

## Study Plan for *Creator God, Who Has Composed*

When I received this anthem text from Mary Keithahn, I liked it immediately. Her text said something important to me about the role of sacred song, not only today but also in the past. The message in her text is a very pertinent one, especially in light of the changes we see happening in the music that we hear and sing in our churches today. She provides a much-needed perspective to the present situation, and she does it in a very scholarly manner without making value judgments. It's a very stimulating, thought provoking text that can serve to stimulate discussions about where we are and where we are going in the area of sacred music. Mary's scriptural basis for the text is Colossians 3:12-17. Take time to examine her text with your choir as a prelude to teaching the anthem.

As I read the text, it created in me a wonderful feeling of "expanding openness." That feeling of expansiveness called for a melody that had both energy and breadth. Usually, this kind of melody poses few problems for a composer. However, when I noticed the words, "Creator God" and the rhythmic situation they set up, I knew that this was going to be an interesting experience. Setting this combination of words so that their accents were appropriately positioned and the natural flow of the language was not disturbed turned out to be quite a challenge.

I tried many different ways to say and sing those two words ("Creator God") and the phrase that followed them. What I eventually chose unfortunately looks a bit strange to the eye, but sounds quite natural to the ear. In other words, I didn't rise from my bed the morning after I received Mary's text and say to myself, "Today I'm going to write an anthem in 7/8 meter." The text clearly dictated that meter. The rhythm of the words became the rhythm of the melody.

The 7/8 meter has a natural forward motion connected to it. It has the ability to drive a melody toward a point of resolution or emphasis. In this anthem, the 7/8 measures are always moving the tune toward the 4/4 measures. More specifically, the 7/8 measures carry the singer to certain ideas in the text. "Cre-a-tor God who has composed our JOY-FUL SONGS OF PRAISE," and "and au-thored too our sad la-ments for MEL-AN-CHOL-Y DAYS." If the eighth note rhythm remains constant, there should be no problem keeping the meters and accents correct.

Needless to say, the best way to introduce this anthem is to speak the words aloud in the rhythm of the melody. Treat each musical phrase as a "question and answer." You speak the two 7/8 measures and your choir then "answers" with the two 4/4 measures. This allows your adults to hear the two 7/8 measures spoken in exactly the rhythm you want. Once they are comfortable with the "answer" and have heard you speak the "question" several times, reverse the roles. This kind of rhythmic dialogue occurs throughout the anthem. I would repeat the process each time the 7/8 to 4/4 meter combination occurs.

The accompaniment to this anthem was designed to support the vocal line(s). The amount of time you spend making this accompaniment secure will directly influence how soon your choir can forget the meter changes and just sing the music. If you are the accompanist, you have to practice this one. If you have a volunteer, plan to spend some time conducting the anthem while your accompanist plays the accompaniment. Both parties benefit from that kind of rehearsal. I've directed choirs all my life and there is no situation more unnerving than when rhythmic war exists between what's on the page and what the pianist or organist plays. The choir and the music become

innocent casualties of such conflicts.

I would like to suggest some exercises that will help your choirs feel the fun and delight of 7/8, especially when mixed with 4/4. Some people will think that these techniques are only for children or youth, but don't be afraid to use them as warm-ups for adults too. Of course, you know your groups and whether they will think that this sort of thing is "beneath them."

Body percussion is an excellent way to internalize the rhythm. Add the following body sounds to the 7/8 measures:

Cre- a- tor God, who has — com- posed our  
pat pat pat clap clap pat pat pat clap clap

*pat = knees (eighth notes)*

*clap = hands (quarter notes)*

Make all 4/4 measures snaps (one per beat).

joy- ful songs of praise  
snap snap snap snap snap snap snap snap

Cre - a - tor God, who has com - posed our  
pat pat pat clap clap pat pat pat clap clap

joy - ful songs of praise.  
snap snap snap snap snap snap snap snap

and au - thored too our sad la - ments for  
pat pat pat clap clap pat pat pat clap clap

*Continue in same manner*

When Mary and I sang and played through the anthem after it was finished, we discovered some serendipitous coincidences in the piece that we hadn't noticed before. Mary clearly mentions melody and harmony in her text. Her stanzas are metrically symmetrical, giving the work a definite form. The missing musical element in the anthem seemed to be rhythm. However, due to her syllabic count and the positioning of word accents, rhythm was created and moved

to the forefront. It even became one of the defining aspects of the work. It's really nice when that happens and it made us happy to discover it.

I see this anthem as a multiple choir anthem. It is up to you to decide which choirs will sing which stanzas. I would suggest having everyone sing the first stanza and then assign other stanzas to whatever choirs you choose. Multiple choir experiences are very healthy to a sequenced choir program; the modeling that occurs is very motivational to young singers. They see their grandparents, parents, sisters and brothers, friends etc., all involved in choirs. Any stigma attached to singing dissipates quickly when we provide experiences like this. A multiple choir experience solidifies a choir program not only giving choirs a chance to participate together and enjoy the sound of many voices but also providing choir members the opportunity to compliment and encourage one another.

How often I have searched for a new opening hymn for a hymn sing or Choir Appreciation Sunday, one that would capture the spirit of sacred music, old and new. Mary Keithahn does a splendid job in covering the many types, moods and purposes for "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." This lively anthem with handbells and multiple choir possibilities sets the stage for a procession of sacred music from all ages. Happy singing!

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