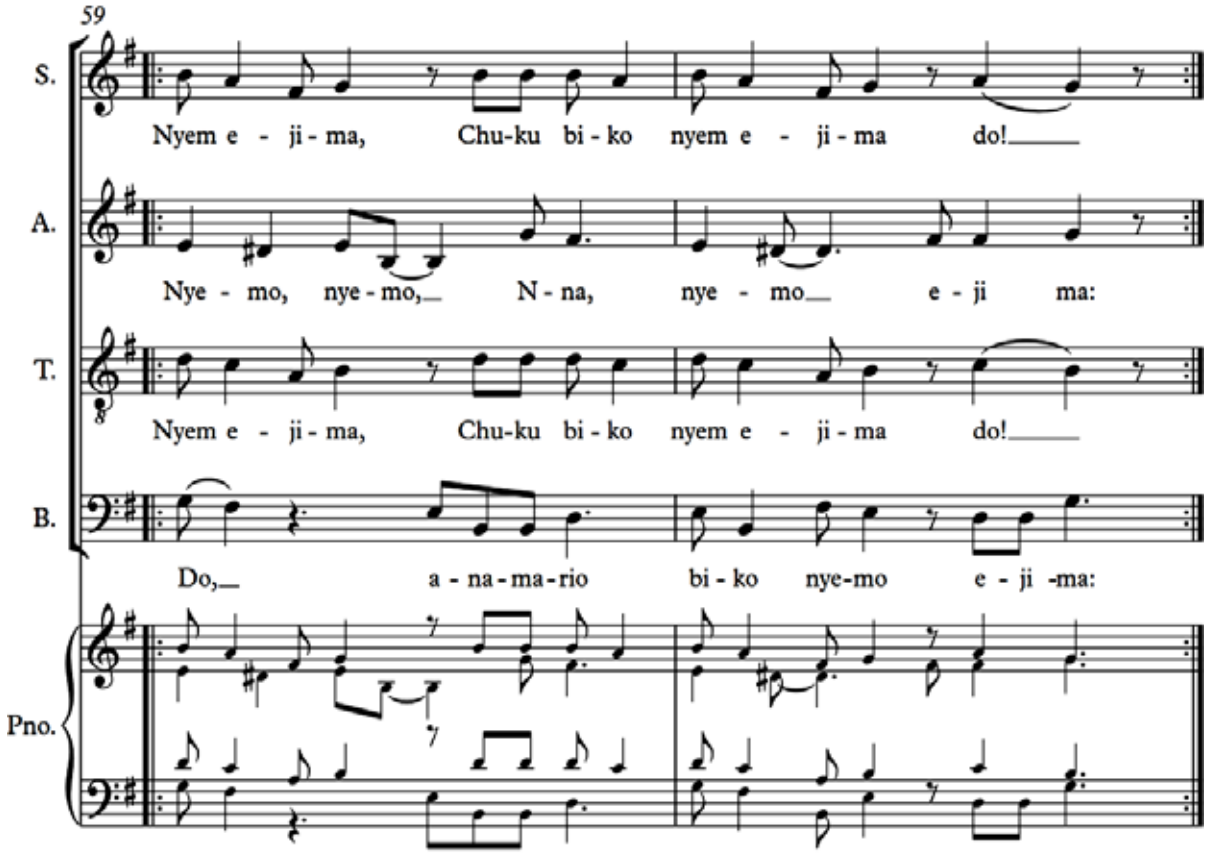

41
Tutti
1.
9
S.
bi - ko nye nu mo!
Tutti
nye-nu-mo_ Chi - mo:___
A.
bi - ko nye nu mo!
nye-nu-mo_ Chi - mo:___
T.
bi - ko nye nu mo!
nye-nu-mo_ Chi mo:___
Solo
B.
O - bu-ru nwo-ke 'bu-ru nwa - nyi, nye-nu-mo_ Chi - mo:___ Mo
Pno.
44
2.
S.
nye-nu - mo_ Chi - mo:___
E - ji - ma eh!
e - ji - ma eh!
A.
nye-nu - mo_ Chi - mo:___
bia-ke-ne O!___
bia-ke-ne
T.
nye-nu - mo_ Chi mo:___
bia-ke-ne O!___
bia-ke-ne
B.
nye-nu - mo_ Chi - mo:___
bia-ke-ne O!___
bia-ke-ne
Pno.

