

“Come, Lord Jesus, We Are Waiting” CGA-592

by Sue Ellen Page

The simplest ideas are often the most clearly remembered. Dorothy Christopherson and Helen Stensrud have provided a lovely, memorable, folk-like tune with an eloquent yet unadorned text, just right for young singers and congregations alike to cherish throughout Advent. Indeed, readings and prayers for the lighting of the four Advent candles are included and set a context for the new stanza of the song introduced each succeeding Sunday during the season.

Although I advocate teaching young singers to read music, children must also have music in their repertoire which is primarily intended to be learned by ear. This doesn't mean totally by rote, but with listening as the major emphasis, rather than reading. “Come, Lord Jesus, We Are Waiting” is a prototype of repertoire which virtually teaches itself, yet provides an ideal opportunity to reinforce literacy skills. For example, the concept of sequence is readily understood once the melody is heard. Create an opportunity later to examine the notation. This process validates with the eye what the ear has already processed into the brain. Helen Kemp's term “from rote to note” is what we seek.

A potential vocal problem needs to be addressed, since we are expecting a “choral tone” from our singers, rather than a “recreational tone” so often considered acceptable from children. After a warm up time which includes lots of yawn-sighs on various vowels in the full extension of the range, be prepared to address the opening phrase of each stanza which has the vowel “e” as in the first syllable of “Jesus” and sung on Eb. If not produced well, this vowel/pitch combination will tend to be pinched and tight.

Remind the singers that *all* vowels must be produced with space in the back of the mouth. Practice singing the “e” vowel with the molars 1/2 inch apart, tip

of the tongue on bottom teeth, first on yawn-sighs, then on sustained pitches, working toward the actual Eb. Next, add the consonant “j” which requires only the use of the tongue against the upper “gum bump” and need not interrupt the 1/2 inch already set up for the vowel.

Another challenge is an artistic one. Because of its simplicity, it would be easy to overlook the very lovely and natural “line” of the melody and settle for a “sing-song” interpretation. I frequently imagine my favorite lieder singer, Elly Ameling, the great Dutch soprano, interpreting a song I'm preparing to teach to my children's choir. No doubt she would use the initial consonant in the first word of the phrase, “c^ome” to establish a forward motion in the melodic line, and then use each consonant to “spin” the vowels out, as my college voice teacher LoRean Hodapp Powell would say. Linear motion (rather than vertical) is essential to an artistic interpretation and will often remedy vocal problems as well.

The anthem's text can be explored in depth by seeking out familiar Christmas carols which interpret the third and fourth phrases of each verse. As a benefit, this activity may shed light on the texts of the carols as well, frequently sung without much thought, simply because of their familiarity or because no one has taken the time to discuss the texts. Include your Christian educator or pastor in these discussions.

Stanza 1 “Longing hearts watch eagerly for Jesus, who comes in love.” Connect this concept to the Advent hymn, “O Come, O Come Immanuel” with its stress on an entire people longing for an incarnate God. Then work with the final stanza of “O Come, All Ye Faithful” with its concentration on the incarnation.

Stanza 2 “Loving hearts we have prepared for Jesus who gives us peace.”

This line parallels the second line of “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” which reads, “Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinner reconciled.”

Stanza 3 “Joyful voices sing in praise of Jesus, who brings us joy.” Connect this to the familiar carol “Joy to the World” with its emphasis on “repeat the sounding joy” and “let every heart prepare him room.”

Stanza 4 “Hopeful hearts find room for you. Come Jesus, and be our Guest.” Connect to the final phrase of the third verse of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” which reads: “Where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.” How do we prepare for a special guest? The term “hopeful hearts” is a good interpretation of “meek souls” - when we open ourselves to the possibilities of God's love, through Christ, for and in us.

This anthem is so simple that it could be learned in about three rehearsals. However, remember that holidays in November often take away from rehearsals, so plan accordingly. If you target only the first two stanzas to be learned by the first Sunday in Advent, you can work on the final two during Advent itself, since the song introduces a new stanza each week. Similarly, and perhaps preferably, the children's activities may be completed one stanza at a time, rather than all at once.

Sue Ellen Page is Director of the Bach Choir at Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton, New Jersey. This is the choir that produced the Choristers Guild recording for Our Heritage of Hymns, Series I. A prominent workshop and festival leader, Sue Ellen Page's choral compositions are listed in the catalogs of several publishers, including Choristers Guild.

Answers to Activity I: a/2; b/1; c/4; d/3

Answers to Activity II:

1. Hark, the Herald Angels Sing
2. O Come, O Come Immanuel
3. O Little Town of Bethlehem
4. Joy To the World

Chorister's Page

“Come, Lord Jesus, We Are Waiting”

In the left column are some phrases from the anthem, “Come, Lord Jesus, We are Waiting.” Read each of them then read the phrases in the right column which are from four different and familiar Christmas carols.

Anthem Phrases

- a. “Longing hearts watch eagerly for Jesus, who comes in Love.”
- b. “Loving hearts we have prepared for Jesus who gives us peace.”
- c. “Joyful voices sing in praise of Jesus who brings us joy.”
- d. “Hopeful hearts find room for you. Come Jesus, and be our Guest.”

Christmas Carol Phrases

- 1. “Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinner reconciled.”
- 2. “Immanuel shall come to Thee, O Israel.”
- 3. “Where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.”
- 4. “Repeat the sounding joy.”

Activity I

Think and talk about these words. Draw a line to connect each anthem phrase with the carol phrase which best describes it.

Activity II

Look at the Christmas carol phrases in the right column. Can you name the titles of the carols to which they belong? Use your hymnal if you like. (To help you, the spaces show how many words are in the title of the carol, and there is one word clue given.)

Christmas Carol Phrase 1 belongs to:

1. _____ Angels _____.

Christmas Carol Phrase 2 belongs to:

2. _____ Come _____.

Christmas Carol Phrase 3 belongs to:

3. _____ Town _____.

Christmas Carol Phrase 4 belongs to:

4. _____ World _____.

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