

INFANT HOLY, INFANT LOWLY

INTRODUCTION

Rather than listing step-by-step instructions for a pre-determined number of rehearsals, this teaching plan presents a range of ideas and suggestions to aid learning “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly.” This approach also acknowledges that youth learning an arrangement with part-singing, likely have a basic musical foundation.

A generalized approach, such as this, supports directors in meeting their singers’ learning in two ways: (I) highlighting specific **musical content**, and (II) addressing **musical source material** (a brief look at music history issues). Part I, **musical content** covers four primary areas: rhythm, melody, harmony and musicianship. **Source material** has been divided into two areas: (1) content for integration during rehearsals, and (2) content for singers to explore outside of rehearsals or at home.

I. MUSICAL CONTENT

- Changing Voices
- Melody and musicianship
- Rhythm and musicianship
- Harmony and musicianship

II. MUSIC SOURCE MATERIAL

- The original folk song melody
- Polish Christmas traditions
- Internet search activity for home
- Paper-cutting art project for home

I. MUSICAL CONTENT

CHANGING VOICES

This SAT arrangement of “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly” is an ideal first encounter with part-singing for younger adolescent voices. It takes into consideration changing voices, especially in the tenor part, where the vocal range encompasses the interval of a sixth (‘A’ below middle to ‘C’, up to ‘F#’). Often this set of notes is stronger in boys’ voices during the early to middle stages of voice change, resulting in this range being one in which they can sing with strength and confidence.

Young adolescent singers encountering an arrangement “in parts” will most likely have basic note reading skills, though remember that some may not have had much experience reading bass clef notation.

This may be quickly illustrated by writing a scale extending stepwise down one octave from the G above middle C (Fig.

1). Explain how the pitches look when notated in the treble clef and how those same pitches look notated in the bass clef. A quick “orientation to bass clef” exercise is to

sing the scale first reading the notes from the treble clef

and then sing the same scale reading from the bass clef. The addition of sol-feg (or the tone system with which your singers are most familiar) may help.



Figure 1: Relationship of notes in the treble clef to bass clef

MELODY AND MUSICIANSHIP

The melody of “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly” is nearly a perfect example of a “bell-curve,” arch-shaped phrase. So singing each musical phrase musically should come naturally, provided a few fundamentals are observed. Good breath support is necessary to sing the entire phrase, especially at the suggested $\text{♩} = 85\text{-}95$ tempo. This slower tempo will quickly reveal which singers are “breathing low” or utilizing diaphragmatic release and support versus those whose breathing is shallow. Keep syllabic stress of the text in mind as it is sung, and notice that consistently in the first two measures of each phrase (occasionally more frequently), counts one and two constitute a two-syllable word with a *heavy-light* relationship—for example: phrase endings “holy,” “lowly,” “lowing,” “knowing.” That motive

looks like this: . In each of these instances, care should be taken to *lighten* the

second syllable (as opposed to increasing or accenting the first syllable. This is because increasing the accent of the first syllable may lead to a more deliberate, forced sound, inconsistent with the overall spirit of the text). Yet while keeping this concept in mind, remember that these lighter second syllables occur in the context of *whole phrases*, and phrasing should reflect this “big picture” (e.g. for phrases 1 & 2, building towards the third measure; for phrase 3 & 4, building towards the fourth measure). The following two exercises may assist development of a beautiful sounding melody. Sing them at a moderate to slow tempo (or use the tempo of the anthem).

Vocal Exercise 1 Developing Flow and Direction

I IV I V7 I V7 I IV I V7 I V7

Noo _____
No _____
Nah _____

Vocal Exercise 2 Developing Height and Resonance

nee yah _____ nee yah _____ nee yah _____ ne yah _____ ne yah _____
nee yoh _____ nee yoh _____ ne yoh _____ ne yoh _____ ne yoh _____

RHYTHM AND MUSICIANSHIP

Perhaps the most noticeable rhythmic feature of this carol is its eighth-note pick-ups



in every measure of the carol. Owing to its folk music roots, the tune **W ZLOBIE LEZY**,* upon which this carol is based, shares much in common with melodies from the broader carol repertoire. Beginning in the Middle Ages, carols were among the first notated popular music of the time and have a strong association with dance. The rhythm throughout “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly” is unabashedly “dancing,” and propels the musical motion towards each downbeat. While this impulse should not be resisted, it should be executed within the spirit of the text—notice how many times active verbs occur on downbeats (often within suspensions—a “harmony” issue covered next). To “pounce” on this “dance” rhythm is to miss the point of the kind of dance underlying this message.

* Pronounced “vee JLoh-bee LEH-zee,” where the “JL” consonant pair sounds a soft “j,” as in the end of the word “orange.”

HARMONY AND MUSICIANSHIP

The fundamental character of this carol’s harmonic structure yields nothing unusual. It is the chain of suspensions in the third phrase that may be the most distinctive feature of the carol’s harmonic structure. Explain to the singers in a straight-forward way what a suspension is (though it is not necessary to get into the music theory behind suspensions). It would be helpful to clarify the difference between “consonance” and “dissonance” in music. To describe suspensions, it should be sufficient to say to the singers “Suspensions are a particular kind of consonance and dissonance where musical tones move towards one another, producing tension against one another; (in this case adjacent pitches in the

soprano and alto, as in m. 19 and following) and then this tension, or dissonance is said to “resolve” when one voice moves downward by step, producing ‘consonant’ harmony.” Awareness of the how the suspensions “work” will help singers to “sing into” the chain of suspensions, making each of the resolutions more musically satisfying. The following exercise serves to illustrate suspensions outside the context of the piece:

Vocal Exercise 3 Mastering Suspensions

1 noo noo noo _____

noo noo noo noo noo

2 noo noo noo _____

noo noo noo noo noo

3 noo noo noo _____

noo noo noo noo noo

4 noo noo noo _____

noo noo noo noo noo

(Part II: Musical Source Material Section)

Figure 2: Original folk melody upon which "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly" is based.

ACTIVITIES BEYOND THE REHEARSAL ROOM

