



# Children Sing for Water



## Five thousand children Five small songs about big problems Words and music by Richard Stilgoe

“These five songs are truly fabulous. It’s a pity they haven’t existed for forty years because if they had they would by now be everybody’s favourite songs for fairly young people, ever. But they haven’t and you have to start somewhere, so here they are, at last, and today’s youngsters will be able to sing them to their children in twenty years’ time, which is great. They are very funny without being stupid, clever without being patronising, meaningful without being nauseating, exceedingly hummable without being even slightly annoying, all about water yet not at all wishy-washy and, let’s face it, **The poo song** is a work of sheer, exuberant genius. Hurrah for Mr Stilgoe’s life-enhancing bucketful of watery songs!”

Howard Goodall

WaterAid asked me to write some songs for primary school children to sing. The songs describe some of the problems of the developing world – distant water sources requiring long daily journeys to fetch contaminated water, drought and poor hygiene – and the work WaterAid does to provide sanitation, hygiene education and safe, clean water close to people’s homes.

Musically, the songs reflect some of the places where WaterAid works – East Africa, South Africa, India and the Pacific Islands. For big performances I have included African and Asian instruments, but because this will often be impractical there are backing tracks provided on the CD. This will be useful for rehearsal, and might be augmented with woodblocks and other hand percussion for performance. Please use the CD, because it will have all the right speed, dynamics and ‘feel’ to it. Brave pianists may also like to use the accompaniment provided. Experts on world music will notice that I have taken huge liberties with the various ethnic styles to make everything possible for those of us with traditional Western experience.

### The band for big shows should be:

- ◆ Kalimba, flute, acoustic guitar, bass guitar, congas, bongos, djembe, blocks, keyboard.
- ◆ And for song three only, tanpura, tabla, sitar and rainsticks.
- ◆ There is also a recorder part (in G) in **Short walk to freedom**, which I hope will be played by some (or all) of the choir.

The songs follow on continuously from each other, with no pauses for applause, changing instruments or coughing. The whole piece should take 13 minutes and 57 seconds.

One extra thing. For **Short walk to freedom** we need a trolley carrying a water tank, a tap on a standpipe, a pump and a car battery. This way, without connecting to a water supply or mains electricity, the tap will work when turned on. The pump will take water from the tank, and the tap will gush the water back into the tank.

Why is it worth making all this effort? Because every day 5,000 children die as a result of bad water and sanitation. Singing won’t cure this, but it might make people pay attention.

**Richard Stilgoe**

# 1. Five thousand children

East African feel. Kalimba, drums.

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## KALIMBA SOLO, THEN FLUTE & KALIMBA

**SOLO VOICE** Five thousand children  
A football crowd of children  
Five thousand children every day

**CHORUS** Five thousand children  
A football crowd of children  
Five thousand children every day

**SOLO** Die

**SOLO** Die

**SOLO** Die

**SOLO** Die.

**SOLO VOICE** Die from diseases  
Borne in bad water  
Five thousand children washed away.

**CHORUS** Die from diseases  
Borne in bad water  
Five thousand children washed away.  
Washed away  
Washed away.

## BAND COMES IN. CONGAS, BASS DRUM, BASS GUITAR, ACOUSTIC GUITAR, KEYBOARD, PERCUSSION, FLUTES.

Five thousand children  
A football crowd of children  
Five thousand children washed away.  
Five thousand children  
A football crowd of children.  
Five thousand children washed away.  
In Africa, in Asia  
Drinking poison from a cup  
Children who will never  
Live to be grown-up.  
A football crowd of children  
Washed away every day.  
Five thousand children  
Washed away.  
Washed away.  
Washed away.  
Washed away.  
Washed away.

(KALIMBA AGAIN)

STRAIGHT INTO I turn on the tap/I walk to the stream

## 2. I turn on the tap/I walk to the stream

(South African Kwela feel)

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**CHOIR C and D** I turn on the tap  
And the water flows  
Don't know where it comes from  
Don't know where it goes  
And it's clean and clear  
And we never run short  
So I never ever give it  
A second thought.

**CHOIR A and B** I walk to the stream  
In the heat of the day  
It's a long, long  
Long, long way.

REPEAT THESE TWO TOGETHER

**CHOIR A** Same stream where we wash each sheet  
All our dirty clothes and our hands & feet

**CHOIR B** Same stream where the crocodile  
Drifts and waits for a careless child.

**CHOIR A** Same stream where we sometimes gloat  
At the bloated body of a floating goat.

**CHOIR B** Same stream where a mile up hill  
The cows do things cows always will.

**CHOIR A** Same stream with the same old stink  
Nothing else for us to drink.

**CHOIR B** Same stream where the grubs and worms  
Fight for room with a million germs.

**CHOIR C and D** I turn on the tap  
And the water flows  
Don't know where it comes from  
Don't know where it goes  
And it's clean and clear  
And we never run short  
So I never ever give it  
A second thought.

**CHOIR A and B**

I walk to the stream  
In the heat of the day  
It's a long, long  
Long, long way.

**ALL** It's a long, long, long, long way.

STRAIGHT INTO Evaporation.

### 3. Evaporation

Indian feel. Tanpura, tabla, sitar, rainsticks. (Please be very sparing and subtle with the rainsticks.)

