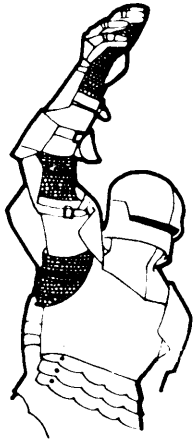


## GOOD CHRISTIAN MEN, REJOICE



Do you recognize me . . . In my Knight's suit of armor?

This is the way many soldiers dressed in Europe in the 1300's where exciting things were happening. These soldiers were called Knights and they wore this suit of steel armor to protect themselves in battle from swords and spears and arrows. Looking out a castle window one could see huts and farms surrounding the feudal estate where serfs lived protected by the feudal lord and his knights. (You may want to look up the meaning of the underlined words.)

Towns were beginning to emerge with little shops where bakers, weavers, leatherworkers, and all kinds of craftsmen made their own living rather than serve on a feudal estate. These "crafts and guilds" were the beginning of the economy upon which our own way of life is now based.

Religion was important to people but because the church service was all in Latin, many Christians made up their own tunes and songs about God. Some of the townspeople even turned Bible stories into plays and acted them out on wagon stages for everyone to enjoy. "Noye's Fludde" is one of the plays that some of our choirs today have staged that is much like those old medieval plays.

"In Dulci Jubilo" is one of the popular tunes people sang in those days, but John Neale translated the words into the more poetic text that we sing today: "Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart, and soul, and voice!" Ask your organist to play an organ arrangement of "In Dulci Jubilo" for you. Listen closely to hear the same melody as in the hymn stand out from the elaborate patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes in the organ setting.

The rhythmic flow of "In Dulci Jubilo" and the excellent translation of the text may make you want to interpret the hymn with movement. Begin by moving by twos to the rhythm. Then try moving with joyful leaps, head high, and arms outstretched. Now, adapt your movements to the meaning of the words, from the manger to the resurrection.

We could almost pretend, as we interpret "Good Christian Men, Rejoice" with movement, that we are medieval minstrels, acting out the story of the hymn on one of those wagon stages. As we travel from town to town, we see all around us, the first steps in exploring ideas that will take centuries to be understood: ideas in chemistry, in mathematics, in industrial arts, even in political processes. It makes us wonder what ideas are just beginning in our own times — perhaps even through our own thoughts — that will take many years to be expanded and accepted.

One of the most important ideas in music came from an eleventh century Italian monk, Guido d'Arezzo. It was the musical staff and notes. In the 1300's, other monks were learning to sound and write two notes at the same time on the staff so that we have the beginning of "harmony." The German people who first sang the hymn and tune "In Dulci Jubilo" would be amazed to see it written as music is printed today because only the clergy and a few noblemen ever had the opportunity to see such scrolls of music.

We should be glad that more comfortable clothing is **one idea** that has improved over the centuries. This Knight's suit of armor is stuffy and heavy . . . and my nose itches! Perhaps the best part about all the changing ideas now — and 600 years ago — is that God's love for us is constant and unchanging whether I'm Sir Charles the Knight or just your friend.