A Christmas Songbook

edited by

Daniel Sadowsky

Bb Reed Score

2025 edition

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

-Luke 2:10

"Christ-mas day: the old heathens feasting day, in honour to Saturn their idol-god; the Papists massing day; the prophane mans ranting day; the superstitious mans idol day; the multitudes idle day; whereon, because they cannot do nothing: they do worse then nothing[...]."

-Ezekias Woodward, 1656

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Notes on the Collection

There are three types of vocal pieces that are worth singing during the Advent and Christmas seasons in the English-speaking world. There are the classics: a repertoire mostly of hymns and mostly in four parts which are all widely known in excellent, singable arrangemnts. There is also a large repertoire of carols which, in part due to their origin as such, have only melodies which are well-known; attempts to arrange such tunes in four parts have been largely unsuccessful, and no such attempts are made here. And finally, there is a repertoire which originates outside of the English-speaking world that many would find either too difficult or unfamiliar, but which is too delightful to neglect entirely.

Each of the three parts in this collection takes on one of these three repertoires and is designed both to sample the best literature in the public domain and also to be sung through as a set. The entire collection is edited with spontaneous groups of singers and/or instrumentalists in mind. Directions to the performers, for example, are kept at a bare minimum in order to allow users of the scores maximum flexibility. For most groups, especially large ones, the first part of the collection contains the pieces which should form the core repertoire. Ensembles for which four-part harmony is not an option might consider the second part of the collection, which contains several two-part arrangements. And while it may be that only relatively adventurous groups of vocalists will approach the third part of the collection, there is plenty of excellent material for instrumental groups to be found there.

Notes on the License

This collection draws from a wealth of texts, music, and arrangements which are in the public domain. Some pieces appear with arrangements which are the original work of the editor (and which are distinguishable as such by the abbreviation "arr. ed.") while others, long ago perfected, appear with nothing original but the name of the editor. All engravings, regardless of their novelty, are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, as are any novel arrangements. The intent in using such a license is to allow, for example, for individual pages from the collection to be reproduced and distributed freely; the easiest way to comply with the terms of the license is to ensure that the icon and text at the bottom of each page is preserved in all copies. For more information, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/.

Notes on the Songs

Ding Dong Merrily on High The arrangement here borrows heavily from the original 4-part harmonization by Charles Wood, but has been considerably simplified. It should be performed at a lively tempo.

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming The anonymous text and melody first appears in the Speyerer Gesangbuch of 1599. The setting by Praetorius is best performed either a cappella or, if necessary, with light keyboard accompaniment. The German lyrics provided are taken from Friedrich Layriz's 1844 edition of the text, which makes slight alterations to the original.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel While the oldest known manuscript containing the melody dates to the 15th century and the text is a paraphrase of the much older O Antiphons, the marriage of the two dates only to 1851. However, the 15th century manuscript, in which the melody is only one of two voices in a parallel organum, was probably unknown to the melody's 19th century popularizers and was only rediscovered in 1966. The practice of setting the text to both parts of the organum seems to be first suggested in 2015 by Jeff Ostrowski, choirmaster of St. Vitus Roman Catholic Church in San Fernando, CA.

The Snow Lay on the Ground An Anglo-Irish carol of unknown origin. The arrangement here borrows heavily from Julius Henry Waterbury's 1871 "Children's Praise".

I Saw Three Ships Several variants of this folk song have been recorded; the two-part arrangement here is based on two separate arrangements published by William Sandys in 1833 and 1862 based on a variant collected in Derbyshire. One possibility for performance is to have women sing the melody while men sing the second line down an octave. Alternatively, both parts can be sung by mixed groups of men and women. However it is sung, the melody should be heard first alone.

Deck the Hall This song orignated with a 1862 publication of several popular Welsh songs. Alongside the lyrics to the traditional New Year's carol, Nos Galan, the publication included a very loose English paraphrase by Thomas Oliphant. These lyrics, as well as the tune of Nos Galan, were the basis of a 1877 publication, "Deck the Hall with Boughs of Holly", by the Pennsylvania State Education Association. This version notably censored all mention of alcoholic beverages and, in doing so, introduced the notorious lyric "Don we now our gay apparel". Here, Oliphant's 1862 lyrics are restored, with one minor alteration. The arrangement featured here makes an attempt to reconnect with the song's roots as a dance tune, and should be played at a lively tempo.

Away in a Manger The two-part setting which has been reproduced here with minimal alteration is the version that is best known in the United Kingdom, despite the lyrics and setting both being of North American authorship.

Silent Night The duet arrangement here reproduces the vocal parts that appear in Gruber's 1818 manuscript, although the bass line has been altered. It should not be performed at a slow tempo.

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen While the earliest known text, "Sit you merry Gentlemen", dates to c. 1650, the earliest extant printing of the tune reproduced here is Edward F. Rimbault's 1846 "A Little Book of Christmas Carols". Rimbault and other authors suggest that the association of the tune with the carol originates in London. The text used here comes from the J. & C. Evans (1822-1828) broadside, which contains eight verses, the first two and final two of which are reproduced here. Two customary alterations of the text are also accepted: the line "And it's tidings" has been altered to "O tidings", and the "To save pour souls from Satan's Power, Which had long time gone astray" has been altered to "To save us all from Satan's pow'r, When we were gone astray". This carol should be sung at a lively tempo, and to encourage this, a four-part arrangement is not used. However, an optional descant has been composed. If the descant is used, it should not be used on the first and final verses.

Auld Lang Syne The original poem in the Scots language by Robert Burns is reproduced here along with a minimalist English translation.

Puer natus in Bethlehem Like most choral settings of this tune, the setting by Bach from the cantata BWV 65, "Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen" that is used here was originally set to a 1545 German text by Cyriakus Spangenberg. The Spangenberg text is a loose translation of the original Latin, which is thought to date to the 13th century. Here, the first four verses found in the Piae Cantiones manuscript of 1582 are used.

Los Peces en el Río This score is based on the 1958 recording by Manolo Escobar, where the song is presented as one of three "aires navideños jerezanos", as well as a later recording by Escobar. The song is often suggested to be of Extremaduran, and ultimately Arabic, origin; however, there does not seem to be any documentation of this.

Fum, Fum, Fum A traditional Catalan carol originating in either the 16th or 17th centuries. The best known English translations are not in the public domain.

How Great Our Joy This piece, often known as the "Echo Carol", should be performed in such a way that the sections marked "echo" are distinct from the sections that precede them. This can be done to good effect with two different groups of singers or a group of singers and a group of instrumentalists, if such forces are available. Another possibility is to simply make a dynamic contrast between the two.

Eesus Ahatonyah A recent transcription by John Steckley of Brébeuf's original Wendat lyrics has been used here with permission. The text should be pronounced as it would be in North American English, with the exception of "th" and "sth", which should be excecuted as "t" and "st", respectively, and followed by an aspiration. Brébeuf wrote six verses; the first, second, and final verses appear here.

Boh predvičny narodilsja A traditional Rusyn-language carol from the Carpathian mountains dating as early as the late eighteenth century. The lyrics reproduced here are the first two verses and the final verse from the Užhorod Pisennik of 1913. The "c" in Rusyn is pronounced as a "ts" in English, the "č" as a "ch", the "j" as a "y", the "š" as a "sh", the apostrophe as a consonant "y", the "ž" like the "s" in 'measure', and the "r" is always trilled.

Part I

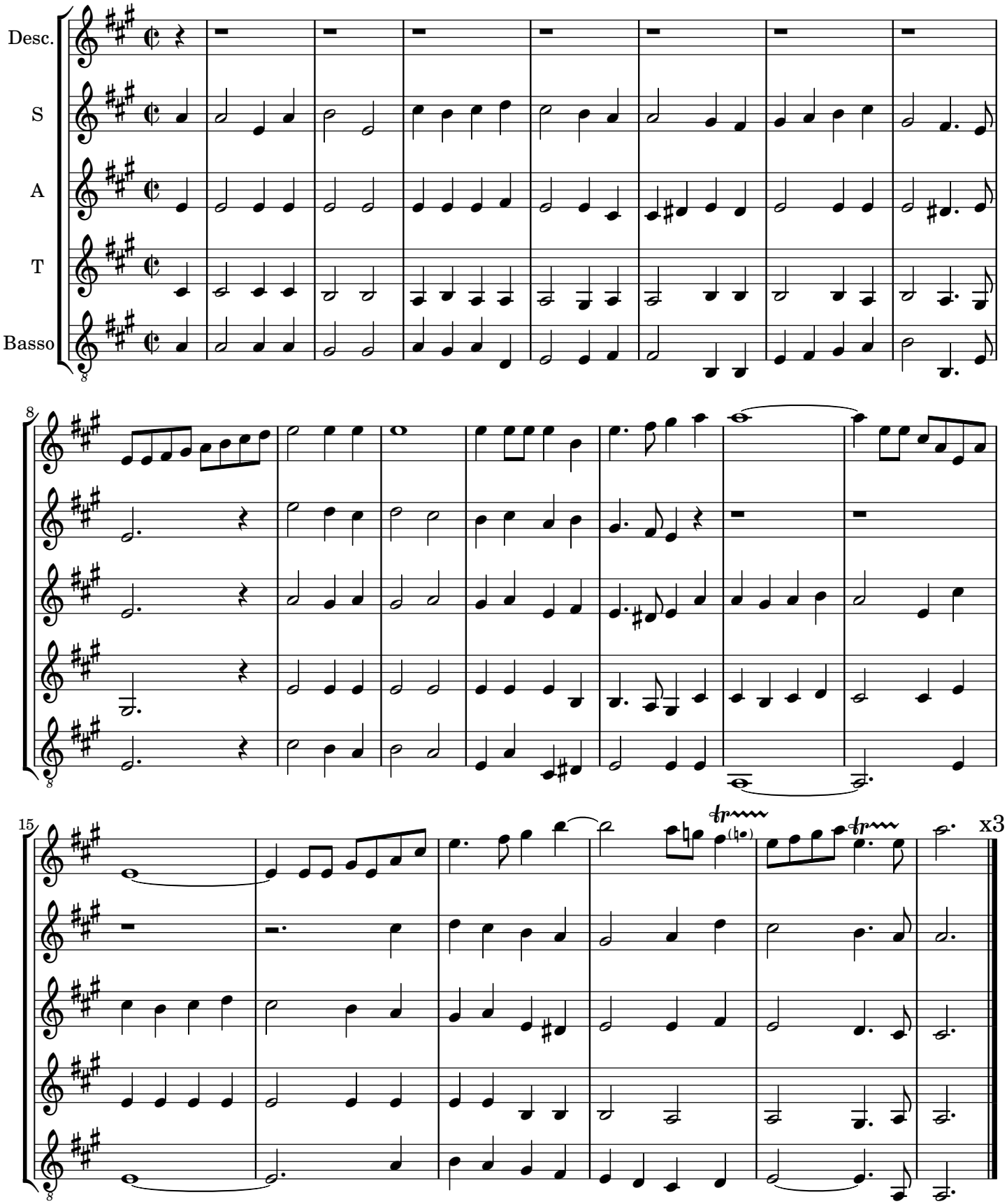
Music for Christmas, mostly in four parts.

