

# Y O U T H DYNAMICS

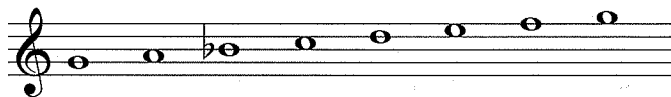
## Study Plan for "Easter Song"

by John D. Horman

One of the most obvious strengths in this anthem may not occur to choir directors who are initially glancing through it. "Easter Song" is an anthem which offers a large variety of performance possibilities. This aspect of the anthem is intentional. I taught middle school for a number of years, and I am very aware that the middle school age is one of continually changing vocal ranges and a wide variance in ability levels. Written specifically for that age, "Easter Song" offers unison verses equally spaced between refrains in three equal parts, affording opportunities for varying vocal capabilities.

The unison verses provide all voices with a melody placed in a limited range to sing comfortably together. Once all singers have had an opportunity to get comfortable with this tune, verses can be assigned to soloists to give the choir less text to memorize. Appropriate amplification should be used to avoid any unhealthy forcing of tone.

Both the verses and refrains are written in the Dorian mode (beginning on G) — which is G A B<sup>b</sup> C D E F G.



Mode - Dorian on G

Many middle schoolers have had a social studies unit on Medieval and/or Renaissance culture. My particular middle school, Cabin John Middle School in Potomac, Maryland had an interdisciplinary unit on these historical periods in which all subject areas actively participated. The students studied music, art, drama, architecture, history, social conditions, etc. The unit culminated in a grand banquet with food, costumes, singing, handbell ringing and wonderful pagentry. It was great fun and the students were very involved. They had a wonderful time while immersing themselves in the sights, sounds and tastes of the period.

Because modes were commonly used in the period, a basic explanation of their construction would be appropriate as part of the learning of this anthem. Originally, modes were thought to have "medicinal" powers, i.e. Phrygian mode was thought to cool the listener, Dorian mode was believed to calm and sooth. Modes preceded the development of major and minor. The lower four pitches of the Dorian mode sound minor, while the upper four pitches sound major. This curious mixture is refreshing and interesting to the ear. The lowered seventh is the most obvious contributor to the overall uniqueness of the modes quality, both melodically and harmonically.

### Teaching the Anthem

I would introduce the three refrain tunes, one each during the first three rehearsals of the anthem (sometime in Lent, probably) and use them as warmups. Everyone would learn ALL parts. To help the singers understand the changes in harmony between G minor and F major, I'd have them clap for G minor and pat knees for F major. Introduce the refrains *a capella* with clapping and patting, then add simple chords on the piano or bourdons on Orff style instruments (G and D, F and C).

clap	clap	pat
Gm	Gm	F
Jesus Christ is	ris'n today!	Jesus Christ is

pat	clap	clap
F	Gm	Gm
ris'n today!	Jesus Christ is	ris'n today

pat	clap
F	Gm
Al-----le-----lu-----ia!	

As the singers learn each refrain, they will begin to recognize that the clap/pat pattern is the same for each. Anytime the harmonic pattern of melodies is identical, the tunes can be sung simultaneously as partner songs. The week before the anthem is to be sung, I would divide my group into thirds and place them in three corners of my sanctuary. I'd have each group sing their tune individually and then altogether in combined fashion for a call to worship or introit. This would make an excellent "dry run" for the following week's anthem. I feel that the best refrain tune for boy's changing voice (*cambiata*) is Refrain II, but choosing the best tune depends on your vocal knowledge of your singers and your ability to match singers with tune range.

The flute part to "Easter Song" (which could be oboe or soprano recorder), though short, is moderately difficult. An agile high school instrumentalist should be able to handle it. The six measure handbell part requires 5-6 ringers. It's simplicity and brevity allow it to be quickly learned and added at the last minute.

Because of the "medieval" sound of "Easter Song," adding percussion in that style can augment the ancient flavor of the anthem. I've listed some possible patterns below:

#### FOR THE REFRAIN

##### Tambourine:

##### Hand drum (with mallet):

##### Finger cymbal:

##### Wood block:

Although not required, developing three simple dances to go with the three different refrains might be fun for youth and/or older elementary age singers to try. It would also solidify their grasp of each tune's character and musical personality. Begin by dividing into three equal groups. Then, without being specific about your outcome expectations, give some or all of the following suggestions:

1. Use the contour of your melody to determine your use of space. The "high-low" vertical space will only be limited by the floor and the height of outstretched fingers. Horizontal space will be determined by arm/hand reach.

2. Use the rhythm of each tune, its accents and rests to place any stamps, pats, claps, or snaps they might want to add.

3. Dance formations can include circles, lines, partners or interacting individuals. It would be more interesting if each tune generated its own distinct formation. Consider it a gift if it does.

4. Each group will be allowed to demonstrate and constructively critique each of the other groups. Ask each group to dance their tune consecutively, then if possible, simultaneously. Encourage them to sing as they dance.

Each of the four verses is a sequential part of the dramatic telling of the Easter story. If you have enough youth or can use some adults from your older ensembles, creating costumed tableaux would be an effective way to highlight the verses. Each verse should build to verse four with perhaps a strong unison singing of the final verse to set the stage for the final multiple refrains.

I believe "Easter Song" is an exciting anthem to prepare, retelling the story of hope and resurrection that never grows old and is the "latch-point" of our Christian faith. It's suitable for Easter morning or anytime during the season of Eastertide. It's also a good anthem to include in a Lenten youth retreat—with lots of built-in activity possibilities. It's fun to put together and gives directors an opportunity to explore the versatility of their youth and to tailor an anthem to the unique needs of their growing voices.

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