



Once Upon a Night!



Text by Bill F. Leach
Music by Vicki Hancock Wright

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A Unison Christmas Cantata

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This cantata is designed for presentation by a choir (or choirs) of grades 1-3, grades 4-6, or grades 1-6. Performance time is approximately 22-25 minutes.

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Also available:

Demonstration Cassette Recording - CGCT21

Director's Kit (containing score and demonstration cassette) - CGK12

Notes

The staging suggestions are made from the perspective of a very young choir and are therefore very simple (and are also optional). Depending on the age of the singers and the circumstances, feel free to make the presentation as elaborate as your own imagination and creativity suggests.

The designation of vocal lines has been made from the perspective of a first to third grade choir, making considerable use of the adult choir leaders to sing solo lines and, if desired, to do some singing along with the children. With a choir of fourth to sixth graders, it is suggested that the adults be used much more sparingly if at all.

The cast includes four or five “choir leaders” in addition to the choir: an accompanist, a director, and two or three activity leaders – just as in a regular choir rehearsal. The “storyteller” role can be played by one person, or can be divided among several. The activity leaders assist with the pantomimed table activities at the beginning of the rehearsal. When the choir is seated for singing one of the leaders tells the Christmas story and the other two sing portions of some of the choruses.

The setting is the regular weekly choir rehearsal. The choir members’ families and friends have been invited to the rehearsal so the children can informally share with them some of the activities they have been doing in choir, some of the music they have been learning, and enjoy refreshments and fellowship with them after the rehearsal.

The stage is set like a rehearsal room, with three or four tables set up for activities stage left. On one of the tables is an autoharp and a songbook or sets of autoharp cards. Art materials that have been used to make a mural depicting events in the Christmas story are on another table. The mural (or several smaller individual pictures depicting scenes in the story) should be made prior to the presentation, perhaps by the children in their regular rehearsals. During the Overture, the children pantomime working on the mural, then hang it for a backdrop. On a third table are simple instruments such as woodblocks, tambourines, and bells (using whatever instruments are available). On the fourth table is a large doll and simple costumes for Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Wise Men; the children will don the costumes during the Overture.

At stage right, chairs are arranged in a semicircle, obliquely facing the audience. These are for the choir members to sit on when it is time for the singing. (If you prefer, children may be seated on the floor or on risers instead.) A single chair faces the choir chairs; when seated in it, the director faces the choir with his or her back slightly toward the audience.

At rear center stage is a simple manger with straw scattered around. The children form a live mural around the manger during the singing of the final chorus.

The Overture begins with the lights dimmed on both the stage and audience. The choir leaders enter the room and take their places – the director at the door and the others at the activity tables – to pantomime greeting the children as they enter the room to begin the rehearsal. When the children enter, the lights come up full on the choir room. The children move to the tables to pantomime the activities. As the end of the Overture approaches, they take their seats in the semicircle. Those who have donned the costumes mix in with those who are not costumed. By all means, do not group the Wise Men together or the shepherds together. As the Overture ends, the director begins the opening dialogue. (See the score for the remainder of the staging suggestions.)

Little or no drilling will be needed for the staging/drama part of this work (unless you choose to make it more elaborate). The children simply do the kinds of things they normally do in their usual rehearsal, and do them in an informal manner.

During one of their rehearsals, you may want to have the children make and mail their own handwritten invitations to their parents. Perhaps together the choir could write an invitation to the congregation to be printed in the church bulletin or newsletter.

Once Upon a Night!

Overture

Bill F. Leach

Vicki Hancock Wright

(As the Overture begins, choir leaders take their places and pantomime greeting the children as they enter. Children pantomime the table activities and hang the mural as a backdrop.)

With excitement (♩ = 72)

The musical score is written for piano in G major and 6/8 time. It consists of five systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system starts with a forte (f) dynamic and includes a first ending bracket. The second system begins at measure 5. The third system begins at measure 9. The fourth system begins at measure 13. The fifth system begins at measure 18 and includes a ritardando (rit.) marking. The score concludes with a key signature change to A major.

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22 Sweetly (♩ = 84)

Musical notation for measures 22-24. The piece is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 84 quarter notes per minute. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The music is marked *mf*. The right hand features a melody of eighth and quarter notes, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Musical notation for measures 25-27. The notation continues with the same melodic and accompanimental patterns as the previous system.

Musical notation for measures 28-30. Measure 28 is marked *mp*. A first ending bracket spans measures 29 and 30, marked with a '1.' above it. The key signature changes to two sharps (F#, C#) at the start of measure 29.

Musical notation for measures 31-34. Measure 31 is marked *mp*. A second ending bracket spans measures 32 and 33, marked with a '2.' above it. The instruction *broaden* is written below the bass line in measure 32. Measure 34 is marked *mf*. The key signature changes to one flat (F) at the start of measure 32.

Musical notation for measures 35-37. The key signature remains one flat (F). The music continues with the established melodic and accompanimental patterns.

