

## A Study Plan for Michael Bedford's

# Songs And Seasons

(CGA-540)

As we work with children, we find that the more imagery we can summon up and the more ways we can present the same material, the greater the success in teaching a piece of music. This is especially true in teaching younger children for whom this collection was designed. The study plan will provide varied ways to unfold texts and music in this set of seasonal pieces and to stir up creative energies necessary to supplement these suggestions with ideas of your own. To conserve space, I have provided information under each heading that will apply to each piece in the set. This should enable you to pull whatever you need to use for the particular piece you are teaching.

### Rehearsal I

1. Read the text to the children expressively, taking all repeats that occur in the music.
2. Point out key words and phrases that are repeated, or have the children look for and identify some themselves ("We shall pray," "Christ is born," "Noel," "Star bright," "forgive," "He comes," "Hosanna," "Joy dawned," "Come," etc.).
3. Discuss any words in the text that may be new, remembering that with young children *many* words are new ("worship," "Noel," "Bethlehem," "forgive," "Hosanna," "dawned," "Alleluia," "Three-in-One," etc.).
4. Have the children form a circle in the center of the room and begin to sing musical phrases that repeat (refrains, etc.), singing them on "loo" (the 'oo' is placed well when you can breath in on it and feel cool air on the back of your throat). After the children are feeling comfortable with the melody,

encourage them to listen carefully to each other and copy what they hear. A beautiful blend can be achieved even in the youngest voices!

5. Now have the children speak the words in rhythm and then sing them to the melody they have just learned.

### Rehearsal II

1. Review the repeated portion of the piece, first on "loo," and then insert the text.
2. Approach the remaining portion of the piece in the same manner, learning the melody on "loo," speaking the words in rhythm, and linking the text and music together.
3. Take some time at this point to address the issue of the liturgical season represented by the piece. Discuss more academic items first (name of season, length of season, color, etc.); then explore the significance of that particular season. Stay with ideas such as how the season relates to the life of Jesus, how your own church celebrates it, how your family celebrates it, etc.
4. Point out a particular symbol for the season, having one on hand to illustrate:
  - a. Advent—Advent wreath with its four candles (discuss what the candles stand for).
  - b. Christmas—a white candle placed in the center of the Advent wreath (tell how it represents Jesus Christ).
  - c. Epiphany—some type of decorative star.
  - d. Lent—a pretzel (discuss how it is made without yeast, just as bread was made during penitential seasons in earlier days; discuss how its shape represents arms crossed over one's heart in

a gesture of being forgiven).

- e. Palm Sunday—a palm branch (if one is not available, it can be drawn and cut from a large piece of poster board).
  - f. Easter—a butterfly (discuss the metamorphosis from caterpillar to cocoon to butterfly, relating this to the risen Christ).
  - g. Pentecost—*fleur-de-lis* (discuss its three petals in relation to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and its stem in relation to the Three-in-One).
5. Returning to the center of the room, sing the entire piece, having the children listen carefully to their blend.

### Rehearsal III

1. As a review, sing through the piece on "loo" and then with the complete text.
2. Teach the form of the piece as creatively as possible. On a tack board or on an empty wall, illustrate the musical form using cut-outs from construction paper or poster board:
  - a. "An Advent Song"—three blue or purple candles together to show the three stanzas, and one candle apart from the others to show the repeated refrain (this candle may or may not be pink, in the earlier tradition).
  - b. "Christ is Born!"—a white candle to represent the refrain, and an angel (or halo) and a shepherd (or shepherd's crook) to represent each stanza.
  - c. "Star Bright"—a small star, a large star, and another small star (the large star shows the textual changes in each stanza).
  - d. "For Things . . ."—use a pretzel

again, letting the three inner portions show the ABA form of this piece.

- e. "He Comes"—a palm branch, a donkey, and another palm branch will illustrate the ABA form of this piece quite well.
  - f. "Joy Dawned"—use a white cross. Let the vertical portion serve as the refrain and each extended arm of the cross be a stanza.
  - g. "Come, Come"—a triangle will do well here. Let each point represent individual aspects of the Trinity in stanza 1, and the full body of the triangle represent the Three-in-One in stanza 2.
3. By now, as quick as young children are, many of them will already have much or all of the piece memorized. Return to the circle in the center of the room and practice for memory and blend.
  4. Practice now on final consonants. Children love to overdo these at first; give them a chance to do that, laughing with them at how funny it sounds. Then, as the novelty begins to wear off, call attention to one or more children who are starting to enunciate well ("I like the way Susie is saying her consonants—not too much, just enough. Who else can do that?").

#### Rehearsal IV

1. After reviewing the piece in the rehearsal room, go into the church and practice singing in the place that you will use when singing in the worship service. Gain an idea of what it feels like to sing with the organ or the church piano. This is especially important for younger choristers, since a large room can be intimidating.
2. Invite a few people who work in the church to listen to the children sing (a minister, a secretary, a Christian education director, a custodian, any and all who might be available to hear).
3. After your "audience" has listened and complimented the children (as they no doubt will do), have the

## Nation's Capitol Is Site of Children's Festival

by Rebecca Jackson

National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. was the site of the 1990 Children's Choir Festival sponsored by the Northern Virginia Chapter. Over 300 third through eighth graders from 18 northern Virginia churches participated in the day-long event.

Guest director Douglas Mears, formerly of National Presbyterian Church and currently a doctoral student at Eastman School of Music rehearsed the children on five anthems and several responses to be shared later during the day's final worship service. The anthems, chosen by a committee of directors to fit the Festival theme *One Body in Christ* were: "One Lord, One Faith" by Marcelyn Smale (CGA-363), "For Love Shall Be Our Song" by Douglas Wagner (CGA-389), "My Jesus Is My Lasting Joy" by Buxtehude/Bitgood, "We the Children" by Noel Goemanne and "Celebrate the Good News" by Tom Mitchell (CGA-381).

The worship service's scriptures and litanies were led by choristers from the participating churches. In addition to utilizing the piano as principal accompanying instrument, Mr. Mears made extensive use of

non-keyboard instruments. Flute and violin were played by area musicians. Orff accompaniment for the Marcelyn Smale anthem was provided by choristers from five participating churches and several individual directors joined to supply the handbell accompaniment for "Celebrate the Good News."

Festival activities began for the directors on Friday evening with a pot luck dinner at the church followed by final preparations for Saturday's activities. Saturday's 9-5 schedule included not only sectionals and a full rehearsal with Doug Mears, but crafts where the children decorated the T-shirts to be worn in the afternoon Festival Service, beginning handbells and a demonstration of the chapel pipe organ where children had actual "hands-on" experience at the organ console.

The end of the day produced some very tired but happy festival participants which included the directors, too! During a post-festival evaluation meeting they looked with a critical eye at the strengths and weaknesses of the 1990 festival and began to plan for an even more successful 1992 festival.

children talk about how it felt to sing for people in the church instead of alone in a rehearsal room. Assure them that those who hear them in worship will enjoy their music every bit as much as those who just heard them.

4. Before leaving the church, have the children look around for some visible symbol of the season. This may be as evident as an Advent wreath and the colors on the pulpit and lectern paraments, or it may be

as disguised as the cruciform design of the church. But use this opportunity to refer to season.

In all you do, affirm the positive. Small successes go a long way in building the self-esteem of a little person, and remember that we hold the power to build self-reliant singers who can take their experiences with them throughout the rest of their lives.

So sing the seasons, teach the children, and reap the benefits!

... Michael Bedford □