Adeste Fideles

John Francis Wade(?), 1744

trans. Frederick Oakeley, 1841

Ibid.



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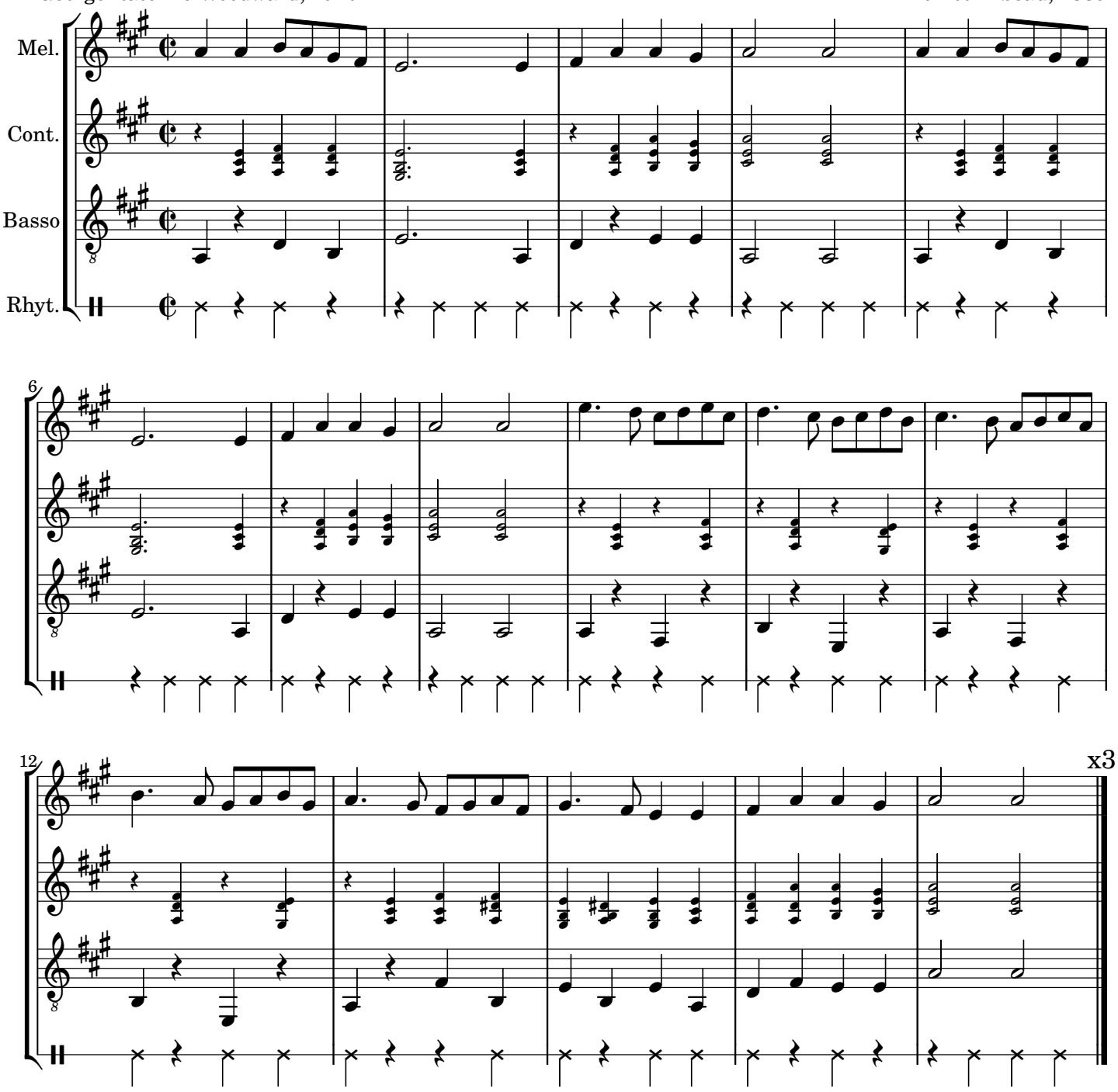
Ding Dong Merrily on High

George Ratcliffe Woodward, 1910 — Thoinot Arbeau, 1589



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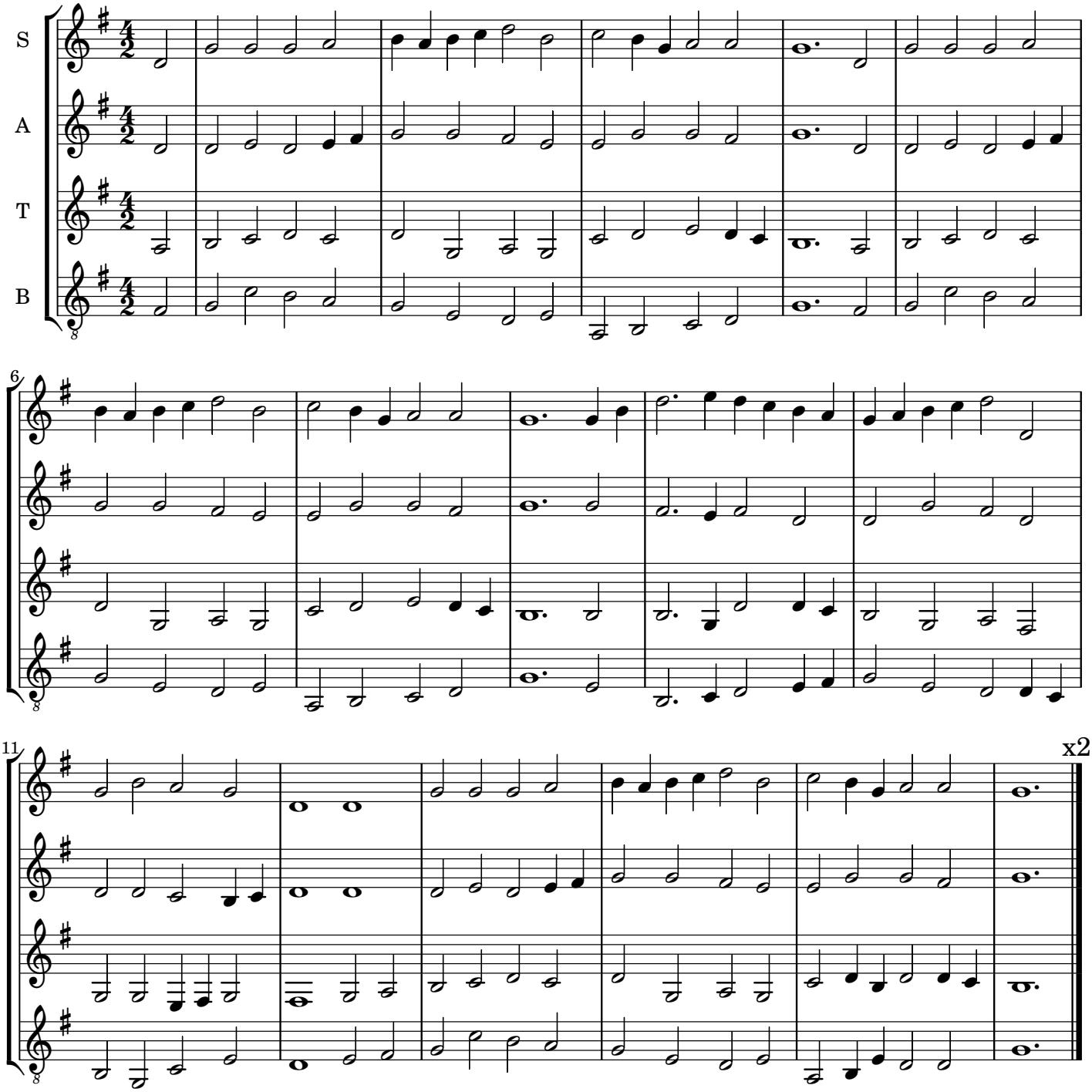
O Little Town of Bethlehem

Phillips Brooks, 1868

traditional (SE England)

arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1903



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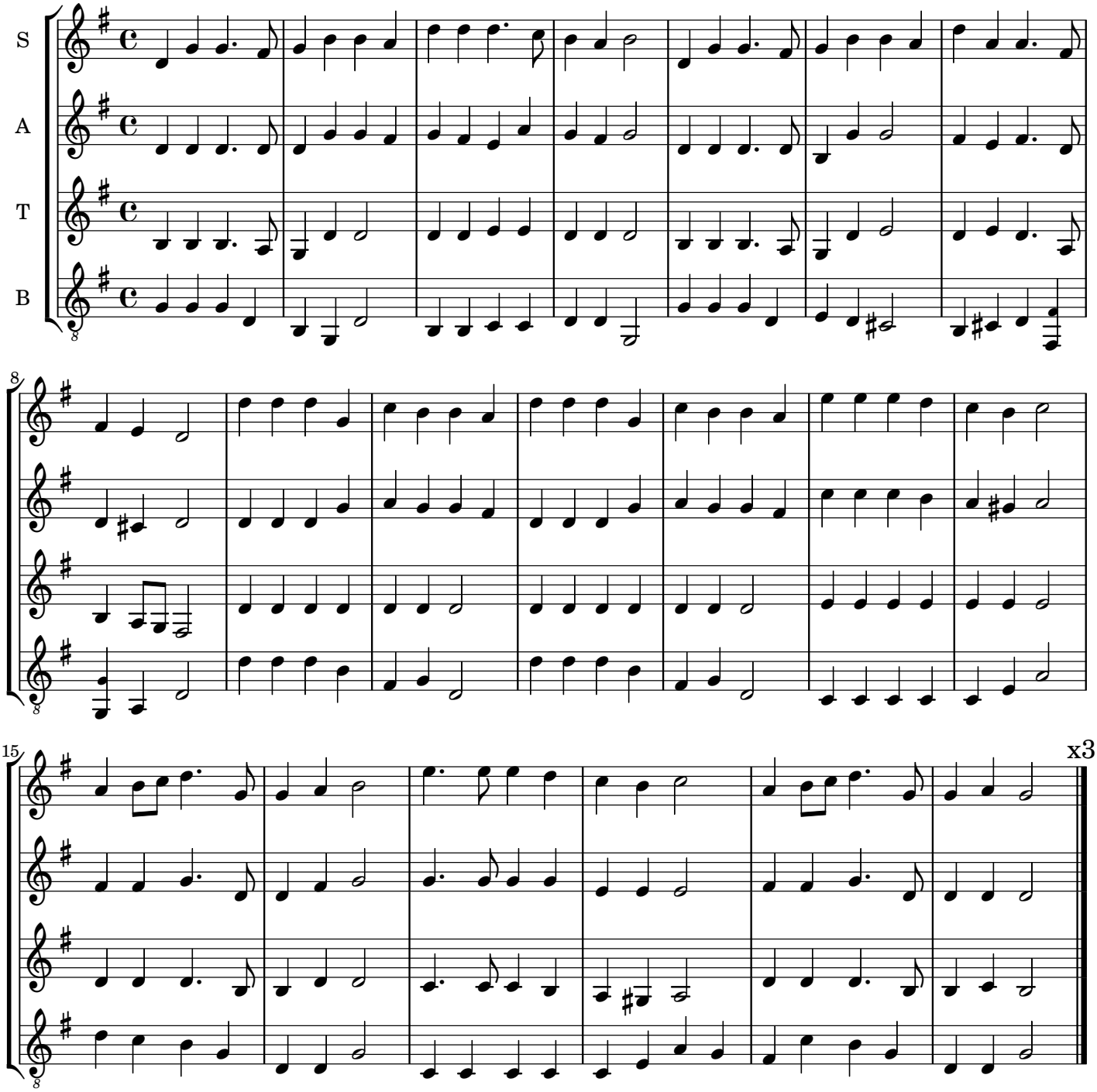
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Charles Wesley, 1739 (alt.)

