



The God of Abraham Praise

BACKGROUND: *The God of Abraham Praise*

Traveling more than 100,000 miles on horseback in the 25 years in which he preached in England, Ireland and Scotland, Thomas Olivers (1725-1799) is remembered chiefly as the writer of the English version of *The God of Abraham Praise*. Olivers heard Leoni Meyer Lyon, a chorister in the Greek Synagogue, Duke's Place London sing the *Yigdal* or Hebrew confession of Faith at an Evening Service.

Olivers showed the hymn to a friend saying "Look at this-I have rendered it from the Hebrew, giving it as far as I could a Christian character, and I have called on *Leoni*, the Jew, who has given me a Synagogue Melody to suit it." Written probably in 1770, Olivers' completed version has 12 stanzas divided into three parts of four stanzas each.

Few hymns are so biblical as this one. This hymn is based on the 13 articles of the Jewish faith, a summation of essential doctrines of Judaism begun by Moses Maimonides (1130-1205) and put in metrical form (verse) by Daniel ben Judah around 1400.

The tune and text began appearing in hymnbooks with the Methodist, *The Pocket Hymn Book*, 1785.

Olivers' full original version may be found in E. Routley's *A Panorama of Christian Hymnody* (Collegetown, MN, 1979), 33-34.

OPTIONS FOR INTRODUCING *The God of Abraham Praise*

1. If you have access to a recording of Smetana's *The Moldau*, play the opening section and call the children's attention to the principal melody (in the strings) that appears after the introduction (the rippling duet of flutes). Tell them the first phrase of our hymn for this month shares the melody you just heard. The hymntune is an old folk melody common to Jewish, Spanish-Basque and Slavic songs. Play on the piano the first six notes of the melody. Have the children sing the six notes. Play the "Moldau" theme. How is it like what you sang and how is it different? (While responses will vary, stress that both examples use the same pattern of pitches, but the rhythm is different as well as the mood.) Or...

2. Do you remember an Old Testament story about Abraham? (Allow for responses from the children and be ready to prompt them or provide a response. The saga begins in Genesis 12.) Our hymn study this month is *The God of Abraham Praise*. Listen to the melody as I sing it for you. (Sing the first verse). This melody was sung years ago in

synagogues. What group of people worship in synagogues? (Jews) You know much of our music and tradition as Christians has its roots in Judaism. The melody of this hymn is drawn from a folk song connected to Jewish, Spanish-Basque and Slavic traditions. Many of our hymns find their beginnings in folk melodies. This often helps us learn to sing them quickly. Let's learn this melody by echo singing: I will sing a phrase and then you sing it back to me. Follow along on your hymn sheet.

MUSICAL CONCEPTS AND SKILLS

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| Tonality: | 1. Minor Mode |
| | 2. Resting Tone: la |
| Melody: | 1. Stepwise patterns |
| | 2. la ti do re mi and do re mi fa sol |
| Rhythm: | 1. Organized in groups of four |
| | 2. Repetition and variety |
| Form: | 1. Four phrases (2+2, 4, 2+2, 4) |
| Text: | God as the Great, I AM |
| | Names for God (God of Abraham, Ancient of Everlasting Days — Alpha and Omega, God of Love, Jehovah, I AM) |
| Worship: | 1. Use first phrase as antiphon for responsorial psalm of praise |
| | 2. As a call to worship |

SOURCES

- Chalice Hymnal*, page 24
- Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs*, page 488
- Lutheran Worship* (1982), page 450
- Psalter Hymnal*, page 621
- Ritual Song*, page 685
- The Hymnal 1982*, page 401
- The Presbyterian Hymnal*, page 488
- The United Methodist Hymnal*, page 116

MUSIC LITERACY

This hymn is an excellent resource at the beginning of the choir year to introduce or reinforce some basic music

reading skills with our choristers. You will need to decide based on the age and experience of your singers where to begin and how far to extend these suggestions. Remember that these are suggestions for you to use as a springboard for your own creativity. What you teach or stress needs to be based upon your singers' previous learning.

1. Exploring Melody

- a. Ask your singers what is melody. As you receive different responses, move to the generalization that melody involves pitch, rhythm and a sense of order.
- b. Ask your singers what is pitch. Reinforce the association of the words "high" and "low" with pitch. For younger children you may wish to introduce the concept that loud and soft are different from high and low. Have them identify pitches that you sing or play on an instrument as either high or low. Then, move to playing two pitches and asking which is the higher or which is the lower. Most likely you will not need to spend much time with older children on this concept.
- c. Ask the singers what are some different ways that notes (pitches) might move on a staff.

Make a list or prepare chart examples to show as the singers suggest up, down, stay the same, by step, and by skip or leap.

Show the children what staying the same looks like on a staff (notes follow the same line or the same space). Using the student hymn page ask the singers to find examples in the melody where the notes stay the same.

Show the children what moving by step looks like on a staff (notes go up or down from one line to the very next space or from one space to the very next line). Give several examples of this using different parts of the staff. Using the student hymn page ask the singers to find examples where the notes of the melody move by step and identify the direction of the stepwise movement.

- d. Teach the stepwise passages of the hymn tune using solfege, number, pitch names or the text. (*La ti do re mi* and *do re mi fa sol* for example)

2. Exploring Rhythm

- a. Ask the singers what note values or kinds of notes do they see in this hymn (quarter, half, eighth). For younger choristers use this hymn to teach quarter and half notes. Don't overwhelm them by trying to teach every kind of note here if they are just beginning to develop their music reading skills.
- b. After identifying the kinds of notes present in the rhythm of this melody, move to actually clapping the rhythm. Isolate patterns and place them on charts or on your board (see example below.) After the children clap the rhythm from the chart, have them be detectives and find where the pattern appears in the hymn.
- c. With older children you may wish to explore how the rhythm of this melody has repetition and contrast. Look for examples where the rhythm stays the same. Find the many different ways groups of four beats are organized in this hymn. Talk about the importance of repetition and contrast to keep interest in music and to create a sense of order or symmetry in a melody.

3. Christian Education

- a. Each week share a little of Abraham's experience with God. Why is Abraham an important Old Testament figure?
- b. I AM the GREAT I AM...what does this mean? Is this one of the earliest expressions of who God is? Explore the different names we use for God. Lead the children in discussing why we use these different names for God.
- c. Use information from Simon Sargon's article in this issue of *The Chorister* to talk with the children about music in the Jewish tradition.