Musical notation for measures 38-40. A first ending bracket spans measures 39 and 40, marked with a '1.' above it. The key signature changes to one sharp (F#) at the start of measure 39.

DIRECTOR: I'm so glad all of you could come. It's a very special time with your families and other friends here to share with us, see some of the things you do in choir each week, hear some of the music you've been learning, and . . .

A BOY: Don't forget the cookies and cakes and everything, *(name of director)!*

A GIRL: Um hm! Don't forget that!

DIRECTOR: Oh, I won't! You wouldn't let me! *(Name of child)*, did your grandmother get to come? *(Give child time to respond, then ask one or two other children similar questions to make it as relaxed, informal and intimate as possible.)*

I hope your parents have enjoyed seeing some of the activities you did in small groups. Now would you like to share with them some of the Christmas music that you've been learning? *(All members respond)*

Good! But first, I have a surprise for you. As we share the music with your parents and friends, we will have the help of *(a)* storyteller(s), who will tell the Christmas story as we sing about it. *(Name of storyteller)*, will you begin?

STORYTELLER: All of you know that many stories begin "Once upon a time . . ." Well, the Christmas story is a very special story and much of it happened at night, so let's begin it: "Once upon a night."

Once upon a night, long, long ago, in the far off land of the Jews, three weary travelers slowly made their way along a dusty road toward a little town called Bethlehem. One of the travelers was a young woman called Mary. The second traveler was a man named Joseph, and he was Mary's husband. The third traveler had no name for he was a little donkey on which Mary rode.

For days they had traveled, all the way from Nazareth, which was the city where they lived. They had seen many other travelers, too, on their journey — some going south just as they were, and others going east or west or north.

But why were so many people traveling? It was because Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, had commanded a census to be taken. Everyone throughout the land had to be enrolled, or counted. To do this, they had to go to the town or city from which their family had come. And no one dared to disobey!

Down the Road to Bethlehem

Bill F. Leach

Vicki Hancock Wright

60 ($\text{♩} = 88$)

Guitar (Capo up 1)

mp

D Am7 D Am7

Claves

62 *mp*

Down the road to Beth - le - hem, Jo - seph and Mar - y are

D Am7 D Am7

(Claves tacet)

64

go - ing;

D Am7 D Am7

66

On their way to be en - rolled, Down the road they're

D Am7 D Am7

68

go - ing.

D Am7 D Am7

Clvs.

70 ADULT LEADER 1

Mar - y looks so ver - y tired, Rid - ing a lit - tle

D Am7 D Am7

(Claves tacet)

72

don - key;

D Am7 D Am7

74 children join leader

Jo - seph's walk - ing by their side, Down the road they're

D Am7 D Am7

STORYTELLER:

“Joseph, will we be there soon?” asked Mary. “It’s been such a long way and I am so weary.”

“Yes, Mary,” Joseph replied. “I think I see the lights of Bethlehem there in the distance now. It won’t be long till we can rest. It won’t be long now, Mary.”

But when Joseph and Mary and the little donkey entered the town, there was no place for them to stay. No place for them to rest. All the rooms in the inn were filled.

No Place to Spend the Night

Bill F. Leach

Vicki Hancock Wright

Stanza one: CHILDREN

Stanza two: ADULT LEADER 1

90 *Sadly* (♩ = 88)

mp

1. No place to spend the
(2.) place for them to

Guitar

(no chord; pick E & B as in bass clef piano)

Em

mp

poco rit.

a tempo

93

night, All the rooms are tak - en; No
sleep, All the beds are tak - en; No

Cmaj7

Am

B7

B7

Em

96

place for them to rest _____ Ex - cept a lit - tle
 shel - ter from the cold _____ *Ex - cept a lit - tle

Em Am Am7 D7

99

sta - ble. No
 sta - ble.

C G

1. Gmaj7 G 2. Gmaj7 G

102

Em Cmaj7 Am B7

mf

105 B7 Em Em Am(9) Am & tacet

rit. *mp*

*Children may join leader on stanza two

Mary's Going to Have a Baby

Bill F. Leach

Vicki Hancock Wright

120 With excitement ($\text{♩} = 66 - 69$, in two)

CHILDREN

122

mf

1. Mar - y's going to have a ba - by!
2. Mar - y's going to have a ba - by!

124

Oh, what will be his name?
Oh, what will be his fame?

126

Will she call him James, or will she call him John, or
Will he be a judge, or will he be a priest, or

If desired, "gonna" may be sung in place of "going to."

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138 *Leader joins children*

Je - sus. Je - sus! Je - sus!
Sav - ior. Sav - ior! Sav - ior!

141

1. She will call him Je - sus!
We will call him

144

2. Sav - ior! Sav - ior! Sav - ior!

rit.

STORYTELLER:

There in the stable, with only Joseph by her side, Mary gave birth to the baby boy. Joseph and Mary and the cattle were all that heard the newborn baby's first cry. And in the stillness of the night Mary held him to her breast and rocked him. Then she wrapped him in warm swaddling clothes and gently placed him in the manger.