Felix Mendelssohn, 1840

adapt. William H. Cummings, 1855



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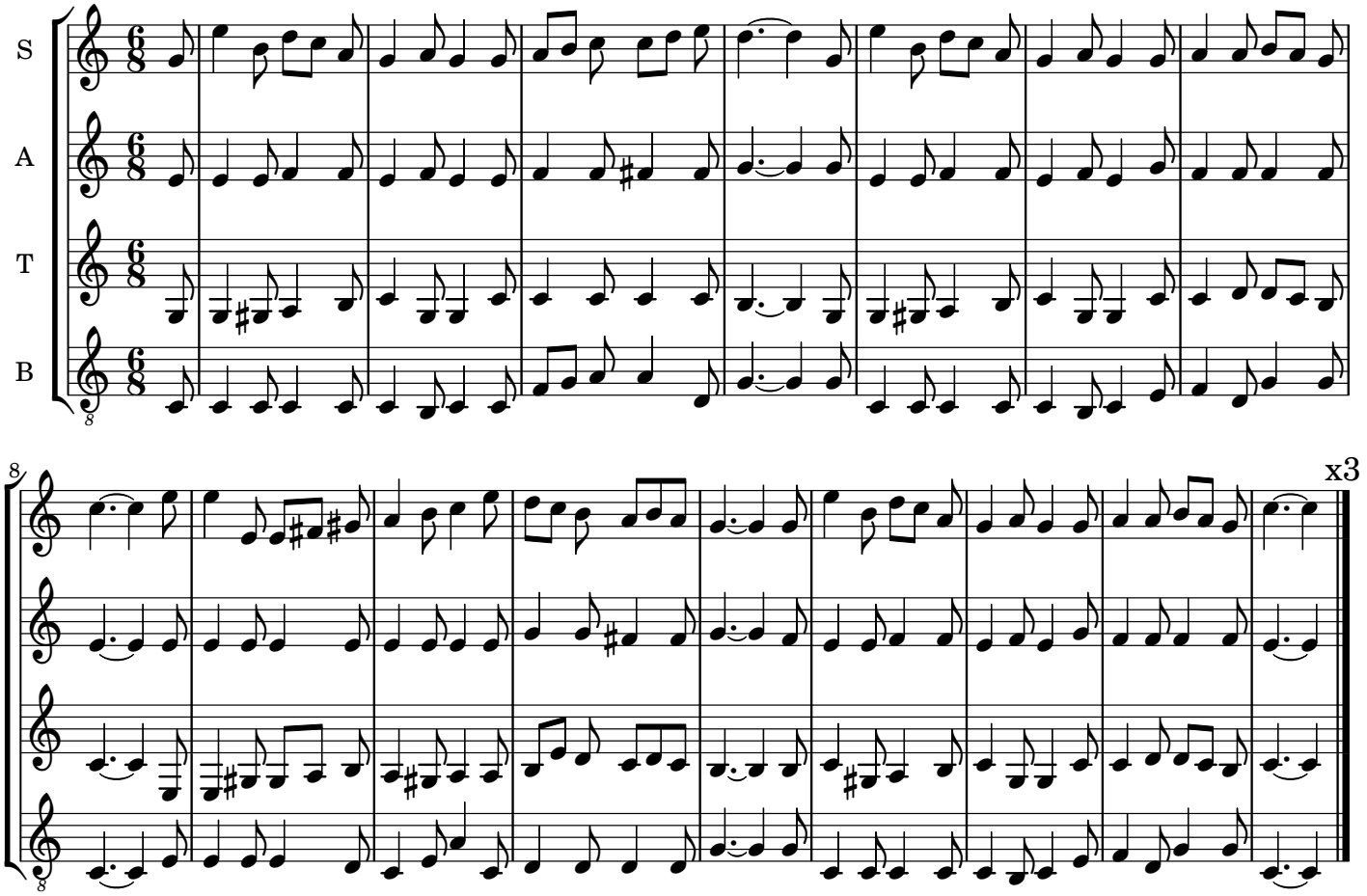
It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Edmund Sears, 1849

Richard Storrs Willis, 1850

arr. Uzziah Christopher Burnap



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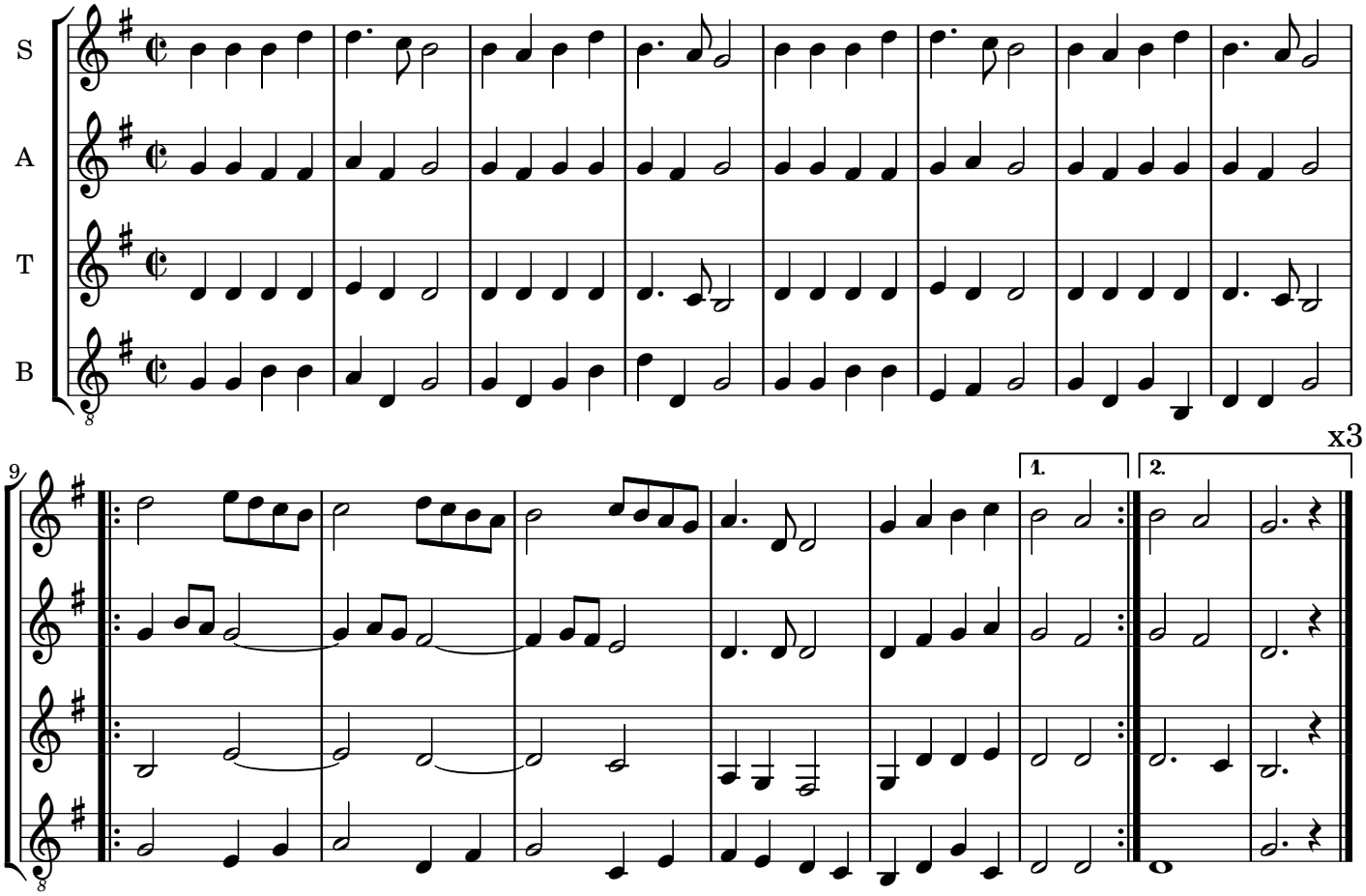
Angels We Have Heard on High

traditional (Languedoc) Ibid.

trans. James Chadwick, 1862 arr. Edward Shippen Barnes (1887-1958)



