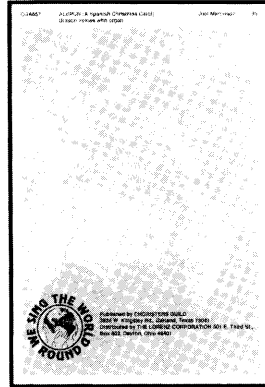


A Study Plan for the Spanish Christmas Carol

“Alepun” CGA657

by Joel Martinson



This setting of a Spanish carol provides an excellent opportunity to introduce children to music from another culture. The rhythmic energy of the tune and the rich descriptions contained in the text make it an exciting addition to the corpus of children’s Christmas music.

Week 1

Goals: To introduce the concept of cultural diversity through Christmas carols and to learn the refrain.

A. Begin with explaining to the choristers that the carols we sing at Christmas come from many different countries and cultural traditions. Select a few carols from the following to play and/or sing in English or their original language, challenging the children to guess their common titles. (Note: use those which are familiar to your church/parish/school and reflect its various ethnicities).

1. Silent Night (Germany)
2. Infant Holy, Infant Lowly (Poland)
3. O Little Town of Bethlehem (USA - with tune ST. LOUIS)
4. The First Nowell (England)
5. Go Tell It on the Mountain (USA-African-American)
6. Angels We Have Heard on High (France)
7. 'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime (Canada)
8. Bright and Glorious Is the Sky (Denmark)
9. I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve (Norway)
10. Cold December Flies Away (Catalan)

- B. Begin learning the refrain to “Alepun” (ms. 16-23).
 1. Sing the refrain (preferably *a cappella*).
 2. Have the children repeat the refrain. Be careful that the last syllable has enough duration on the “oo” vowel.
 3. Tell the choir what the word *alepun* might possibly suggest (see notes at the bottom of the first page in the music). Bring bells to jingle and sway from side to side (moving each leg up and down) to illustrate the movement of the donkey on its way to Bethlehem.
4. Mention other carols which have nonsensical words for a refrain:
 - a. Deck the Halls (Fa la la la la...)
 - b. Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mine (Eia! Eia!)
5. Sing the refrain again until it has been learned. The accompanist could double the choral part with the right hand and play the left hand chords for the final time.

Week 2

Goals: To solidify the refrain and to learn the music for the stanzas.

- A. Begin the rehearsal by singing the refrain once or twice (*a cappella* and without music).
- B. Learn the first two phrases of the stanzas (ms. 4-9).
 1. Sing the first phrase (ms. 4-6) and have the choristers repeat it.
 2. Explain that the second phrase repeats the words of the first phrase, but at a higher pitch.
 3. Sing the second phrase (ms. 7-9) and have the choristers repeat it.
 4. Have girls (or Group I) sing the first phrase and all sing the second phrase.
 5. Repeat this step until all have learned both melodies.
- C. Learn the second two phrases of the stanzas (ms. 10-15) using the procedure from above. Strive to teach all choristers the entire melody so that any combination of voices can sing either part - the original phrase or the higher repeat.
- D. Depending upon the ease with which the choir sings the high F¹ in m. 14, one might ask the choristers to sigh on an “ah,” beginning very high. (A siren exercise would also work). Once the children have reached (and surpassed) the pitch several times, sing “night” and have them repeat it back. Sing the words from the other stanzas which correspond to the same music - “laughter” (m. 34), “heart” (m. 14), and “light” (m. 34) - and have the choir repeat each one. Point out that all these words utilize the “ah” vowel.

E. Open the music and sing the entire first stanza with all choristers singing all parts. The accompanist should double the melody and play as much of the left hand accompaniment as possible.

Week 3

Goals: To secure the stanzas, to assign and work with solo sections and to add more of the accompaniment when possible.

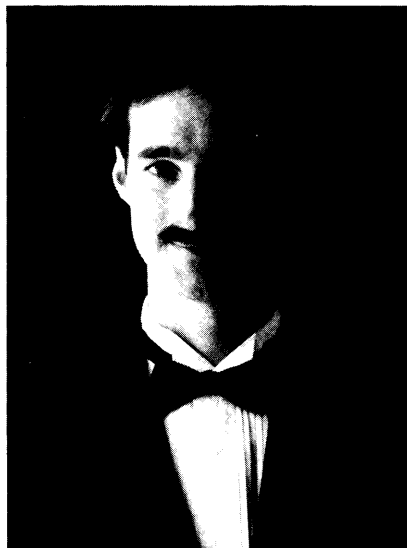
- A. Prior to the rehearsal, decide which choristers to assign to the solo sections. (If you are combining two choirs, you may wish to have the younger children simply sing the second and fourth phrases throughout along with the refrain, utilizing older children to sing solo passages.) We have selected older choristers to sing the "Small Group" on stanza 2. One could set up the room and seating assignments to reflect the solo assignments (i.e. boys and girls on separate sides of the room).
- B. Do sigh or siren exercises.
- C. All sing the entire piece (with music). Emphasize the importance of good enunciation (rhythmic vitality should help make the text clear as well).
- D. Assign responsibilities for the solo sections.
- E. Sing the piece with the proper assignments. At this point, the accompanist may begin adding the right hand obbligato on the piano. (Note: make certain that you and the accompanist have rehearsed the *rall.* in ms. 19 and 39 prior to this time.)
- F. Work any remaining problem spots and sing one last time with as much of the accompaniment as possible (even played on the organ if possible).
- G. Challenge the children to memorize the text. (The key, of course, is that the group which leads knows their text, since all repeat after them.)

Week 4

Goals: To secure the solo passages, to increase choristers' comfort level with organ accompaniment and to memorize the piece (if desirable).

- A. Begin with sigh or siren exercise.
- B. Remind choristers to use a tall "ah" on all the high passages. (One might sing all the high "F" words and have the choir repeat -see Week 2, item D.)
- C. Sing the piece with the organ, adding percussion, zimbelstern or other sound to the repeats of each refrain (m. 20-23 and 40-43). We use the *Rossignol* (Nightingale) stop on our organ for these passages and for the interludes in ms. 26 and 29 following "Birds sing out in expectation, *alepun.*"
- D. Repeat and work the piece as necessary for memorization and security.

Composer of the Month



Joel Martinson, composer of the anthem, "Alepun," lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is Director of Music Ministries and Organist for Saint Rita Catholic Community. An active composer, he has over 35 works in print or awaiting publication for organ, choir and congregation from Oxford University Press, Augsburg Fortress, Aureole Editions, CPP/Belwin, Concordia, GIA, Selah and Paraclete Press. "Alepun" is his first anthem with Choristers Guild. Another arrangement of a Christmas carol, "The Friendly Beasts," will also be published by Choristers Guild in the coming months.

His works have received many favorable reviews since the first published pieces were released two years ago. His "Missa Guadalupe" was recently awarded First Place in the Hispanic Music Composition Competition sponsored by the Southwest Liturgical Conference. His works have been performed at national conventions of the American Guild of Organists (AGO) and Association of Lutheran Church Musicians as well as at regional conventions of the AGO and National Association of Pastoral Musicians.