



Study and Presentation Plan for **Set the Sun Dancing!**


Helen Kemp

Every song has a story. Knowing the story makes the drama of the poetry come alive. This song began to take form one day when I was feeling very sad. Trying to lift my spirits, I started reading through a small collection of hymns entitled *Every Day in Your Spirit* by the New Zealand poet, Shirley Erena Murray.

As I read her words, "Set the sun dancing! New life has begun!" something started to happen. When I came to the refrain, "For the light that is shining is our light to hold, light that's not hidden where Good News is told," a tune danced right out of my heart, and my sadness danced away with it.

"Yes," I thought, "it is our privilege to hold that Light and let it shine through us. My personal sadness should not extinguish God's Great Light." Written as a hymn for the season of Epiphany, the text is based on a portion of scripture from Matthew 5:14-16.

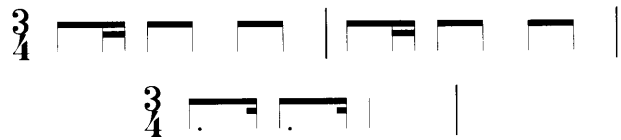
"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do you light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine, that all may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Mother Teresa also gave us a shining example when she wrote "Stay with us, Lord, and then we shall begin to shine as You shine; So to shine as to be a light to others. It will be You, shining on others through us." 

So this is a song about light. It should sparkle and dance. The accompaniment repeats the rhythm of two dance-like motifs many times to remind us to shine vocally like dancing sunbeams.

Teaching the Anthem

Prepare these rhythms on a chart or board for the singers.



Clap these rhythms lightly but energetically:

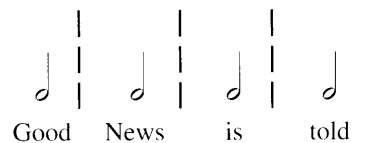
Have the children listen for these rhythms in the introduction and the interludes. Then ask the children to find these patterns in the printed music. This experience will help the children begin to feel the dance-like quality of the anthem.

Next, move to the refrain (3rd beat of measure 20.) The refrain is repeated 3 times during the piece (sometimes with different accompaniment); so teaching it *first* gives you and



Good News is told

the choristers a good start. You might want to identify the hemiola on the words "Good News is..." but I suggest counting and feeling it before introducing the term, *hemiola*. A *hemiola*



Good News is told

occurs when two bars of triple meter are articulated as if they were in duple meter.

Group 1



Group 2



Group 3



After the children have experienced the refrain, teach the choral coda, measures 88-90.

Rehearse each group separately. Have groups 1 and 2 sing their parts together until they are secure. Wait to add group 3 until the *duet* (groups 1 and 2) is a sure thing.

Tip: Have three high school girls learn the measures as a trio. Have them act as singing “mentors,” one leading each group until the younger choristers are secure, accurate, tuneful, and excited to be singing harmony. Even children who can read music need the experience of holding their part in a chord.

Look at the form. It simplifies both teaching and learning. Consider labeling these sections in the children’s music for their easy reference. Older children may pencil in the labels themselves. Introduce the idea of two part form (AB) to the singers. Ask the children to think of hymns they know that have a verse/refrain (AB) form. Tell them this anthem uses the same kind of pattern. By the time the children have learned the anthem, they should be able to explain introduction, A section, B section, interlude and coda.

Keyboard Introduction (made up of two dance-rhythm motifs)

- A Set the sun dancing! New life has begun!
Star, you must fade, for your journey is done.
New Year rides onward now, Christmas is gone.
Carry the light with us as we move on.

- B Refrain:
For the light that is shining is our light to hold.
-

Light that’s not hidden where Good News is told.

Keyboard Interlude (same as introduction – a reminder of dance theme)

- A Wise Men with riches of knowledge and thought
Found greater treasure than ever they brought.
Here is Epiphany*, wrapped in a shawl,
Christ who is light, who is wiser than all.

- B Refrain:

Keyboard Interlude (same as introduction)

- A Set the sun dancing! (text repeated)

- B Refrain:

Coda: Let your light shine!

Tips: The word *light* is featured in the text. To encourage a beautiful sound, sing it as though it were spelled like this: LAHiht. The ending consonant, “t,” is important as it gives both meaning and drama to the word.

Teach the whole song. Have your choristers memorize it before the addition of the bell accompaniment. The bells are meant to create a gradually increasing cacophony of sound to represent “Light that’s not hidden where Good News is told.”

Be sure to “set the sun dancing” in the ♥’s of your choristers when you teach this song.

References:

Every Day in Your Spirit Shirley Erena Murray
Hope Publishing Co., #1092 (1996)

Meditations from A Simple Faith Mother Teresa
Ballantine Books (1996)

*Epiphany: This season of the church year begins on January 6th, known also as Twelfth Night. Just as the ☆ led the Wise Men to Jesus’ birthplace, so Jesus is the light that leads us to the truth of God’s unfolding love. “Arise, shine; for your light has come.” Epiphany comes from the Greek word meaning revelation.

Helen Kemp is internationally known as a specialist in the training of young voices. She served as a professor of voice and church music at Westminster Choir College, Princeton, New Jersey, where she was honored with a Doctor of Music degree.