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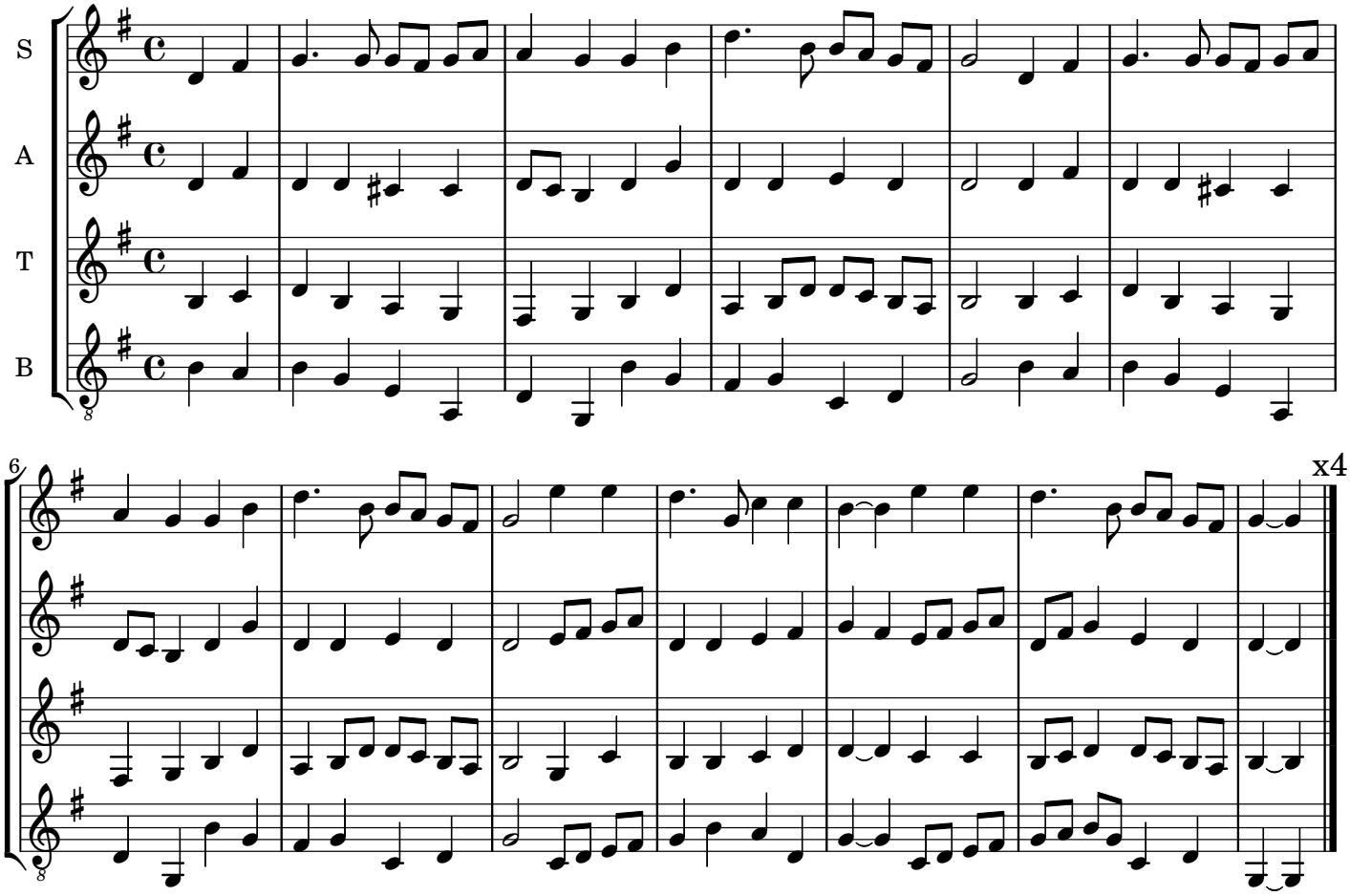
Once in Royal David's City

Cecil Frances Alexander, 1848, alt.

Henry John Gauntlett, 1849

arr. Arthur Henry Mann, 1919



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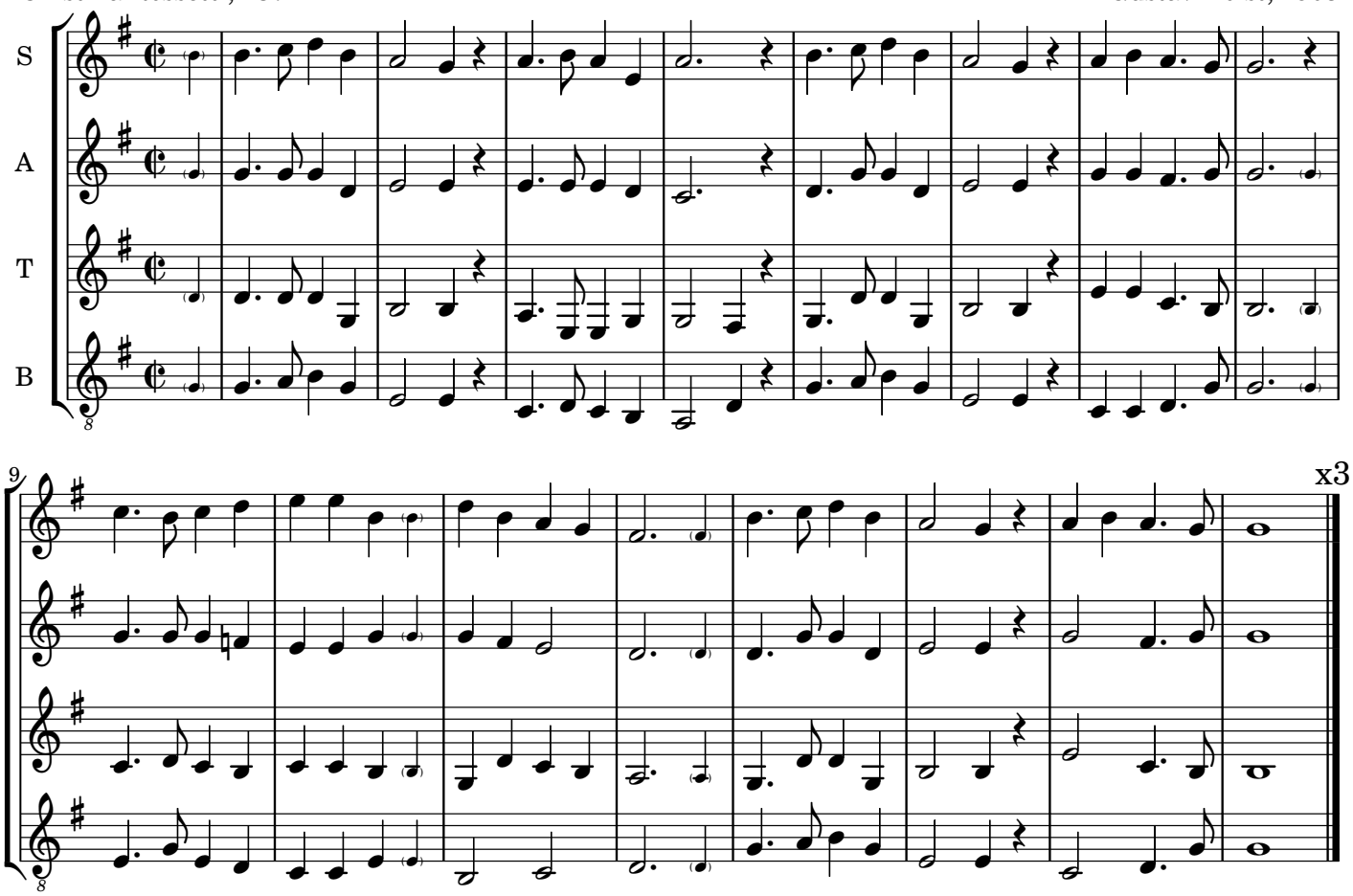
In the Bleak Mid-Winter

Chistina Rossetti, 1872 Gustav Holst, 1905



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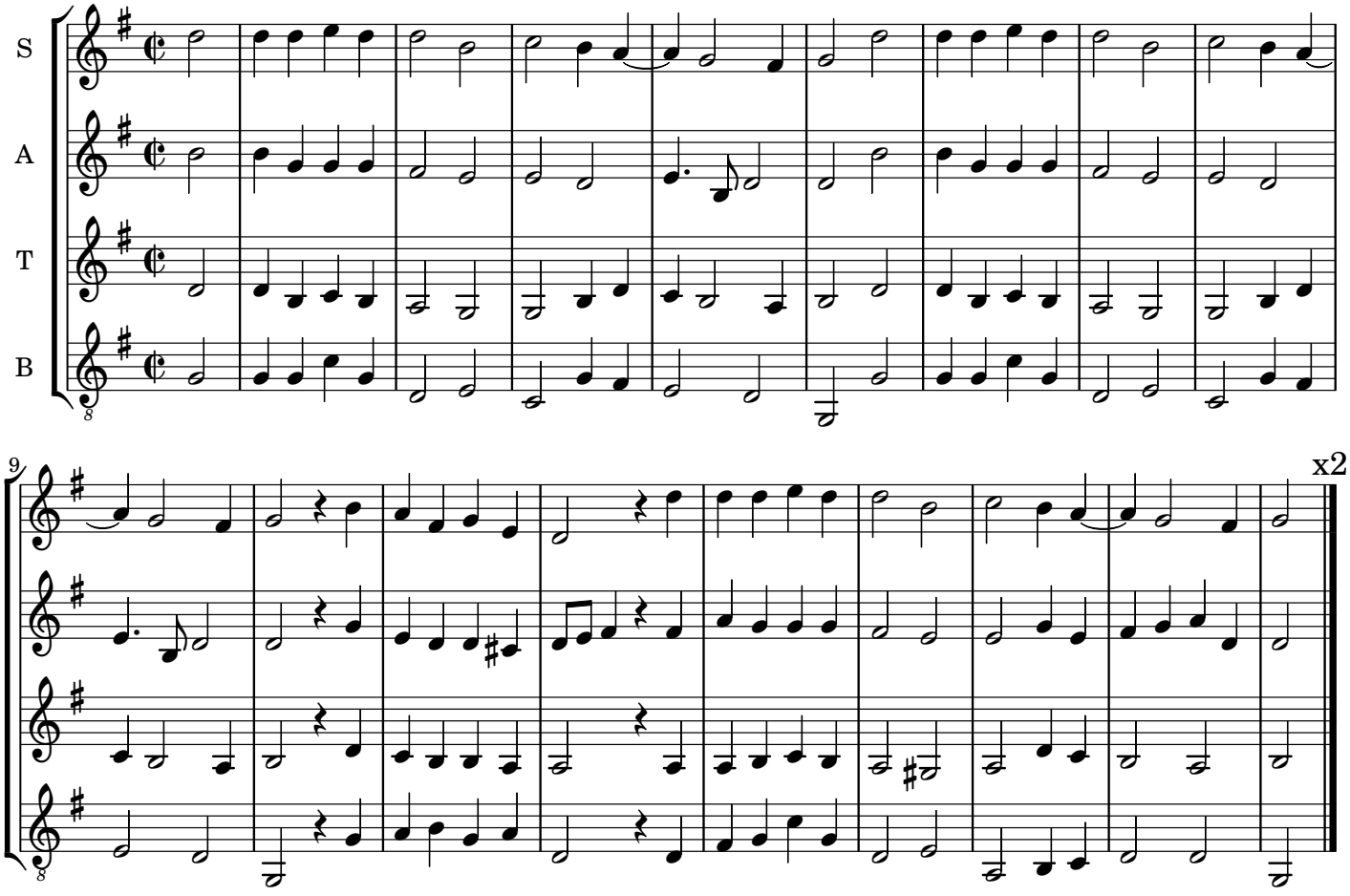
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

anonymous, 1599, alt.

trans. Theodore Baker, 1894

Ibid.