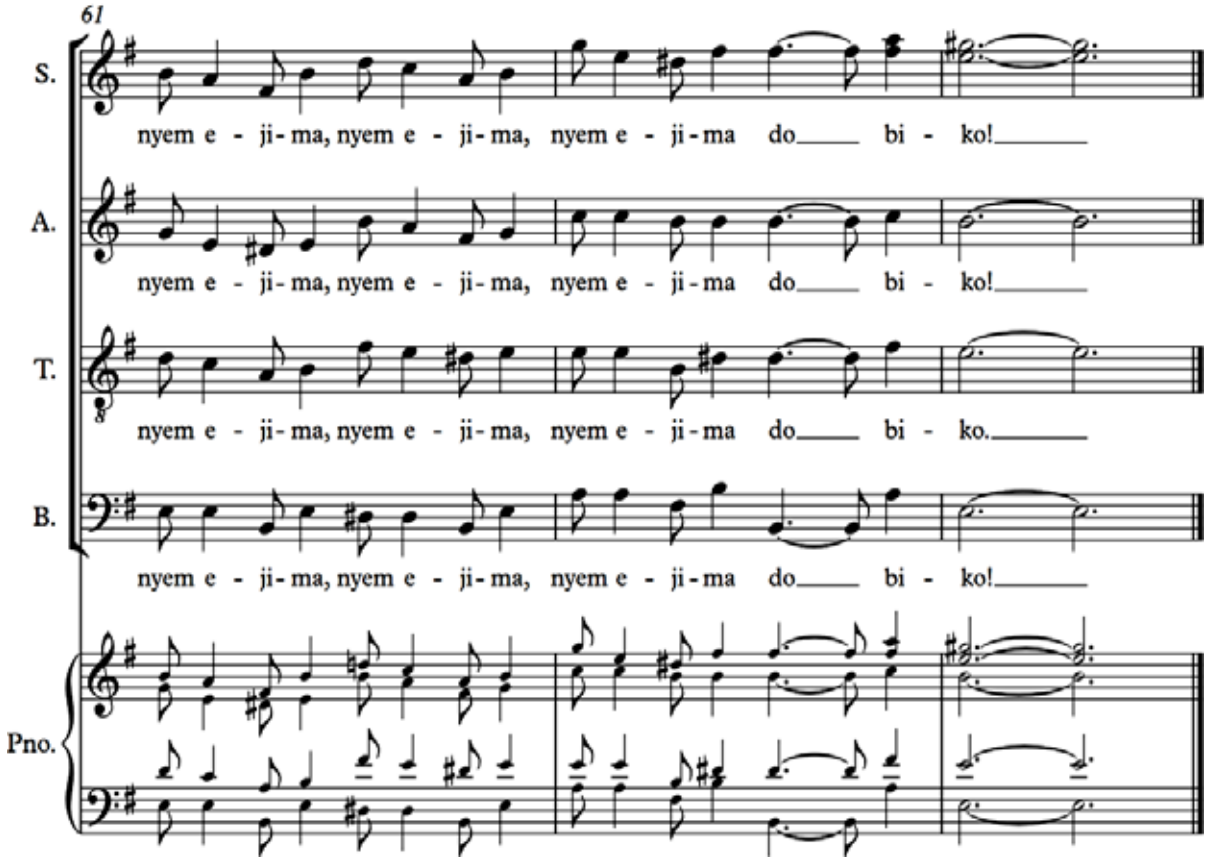

47
S.
e - ji - ma eh! bia-ke-ne,_ bia-ke - ne_ O! E - ji - ma eh!
A.
O!_ bia-ke-ne o, do!_ bia-ke - ne_ O! E - ji - ma eh!
T.
ma_ bia-ke-ne o, do!_ bia-ke - ne_ O! E - ji - ma eh!
B.
O!_ bia-ke-ne o, do!_ bia-ke - ne_ O! E - ji - ma eh!
Pno.


50
1.
2.
S.
e - ji - ma eh! bi - ko bia-ke - ne! bi - ko bia-ke - ne! Nyem e - ji-ma, bi - ko,
A.
e - ji - ma eh! bi - ko bia-ke - ne! bi - ko bia-ke - ne! Nyem e - ji-ma bi - ko,
T.
e - ji - ma eh! bi - ko bia-ke - ne! bi - ko bia-ke - ne! Nyem e - ji-ma bi - ko,
B.
e - ji - ma eh! bi - ko bia-ke - ne! bi - ko bia-ke - ne! Nyem e - ji-ma bi - ko,
Pno.


54
S.
do!
A.
do!
T.
do!
Nyem e - ji-ma, Chu-ku bi-ko nyem e - ji-ma do!
B.
do!
Pno.


57
S.
Nyem e - ji - ma, Chu-ku bi - ko nyem e - ji - ma do!
A.
Nye - mo, nye- mo, N - na, nye - mo e - ji ma:
T.
Nyem e - ji - ma, Chu-ku bi - ko nyem e - ji - ma do!
B.
Pno.


59
S.
Nyem e - ji - ma, Chu-ku bi - ko nyem e - ji - ma do!
A.
Nye - mo, nye - mo, N - na, nye - mo e - ji ma:
T.
Nyem e - ji - ma, Chu-ku bi - ko nyem e - ji - ma do!
B.
Do, a - na - ma - rio bi - ko nye-mo e - ji -ma:
Pno.


61
S.
nyem e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma do bi - ko!
A.
nyem e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma do bi - ko!
T.
nyem e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma do bi - ko.
B.
nyem e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma, nyem e - ji - ma do bi - ko!
Pno.