In the Stillness of the Night

Bill F. Leach

Vicki Hancock Wright

148 $(\text{♩} = 66)$

pp

151 *CHILDREN, Quietly, with awe*
mp

In the still-ness of the night, With - in a sta-ble warm,

154 Long be-fore the morn-ing light, the Son of God was born, was

157 *ADULT LEADER 1*

born. Not in a pal - ace fit for a king, Not

The musical score is written in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of four systems. The first system (measures 148-150) is a piano introduction marked *pp*. The second system (measures 151-153) features a vocal line for children, marked *mp* and *Quietly, with awe*, with piano accompaniment. The lyrics are 'In the still-ness of the night, With - in a sta-ble warm,'. The third system (measures 154-156) continues the vocal line with the lyrics 'Long be-fore the morn-ing light, the Son of God was born, was'. The fourth system (measures 157-159) features an adult leader's vocal line with the lyrics 'born. Not in a pal - ace fit for a king, Not'. The piano accompaniment continues throughout.

* If desired, handbells may double the top notes of the right hand piano accompaniment in measures 148 to 151, and again in measures 164 to 174.

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159

in an el - e - gant home; But in a sta - ble — all a - lone, The

161

Ho - ly Child was born, was born.

164

CHILDREN

In the still - ness of the night, With - in a sta - ble warm,

166

Long be - fore the morn - ing light, The Son of God was born, was

Shepherds, Shepherds

Bill F. Leach

Vicki Hancock Wright

175 Joyfully (♩. = 72)

Stanza one: CHILDREN
mf Stanza two: CHILDREN AND/OR ADULT LEADER 1

178

1. Shep - herds, shep - herds, do _ not fear these
 2. Shep - herds, shep - herds, leave _ your lambs, They

181

ti - dings of _ great joy; _ Up and a - way to
 will be safe _ from dan - ger; Up and a - way to

184

Beth - le - hem To find the ba - by boy.
 Beth - le - hem To kneel be - fore the man - ger.

Star Light, Star Bright

Bill F. Leach

Vicki Hancock Wright

209 (♩ = 84) CHILDREN *mp*

Star — light,

mp

Finger Cymbals 4/4 *tacet*

212

star — bright, What do the Wise Men wish to-night?

215

Do they wish for jew - els rare? Do they search for a

ADULT LEADER 2 *Slightly faster*

218 *mf*

cit - y fair? They wish to find the Babe fore -

Slightly faster

221

told So they can give him gifts of gold;

224 *rubato*

Gifts of frank-in-cense and myrrh, Gifts for a new - born_

rubato

227 *Tempo I* CHILDREN AND LEADER *mp*

King. Star _____ light,

Tempo I

mp

F.C. || tacet

*Hodie, It's Christmas Day

Bill F. Leach

Vicki Hancock Wright

Briskly (♩. = 80)

240

Hand drum: x. x. x. x. x.

243 *mf* **GROUP 1 GROUP 2

*Ho - di - e, it's Christ - mas day, Ho - di - e, it's

(tacet)

247 GROUP 1 GROUP 2

Christ - mas day! The day of Je - sus' birth, The

251 BOTH GROUPS

day of Je - sus' birth; Let us cel - e - brate, cel - e - brate, Re -

*Hodie (Hoh-dee-eh) means "This day."

**Group 1 could be a soloist or small group of children, and Group 2 the choir.

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255 GROUP 1

joyce, O heav'ns and earth! Ho - di - e, it's

drum: x. x. x. x. x. (tacet)

259 GROUP 2 GROUP 1

Christ - mas day, Ho - di - e, it's Christ - mas day! The

263 GROUP 2 BOTH GROUPS

Sav - ior reigns to - day, The Sav - ior reigns to - day; Let us

267

cel - e - brate, cel - e - brate This day and ev - 'ry day!

drum: x. x.

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287 Legato (♩ = 88)

Guitar tacet to m. 295 (Capo up 2)

mp

Red. Red. Red.

(As each part of the story is sung, those costumed as Mary, Joseph, shepherds and Wise Men move to the manger. Some of those not costumed should move with costumed characters, too, so that all are grouped around the manger, facing the audience, as they sing the final section of the chorus.)

290 CHILDREN *mp*

Once up - on a night, Once up - on a

mp

Red. simile Finger cymbals:

294 night! Stanza one: LEADER 1

1. Be -

Guitar (Capo up 2)

mp

Red. C C

F.C.

320

Cel - e - brate the birth of him by all a -

D°/C bass G7 C C

323 CHILDREN

Once up - on a night,

dored; Once up - on a night!

D7 D°/C bass Fm7 G7 C F

a tempo

F.C.

327 *decresc.* *mp* (Children) *ten.*

Once up - on a night, Once up - on a night!

mp (Leaders) *ten.*

Once up - on a night!

C F G7 *ten.* C

decresc. *mp* *rit.*

F.C.

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