arr. Michael Praetorius, 1609



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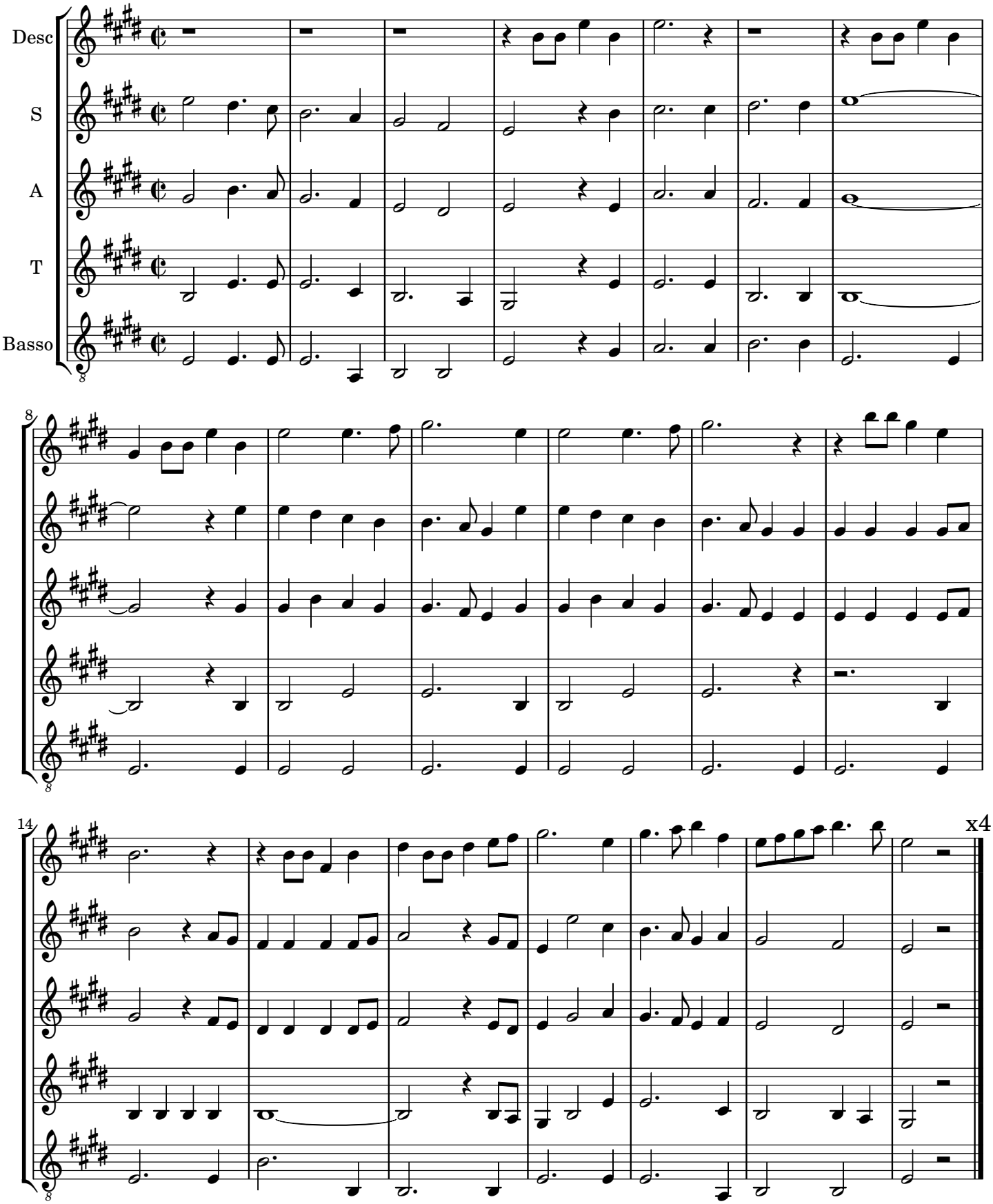
Joy to the World

Isaac Watts, 1719

Lowell Mason, 1839



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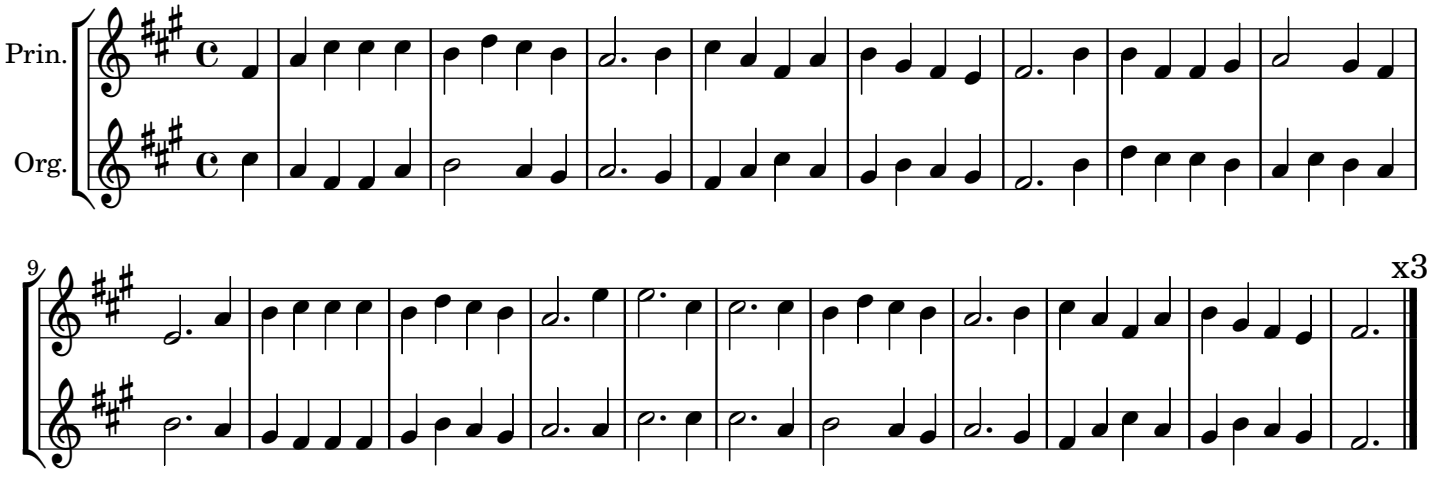
Part II

Music for Christmas, mostly in one or two parts.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

anonymous, 1710 anonymous, 15th c.

trans. John Mason Neale, 1861 (v. 1, 4-7); Henry Sloane Coffin, 1916 (v. 2-3)



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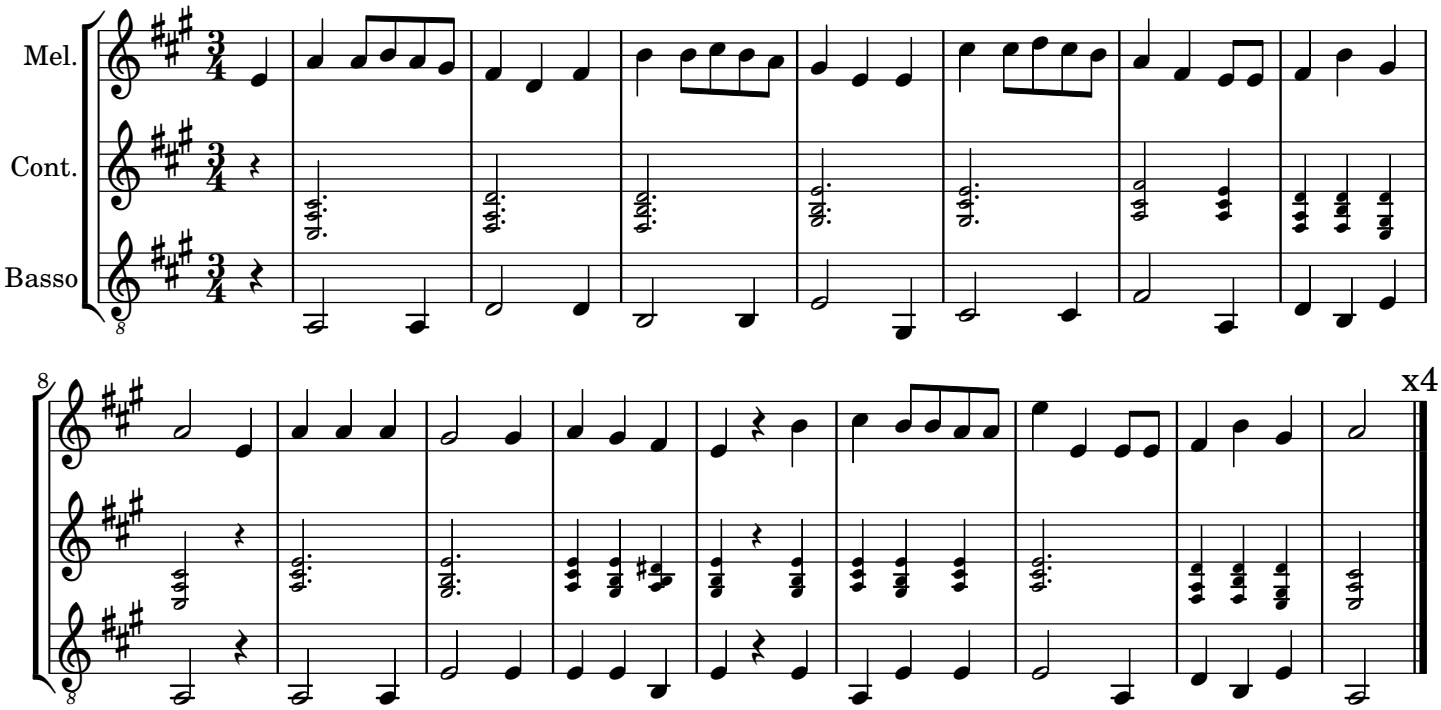
We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Traditional (England)

Ibid.

arr. ed.



