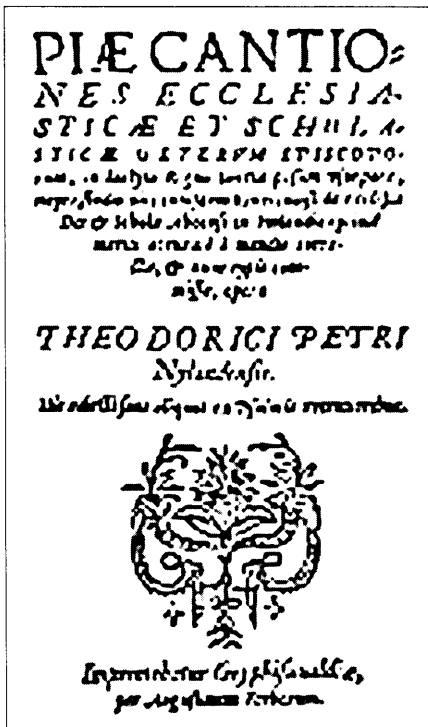


On This Day Earth Shall Ring: A Hymn Study



On This Day Earth Shall Ring is one of 74 medieval hymns and school songs found in the *Piae Cantiones* published in Finland in 1582. This collection of hymns is a product of the Protestant Reformation in Scandinavia, where the countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland eventually established Lutheranism as their state church. It was published in Greifswald by the Finnish student, Theodorici Petri, and was compiled and revised by Jacob Finno, the Rector of the Turku Cathedral School. This songbook was used by the students in the Finnish Cathedral School where singing was a very important part of school life. The full title is *Piae Cantiones ecclesiasticae et scholasticae veterum episcoporum* which translates *Devout ecclesiastical and scholastic songs of the old bishops*.

About half of the songs are believed to be of Finnish origin, while the others have been found in foreign sources. The *Piae Cantiones* collection of songs is one of Finland's greatest musical treasures, and it connected the country to other European cultures during the Middle Ages.

Other familiar hymns found in this collection are *Of the Father's Love Begotten* (DIVINUM MYSTERIUM), *Unto Us A Child Is Born* (PUER NOBIS NASCITUR), and *Gentle Mary Laid Her Child* (TEMPUS ADEST FLORIDUM).

THE TEXT

The hymn text was originally in Latin as were all the songs in this collection. This text was translated into English by Jane Marion Joseph (1894-1929). Jane Joseph was born in London, England, in 1894, and died there at the young age of thirty-five. Educated at St. Paul's Girls' School, Brook Green, and Cambridge, she was a gifted student of the English composer Gustav Holst. The refrain retains the original Latin language "Ideo, gloria in excelsis" which translates "Therefore, glory to God in the highest." It is understandable why the translator decided to keep this refrain in Latin, for the Latin sings so well and is common enough to be understood by the congregation.

This is an Advent or Christmas text as it begins by declaring the birth of the Savior, and such a declaration gives the children a song to sing. The following stanzas point out primarily three other aspects of the nativity: the place of Jesus' birth, the wise men led by a star, and the song of the angels at the birth.

THE TUNE

The tune PERSONENT HODIE also originates from Scandinavia. Written in 1360, it is one of the early Scandinavian Lutheran contributions to modern hymnody. The present form of the tune is from *Piae Cantiones* (1582). The arrangement used in most all current hymnals was written by the English composer Gustav Holst in 1924. The first publication of Holst's arrangement was in *The Oxford Book of Carols*.

INTRODUCING THE HYMN

1. Introduce the refrain first, allowing the singers to have fun pronouncing "Ideo" (ee-deh-awe). Be prepared for the singers to realize that this Latin sounds like "idiot" in English. To put this problem in the past, strongly emphasize proper Latin pronunciation. Clear vowel pronunciation should continue to be emphasized for the "gloria in excelsis Deo" (GLAW-ree-ah EEn eck-SHELL-sees DEH-aw).

2. After the refrain is taught, challenge the singers to find references in the verses to three events of the nativity. If teaching the hymn to children, point out that *they* are mentioned in the first stanza as the ones singing the song "to the Lord, Christ our King, Born on earth to save us."

3. If handbells or choir chimes are available, have some of the singers play on the refrain to reinforce the title "earth shall ring." If musical resources are available, have the handbell choir play the falling fourths found in the treble clef of the refrain. For more information on using handbells with this hymn, see

The United Methodist Hymnal Supplement.

4. Use this hymn to introduce or reiterate the difference between minor and major tonality. The tune begins minor and ends major with the use of the Picardy third in the final chord. The Gustav Holst arrangement is actually in the Dorian mode which was the most frequently used of the church modes in the sixteenth century. The Dorian mode is the same as minor (Aeolian mode) tonality except that the 6th scale degree is raised.

5. Singing this hymn makes one feel like marching. Have the singers march around the room while humming the tune, stepping on the half-note beats. Clearly, the carol lends itself to being used as a processional hymn for choir children through adults. Another possibility is to have three singers (wise men three) process in, bringing gifts to the altar, as the choir and/or congregation sing.

MUSICAL CONCEPTS AND SKILLS

Tonality

1. Minor Mode (Dorian)
2. Each stanza ends major (Picardy third)

Melody

1. Intervals of the perfect fourth and fifth used (Teach how these intervals look on the staff; particularly the fifth written line—skip a line—line or space—skip a space—space)
2. Frequent use of lowered seventh (minor mode)

Harmony

1. This arrangement by Gustav Holst creates some dissonance with moving bass line and counter melody in the treble of the refrain. With older elementary children discuss the terms *dissonance* and *countermelody*.

2. Raised third (Picardy) in final chord creates lift at the end of each stanza.

Rhythm

1. Predominantly quarter, quarter, half note.
2. Introduction begins on offbeat which could create confusion for unprepared congregation. You may consider not repeating the introduction before the second, third, and fourth stanzas.

Form

- Verse and Refrain
- Have the children identify other carols in the verse/refrain pattern.

TEXT

Imagery

1. Declares the birth of the Savior.
2. The place of Jesus' birth (stanza 2).
3. The wise men led by a star (stanza 3).
4. The song of the angels at the birth (stanza 4).

Poetry

1. 666.66 with refrain

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES

Singers and Accompaniment

1. Sing in unison, a cappella.
2. Sing in unison with hymnal accompaniment.
3. Sing in unison with handbells, choir chimes or glockenspiel.
4. Sing as a choir anthem (see sources).
5. Use strong/weak contrast when singing "save us", "gave us", "Deo", etc.

Worship Opportunities

1. Use as a choir processional at the beginning of worship.

2. Sing at Advent or Christmas.
3. Sing unison in the round (around the sanctuary).

SOURCES

Hymnals:

- Chalice Hymnal: 168
- Gather: 559 (non-Advent text)
- The Presbyterian Hymnal: 46
- The United Methodist Hymnal: 248
- The Hymnal 1982: 92
- The Worshiping Church: 175
- The Worshiping Church: 142 (Fred Pratt Green text, Advent)

Anthems:

- Personent hodie*, arr. John Rutter, SATB, Hinshaw, HMC1580 (1997)
- Personent hodie*, arr. Gustav Holst, unison, Curwen, 71655
- The Boys' Carol*, arr. Rosenberry, unison, G. Schirmer, 11629
- Let the Song Be Begun* (Easter text), arr. Don Malin, SATB, Hal Leonard, 00007733

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