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Composer's suggestions for a combined performance of

“What a Friend/ Lonesome Valley”

(CGA-518)

by John D. Miller

There are several options in singing this two-part piece which give it a versatility for usage in services with children's, youth, and adult programs.

No matter which combinations are used, it is essential that there be an even balance between all parts, vocal and instrumental. The hymns should be presented without either melody dominating, particularly from measure 34 on, where the quodlibet takes place.

The sparse piano accompaniment, the simple flute line and the duple/triple rhythm treatment combine color and flowing motion with the hymns.

Since both hymns are familiar, the listener can easily absorb the dual treatment of independent lines of music and text.

The texts combine two thoughts about Jesus—the friend who offers comfort to all, and Jesus the man who personally experienced trials and loneliness. Together, they focus on a more personal relationship with, and understanding of, Christ.

The mixed-voice setting as published was written for youth or adults. Having children sing the treble line is a nice option that gives the piece even greater usefulness. Consider separating choirs for antiphonal singing.

Note that both melodies are in duple rhythm and each must be secure as the accompaniment is independent and partially in triple meter. The counterpoint (measures 13-16, 23-30, 42-45) may be too challenging for children and could be taken by the sopranos and altos of the older choir.

As you begin, familiarize the children with both melodies even though they are to sing only the treble part. Discuss texts, and mark the music where choir will sing the treble part (measures 5-12, 17-20, 34-41, 45-49, 55-61).

The second week, learn measures 55 to end, tapping quarters and singing text. Tapping may be done on a desk or as *patschen* (knee-slaps). Emphasize the down beat in some way, with a higher preparation of the hand, or using both

hands on the downbeat, or alternating left-right-right-right, or right-left-left-left. Begin memorizing “What a Friend.”

The next week, practice the ending (measures 55-61) with accompaniment. Then sing through the piece from the beginning with the accompanist playing the left hand as written, and playing Choir I part with the right hand. After that is secure, sing through from the beginning, with the accompaniment as written.

In succeeding weeks, sing or play Choir II part for children to hear against their own line. Thereafter, sing through all parts represented so the children experience how the parts come together, becoming accustomed to “distractions” of other parts, and uncover any rough spots. A cassette of the adult rehearsal (leaving out the children's part) would be very helpful accompaniment as the children continue their preparation and memorization.

A word from experience . . . it is not fair to assume either adult's or youth can perform without having heard the children's part prior to the service rehearsal. Time does not always allow for several repetitions on Sunday morning. Invite two or three of the strongest musicians in the children's choir to attend and sing the Choir I part at the rehearsal of the older choir for its final regular practice. □