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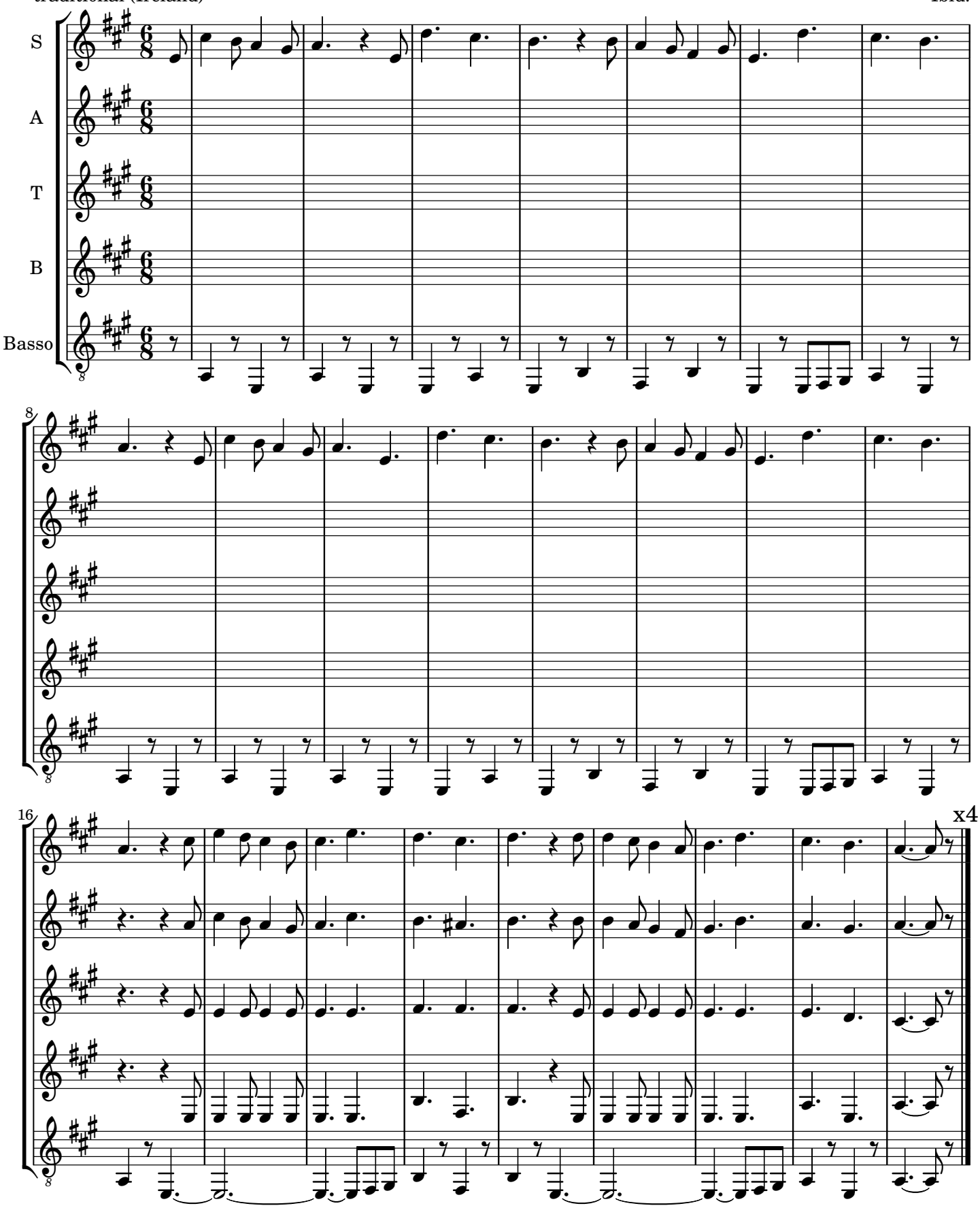
The Snow Lay on the Ground

traditional (Ireland) Ibid.



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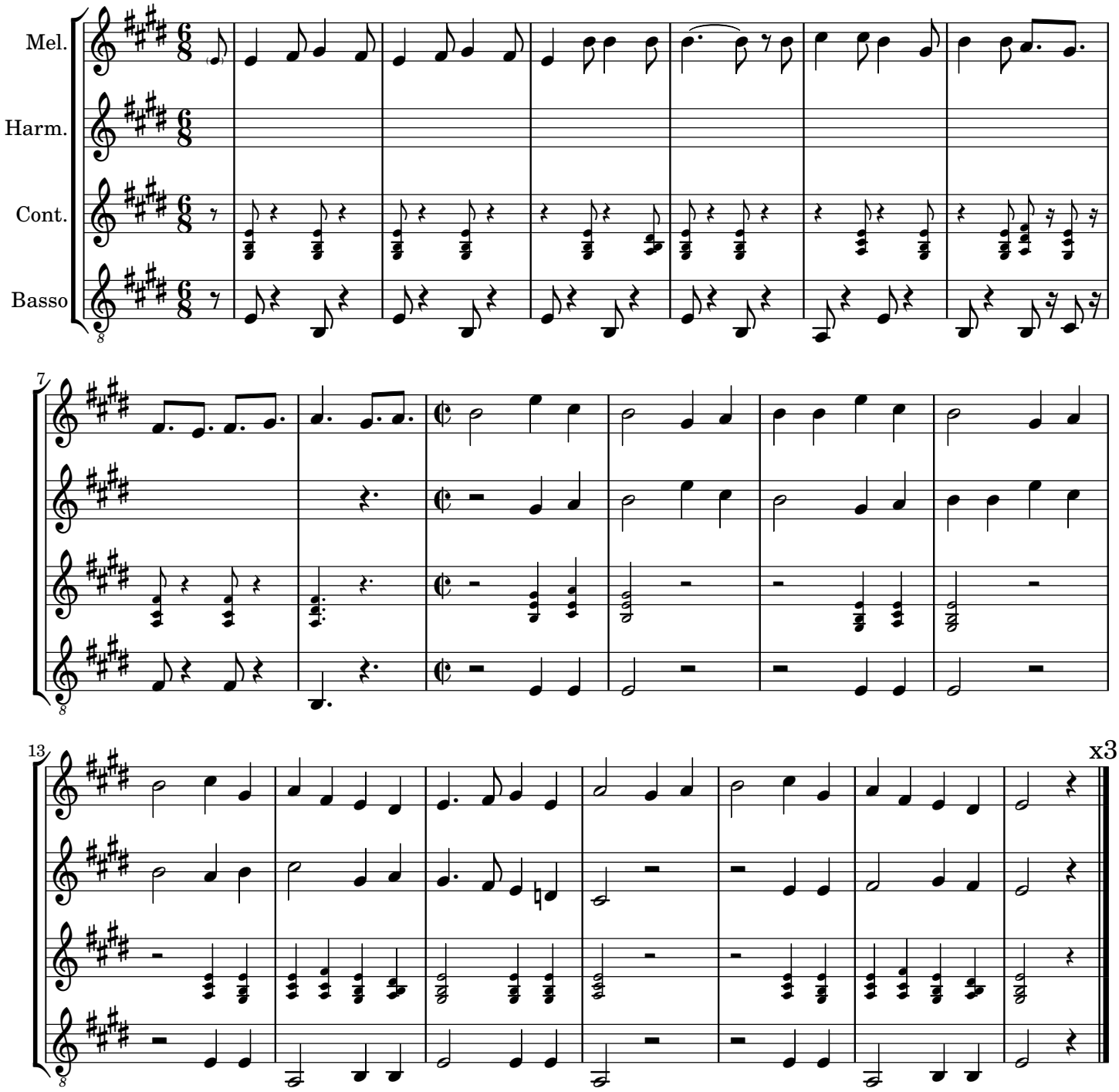
Here We Come A-wassailing

traditional (England) Ibid.

arr. ed.



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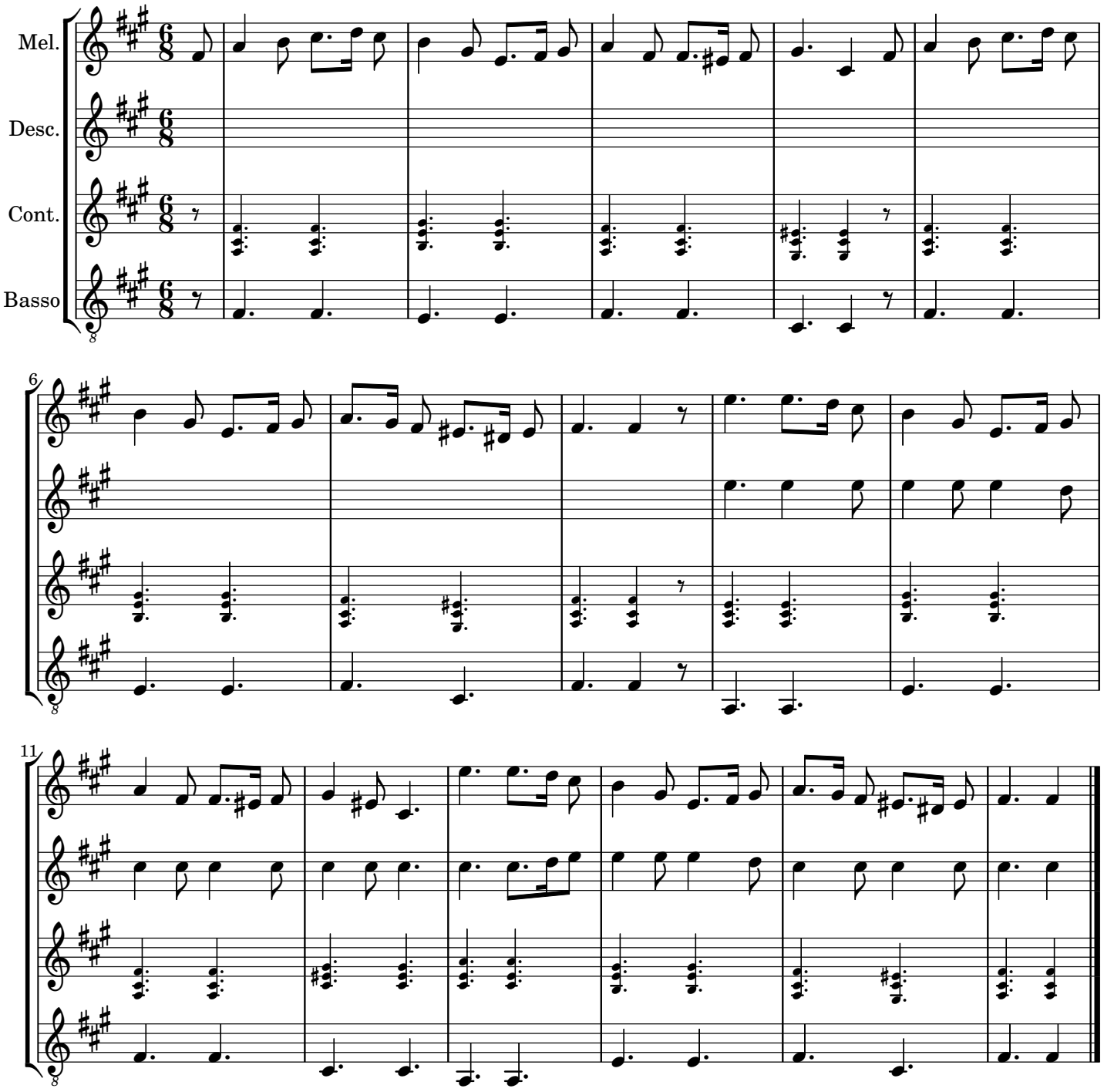
What Child Is This?