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**CHOIRS A,B,C,D** Evaporation, Precipitation, Evaporation, Precipitation.

**CHOIR A**  
The sun warms up the sea, and that makes clouds  
They blow inland and rain falls on the crowds.  
And the crowds drink the rain,  
Then it's down the drain, down the river to the sea again.

REPEAT THIS IN CANON, with CHOIRS A, B, C and D

**CHOIR A**  
The sun warms up the sea, and that makes clouds  
They blow inland and rain falls on the crowds.  
And the crowds drink the rain,  
Then it's down the drain, down the river to the sea again.

REPEAT WITH SITAR and TABLA

**SOLO** There are places on the planet where for more than seven years

**CHOIR C** More than seven years.

**SOLO** No rain has fallen, only tears.

**CHOIR C** Only tears.

**CHOIR A,B,C and D** There are places on the planet  
Where for more than seven years **CHOIR C** More than seven years  
No rain has fallen, No rain has fallen  
Only tears. Only tears.

**CHOIR A** Evaporation **B** Evaporation **C** Evaporation **D** Evaporation

**ALL** Zum, Zum, Zum, Zum, Zum, Zum, Zum, Zum, Zum,

STOP RAINSTICKS AND HOLD THEM VERY STILL

(ACTIONS During "Evaporation", all children raise their arms while wiggling their fingers, then lower their arms during "Precipitation".

During "Evaporation" at the end, each choir raises its arms and holds them up high until the music starts for The poo song.)

STRAIGHT INTO The poo song

## 4. The poo song

(Gentle beguine, peaceful oceanic feeling. Marimba, percussion. This must be sung beautifully and sweetly to prevent it being appalling).

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**ALL** Oo-oo-oo-oo. Oo-oo-oo-oo. (etc.)

**ALL** This is a song about poo.  
I know the word is taboo.  
Don't make a hullabaloo –  
It's something all of us do.  
But if you haven't a loo  
Then it's a problem for you  
Which is why we have to do  
This song about poo.

**CHOIR A and B** Dad we've had an education  
We know all about hygiene  
No more squatting by the roadside  
You have to dig a V.I.P. latrine.  
A Ventilation Improved Pit  
That's the type we require,  
With a plastic pipe to catch the flies  
And a pile of ash from the fire.

**ALL** Dad we don't live in a zoo.  
You can't just do doo-doo-doo.  
Hey Dad we're talking to you,  
And the other dads too.

**CHOIR A and B** Nobody will come to our house.  
Other kids all shout at me  
"My Dad's cleaner than your Dad" –  
'Cause we haven't got a V.I.P.  
Daddy we're not talking dirty,  
We agree and so does Mum  
You should build a latrine,  
And we'll all keep it clean  
It will stop the pain in your bum.

**SOLO** (in pain) Ooh!

**ALL** That was a song about poo –  
It's over, finished and through.  
It's time to bid it "adieu" –  
But if we made a CD  
In a week it would be  
Number two!  
Phew!

STRAIGHT INTO Short walk to freedom

## 5. Short walk to freedom

(South Africa – Kwela – like I turn on the tap/I walk to the stream)

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RECORDERS AND BAND INTRODUCTION. RECORDERS COULD BE A GROUP WITHIN THE CHOIR.

(During this a small truck is brought centre stage. It carries a standpipe standing in a tank of water, an electric pump and a battery – so that when turned on, it works as if by magic. In the spoken intro, it is used as a percussion instrument to play the tapping sounds.)

### ALL SPOKEN

Look what we've got! Look what we've got!

Look (TAP TAP) In the middle of the village. Look (TAP TAP)

In the middle of the town.

We have a tap (TAP). One tap (TAP).

It's brand new.

May not sound like much to you (TAP, TAP, TAP)

But it's like lighting a fire

Or learning to fish

It's a wish (TAP TAP) come true.

### A and B

Turn on the tap

Now the water flows.

Don't know where it comes from –

Someone knows.

And the water's clean

And it's close to home –

Just a short walk to freedom.

THEN REPEAT WITH C and D

We have time, time, time

We are well, well, well,

No more germs, no more grime

Just a short walk

To freedom.

REPEAT TOGETHER

Time for mothers to be mothers

Time to play with my brothers

Time for them to play with me

Time to be a family.

No more long walk down the track

I just got my childhood back.

Time for me to go to school

(Okay – nothing's perfect).

TURN ON THE ONSTAGE TAP!

### A and B

Turn on the tap

Now the water flows.

Don't know where it came from –

Someone knows.

And the water's clean

And it's close to home.

### C and D

We have time, time.

Time.

We are well, well.

Well. No more

Germs, no more

Grime.

**ALL**

Just a short walk, a short walk to freedom.  
A short walk, a short walk to freedom,  
A short walk, a short walk,  
To freedom, to freedom, to freedom.

**SOLO**

Five thousand children  
Saved by safe water  
Five thousand children  
Survive.

**CHORUS**

Five thousand children  
Saved by safe water  
Five thousand children  
Survive.

**SOLO**

Five thousand children  
A football crowd of children  
Five thousand children  
Survive.

**CHORUS**

Five thousand children  
A football crowd of children  
Five thousand children  
Stay alive.  
Stay alive.  
Stay alive.  
Stay alive.  
Stay alive.