

I Will Overcome: A Genre Bending Anthem of Perseverance

"I Will Overcome" is the second track on British singer-songwriter and producer RAYE's sophomore album, *This Music May Contain Hope*, released on March 27, 2026. Although the album opens with "Intro: Girl Under the Grey Cloud," that track functions primarily as a prologue; "I Will Overcome" serves as the album's true musical beginning. The song is both a grand testament to RAYE's artistic ambition and a powerful affirmation of perseverance in the face of adversity, establishing the album's central theme of finding hope through struggle. The music does, in fact, contain hope.

Written and produced by RAYE alongside Tom Richards and Chris Hill, "I Will Overcome" demonstrates a commitment to creating music that is both emotionally resonant and musically sophisticated. The track is rooted in C minor (Musicnotes, 2026), a key traditionally associated with melancholy and introspection, which reinforces the song's themes of self-doubt, loneliness, and resilience. Throughout the piece, RAYE plays with the tension between darkness and hope through harmonic shifts and dramatic dynamic contrasts, allowing moments of uplift to emerge from the song's otherwise sombre tonal landscape. The song's slow 12/8 meter further contributes to its reflective, almost hymn-like quality.

The tonality remains predominantly dark and mysterious, "paired with this subtle sensuality that sits just under the surface" (Ileyah, 2026). Yet, there is an underlying sense of optimism that gradually surfaces as the song progresses. The song begins with a relatively transparent texture, featuring sparse accompaniment and an intimate vocal performance that conveys vulnerability and emotional honesty. RAYE weaves a narrative of insecurity and public scrutiny through the fluctuating timbre of her expressive vocals. Her rich vibrato and emotional delivery evoke the storytelling traditions of a *chanson réaliste*, drawing listeners into an intimate confessional space as she masterfully paints her mental and physical state within the narrative; "Five hundred steps left to make it to the front door (Mm)/My red high heels click, click/four many too drinks/I feel my backbone threaten to greet the concrete below" (GENIUS, 2026). As the narrative unfolds, the texture gradually becomes denser through the addition of orchestral strings, backing vocals, and a fuller rhythm section. Her vocal performance transforms into something closer to a battle cry, culminating in the Aretha Franklin-esque rawness in the final declaration of "I will overcome." This shift from vulnerability to empowerment mirrors the song's lyrical journey and underscores its message of resilience, and the strength in overcoming adversity.

Instrumentally, RAYE moves beyond contemporary pop conventions by incorporating sweeping orchestral arrangements (courtesy the London symphony orchestra), gospel-inspired call-and-response vocals, and "an electronic beat" (Lindsay Carson, 2026). The orchestration expands throughout the song, creating a cinematic sense of scale that complements its themes of struggle and triumph. These elements elevate "I Will Overcome" beyond a standard pop ballad and showcase RAYE's versatility as both a songwriter and performer. The result is a dramatic and emotionally compelling work that is as musically ambitious as it is deeply personal.

Moreover, in a cultural moment where discussions of mental health, personal growth, and self-acceptance are increasingly prominent, "I Will Overcome" resonates with contemporary listeners while avoiding simplistic or overly sentimental solutions. As said in the The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2020, "A synthesis of 20 studies demonstrated a significant relationship between social media use and body image concerns and eating disorders, with social comparison as a potential contributing factor." RAYE highlights her social awareness by addressing this issue in "I Will Overcome"; "Whilst scrolling, I sighed (I'm so jealous)/Of everyone online who is so much happier/And content and complete/(To feel better, I shall arrange a sad little feast" before ending the verse with "I will keep on," flowing into the hymn-like chorus; "I'll overcome (She will, she will, she will)" (GENIUS, 2026). In just a verse of this song, RAYE has both embraced everyone else going through the same issue, and offers the next step forward: to overcome.

"I Will Overcome's" message is not that adversity disappears, but that individuals can find the strength to endure and grow through hardship. The incorporation of gospel-inspired call-and-response vocals adds a communal dimension to what might otherwise be a deeply personal statement which can also be understood within the broader historical tradition of gospel and protest music. The song's repeated refrain, "I will overcome," echoes the language and spirit of the civil rights anthem *We Shall Overcome* (Virginia Gorkinski, n.d.), a song that originated in African American spiritual and gospel traditions before becoming one of the defining musical symbols of the American Civil Rights Movement. Historians trace *We Shall Overcome* to Charles Albert Tindley's gospel hymn "I'll Overcome Someday" and later adaptations by labour activists and civil rights organizers (Meg Matthias, 2025). Through its simple, repetitive lyrics and communal style of performance, the song became an expression of perseverance, hope, and collective resistance against oppression. While RAYE has never made this comparison herself, and it may be a stretch to do so, her connection to faith; "There's a world in which if I didn't find faith again, I might not even be here" (Rachel Keen, 2024) and wealth of musical context makes the connection plausible at best.

"I Will Overcome" demonstrates how musical elements can work together to amplify lyrical meaning and create a powerful emotional experience for listeners. However, its grandiose nature could be a bit much for some audiences. As noted in a lot of reviews of the album as a whole, oftentimes the instrumental is doing too much; "Yet the album's sweeping orchestral arrangements often threaten to overwhelm that voice rather than elevate it," and I could see where the sentiment may apply here. The way she is able to play with emotion in her tender vocal performances is quite notable. However, what she attempted (and succeeded in) in this song and the album as a whole is undeniable.



I Will Overcome

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Label: Human Re Sources

Writer(s): RAYE, Chris Hill,

Tom Richards

Producer(s): RAYE, Chris Hill,

Tom Richards

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