William Chatterton Dix, 1865 traditional



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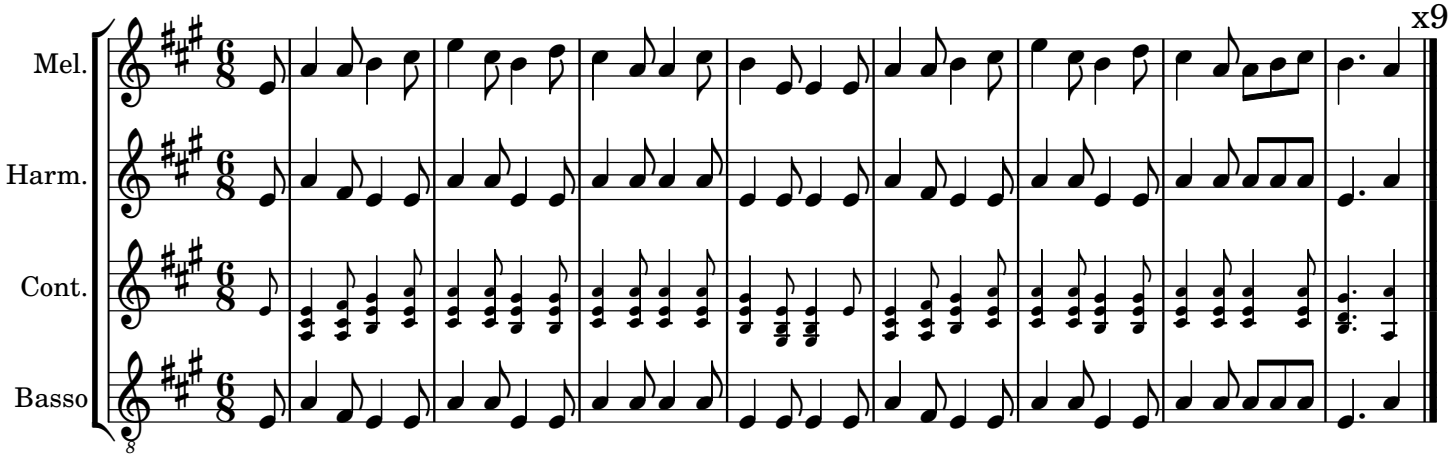
I Saw Three Ships

traditional (Derbyshire) Ibid.

arr. William Sandys, 1833



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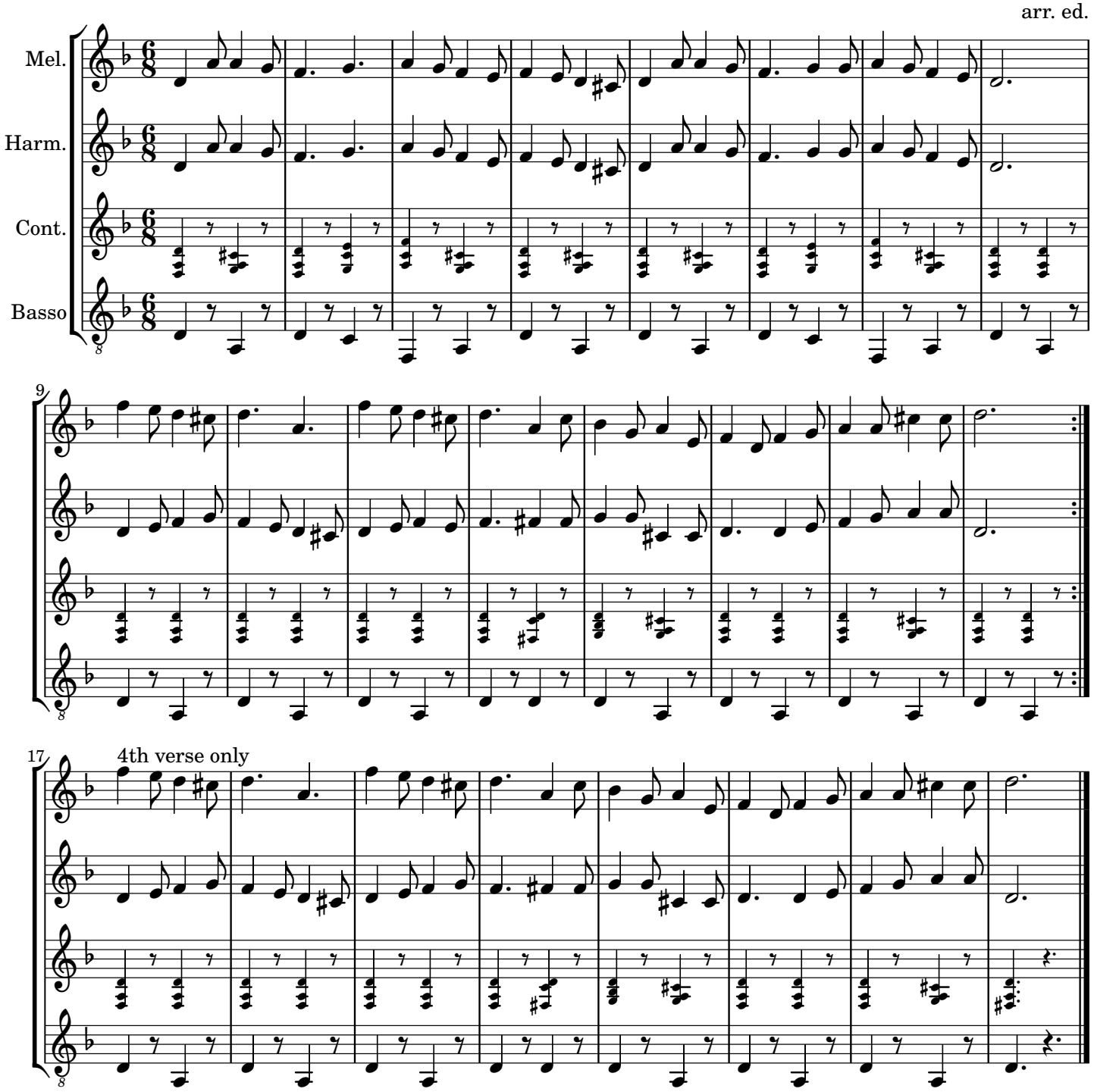
Masters in This Hall

William Morris, c. 1860

Marin Marais, 1706

arr. ed.



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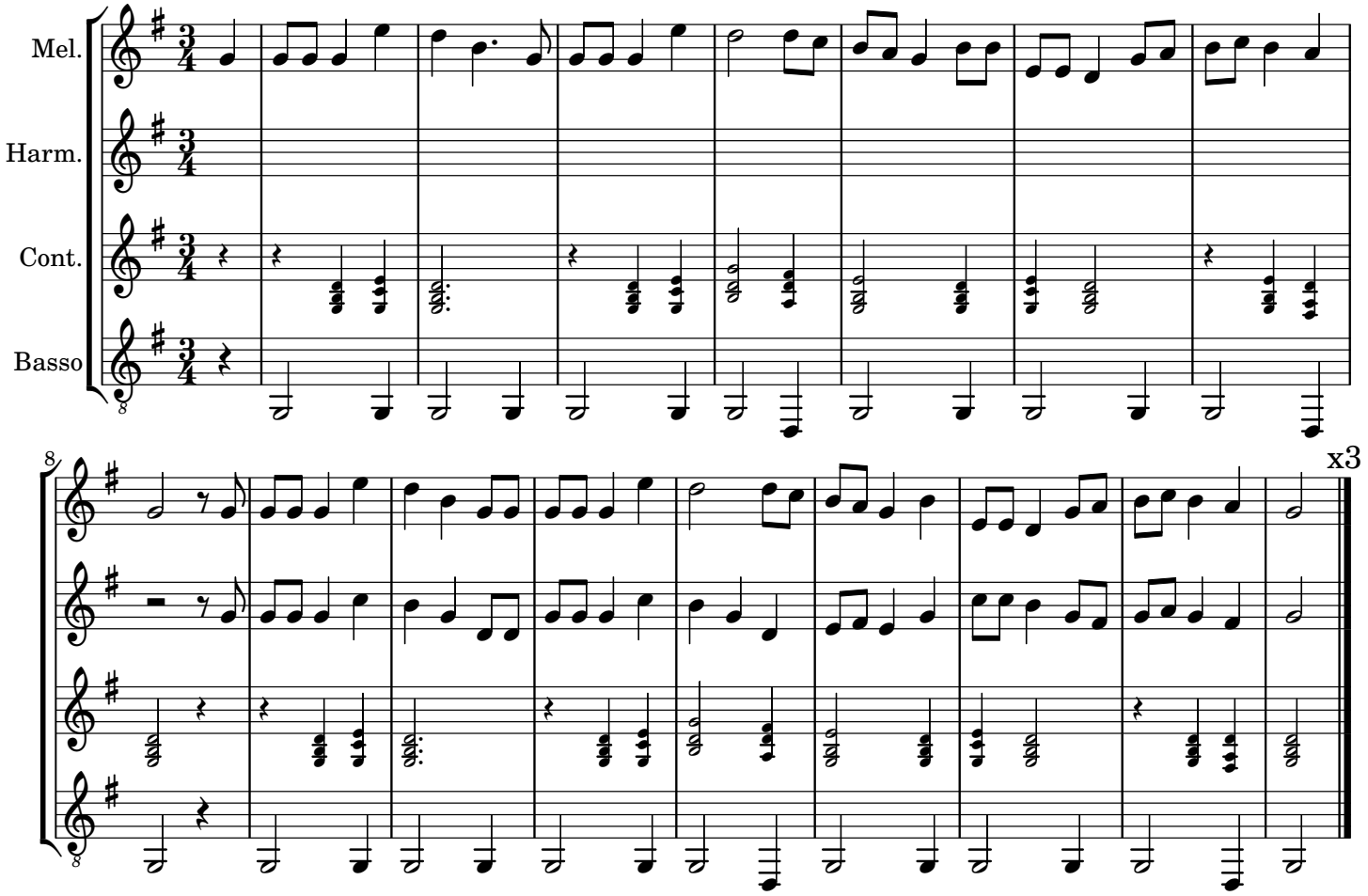
The Holly and the Ivy

traditional (Gloucestershire)

