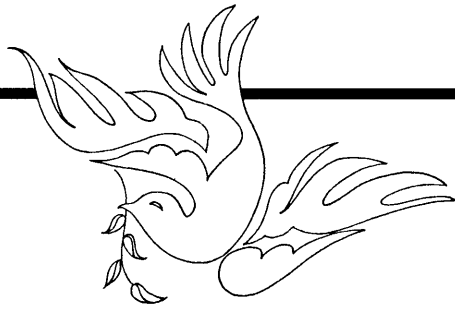


A Study Plan

for Betty Lou and
Ronald A. Nelson's

The KING of LOVE

(CGC- 30)



Outlining a rehearsal plan for this musical is challenging:

1. Any "full-length" musical will take a far longer period of preparation than a single anthem.

2. The parts of this particular musical can be assigned in so many different ways, that one rehearsal plan will not be workable for groups.

3. The children's familiarity with the carols will vary greatly from one church to another.

Above all, it is better to have "too much" time for an undertaking of this kind than to be caught in a panic at the last minute. Starting early with what is perceived as the most difficult music will give the singers time for other worship music while learning the musical play in a gradual process over a long period of time.

Since most of the carols are in mid-range, be sure to vocalize the children at each rehearsal to open up the "top" of the voice. Even though the higher notes may not be used, keeping them open will influence and enhance the quality of the lower notes and prevent the children from getting "chesty" habits. Light "oo" sounds descending are a good beginning.

The assignment of certain pieces to certain weeks as follows does not mean waiting until then to expose the children to that tune. Find ways to introduce all the music as soon and as often as possible. Then use the guide as a suggestion of emphasis at each rehearsal.

add the appropriate words for each group. From the beginning, let the excitement of the shepherds, telling of the amazing thing that has happened to them, be communicated - with "body, mind, spirit, voice" (and raised eyebrows, perhaps!).

Seven weeks ahead: The Polish Lullaby should be in intensive rehearsal for the singers who will do it. If the alto part is to be used, let that be the only "tune" learned at first, by all singers. I have found that this procedure works very well, leaving the melody alone for a couple of weeks until the lower part is completely mastered. Then the tune can be added above as a kind of "descant."



Early on, perhaps at the first rehearsal in the fall, present the story. Simply tell it to the youngest children. Let the oldest read it from their books, taking the various roles. Sing the carols that are already familiar to them, but skip over the others at this time. Announce auditions for solo roles, both speaking and singing, with a rehearsal schedule (under a drama director if possible). Then, week by week, use this "countdown."

Eight weeks ahead: "As Lately We Watch" should be in rehearsal, along with "O Come, Little Children." Study the tune of the Austrian carol first, letting older children discover the AABA form. Spend the most time on the B section, since that is really sung only 1/3 as many times as A when singing the whole song. Use a light "doo-doo-doo" first instead of text, then

Use "O come, O Come, Emmanuel" as a more familiar tune this week.

Six weeks ahead: "O Chief of Cities, Bethlehem" should have been introduced by now, concentrating on the rise and fall of the phrases of this lovely folktune. The varying meter poses no problem for children, who will eventually come to count this as one of their favorites, if it has been introduced early and given plenty of time. One of the more difficult texts in the musical, it should be discussed and explained as needed. Use "Bright and Glorious" as a contrasting and more familiar piece this week for those who will sing it. Of course, all previously-introduced music should be rehearsed every week! This means more careful budgeting of time as the presentation approaches.

Five weeks ahead: "From Heaven Above" should now be in rehearsal for

the “angels,” and also “Rise Now, the Kingdom” for the travelers chorus. Present the first of these as a joyful proclamation of the good news of Jesus’ birth! Stress a “tall tone” on the opening phrase, which should then carry through even to the lowest note at the end of each stanza.

Although the first two stanzas are designated as a solo, let the entire group sing through them before concentrating on the stanzas they will be memorizing. “Rise Now. . .” should be full of joyful expectation almost dance-like in its rhythm. Be sure that the first vowels come out AHee instead of ahEE.

Four weeks ahead: “What Can I Give Him” is perhaps the most important song to be sung by even the youngest children. It should have been introduced before this time and given ample opportunity to “grow.” Filling out the slower tones of this carol to a smooth legato is most important. “Angels We Have Heard” is probably familiar to all, but the “shepherds” should practice their solo stanza for expressive enthusiasm that would follow the angels’ revelation.

Three weeks ahead: In addition to reviewing all the songs previously rehearsed, enjoy the more familiar “Away In a Manger” (youngest children should be singing this for many weeks), “Go, Tell It On the Mountain,” and “Joy to the World.” The memorizing process should now be in full swing. For the toughest texts, writing the words on a chalkboard and gradually erasing them as the song is sung over and over is a method the children especially enjoy. (Don’t forget to do one final run-through after all the words are erased, pointing rhythmically to the place on the board where they were.)

Final weeks: Now it must all come together. The solo and speaking parts are well-rehearsed and everyone is eager to involve the choruses. Allow plenty of time for these run-throughs especially the first one where all the placing of groups must happen. Let the second run-through follow as closely as possible, so that the blocking is not forgotten. If younger children are used only in the final scene, they should not have to sit through the long process of chorus blocking for the first scenes. Maximize the use of everyone’s time. If youngest children are to sit with their parents in pews until the final scene (as is suggested), a parent should attend each rehearsal with each child. At least two full dress rehearsals should be held, so that any problems with costumes can be solved and all will feel comfortable in costume.

... **Ronald A. Nelson**