transcr. Cecil Sharp, 1911

arr. David McCarthy, 2021



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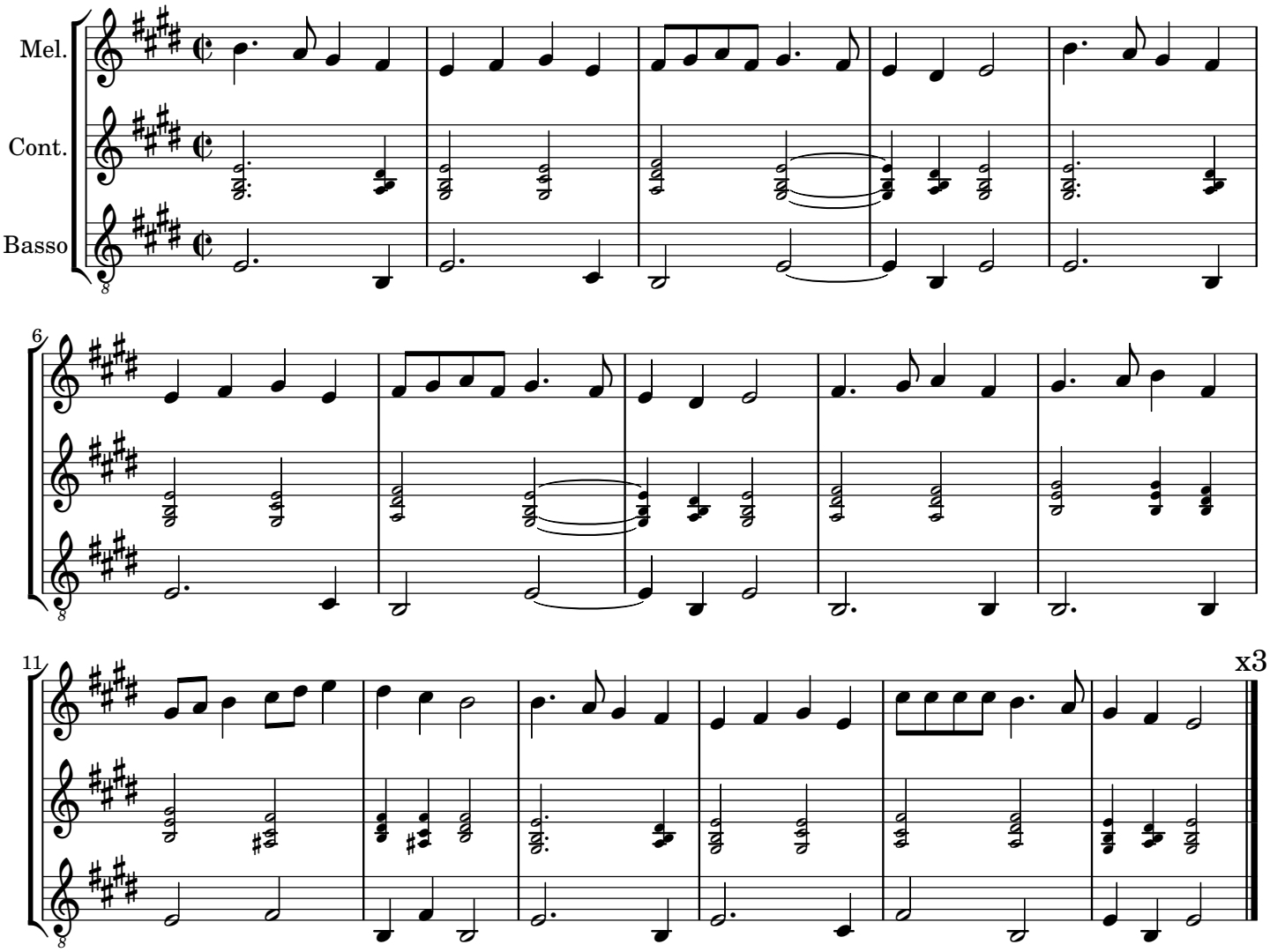
Deck the Hall

Thomas Oliphant, 1862 — traditional (Wales)



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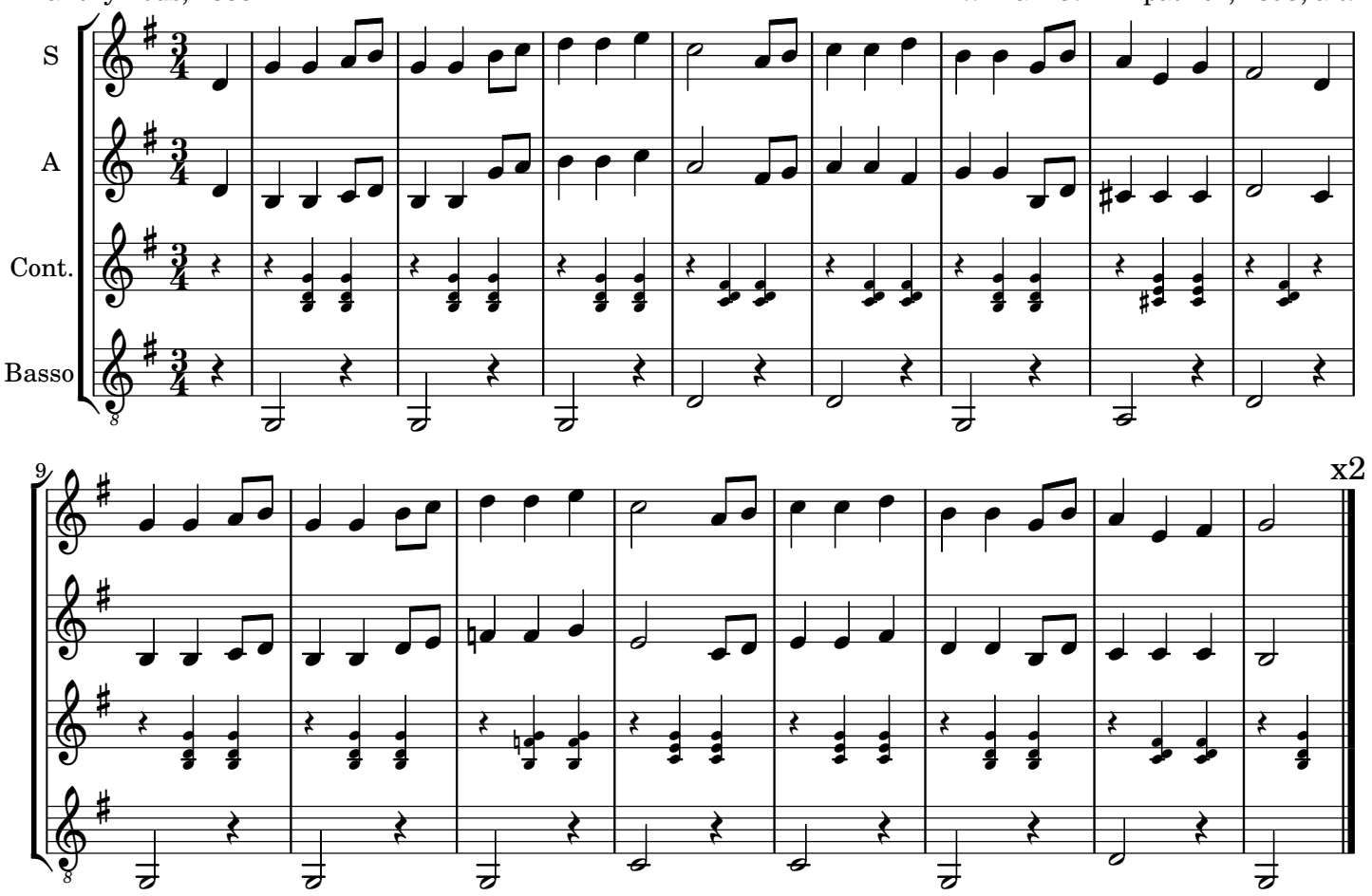
Away in a Manger

anonymous, 1883

William J. Kirkpatrick, 1895, alt.



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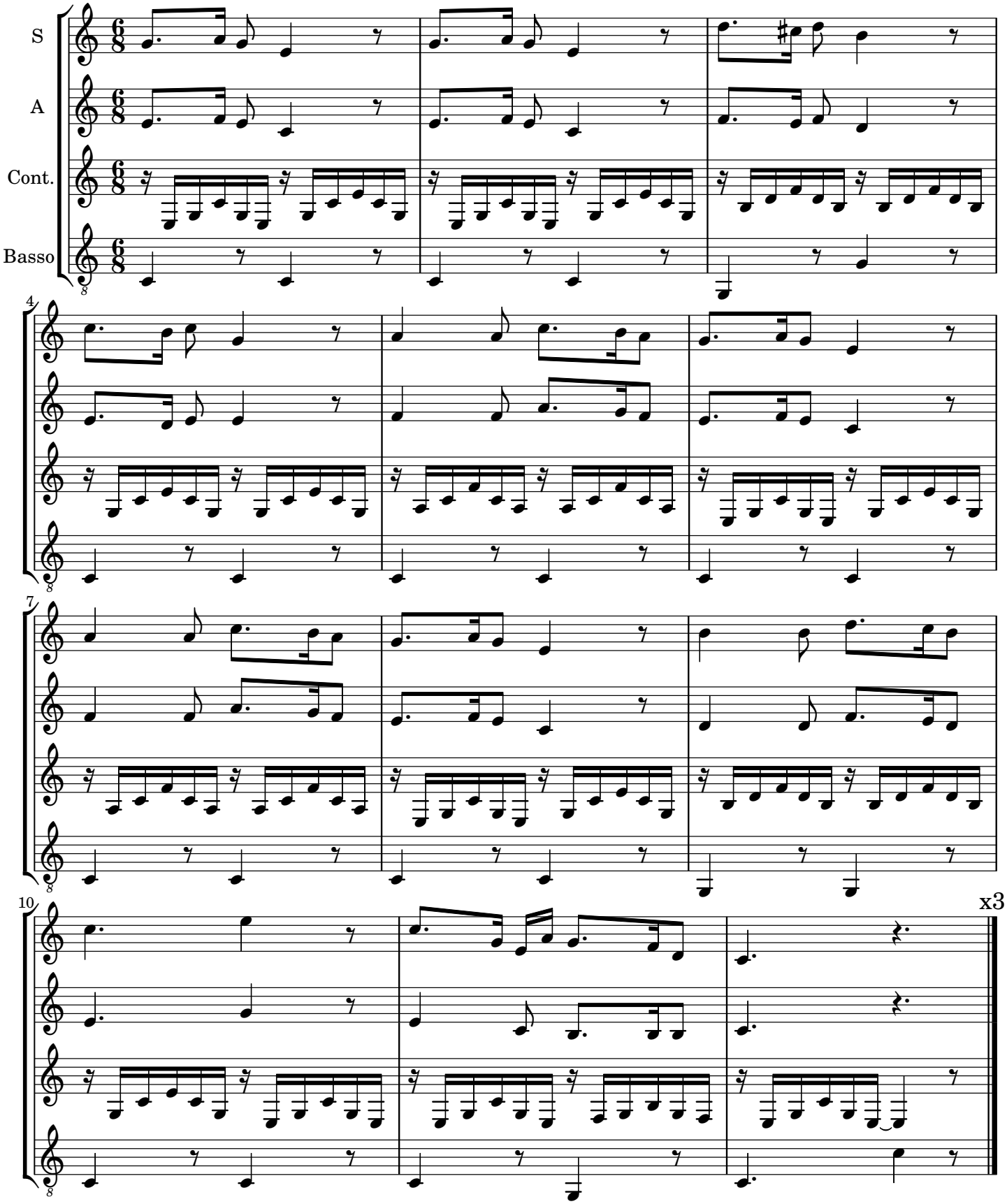
Silent Night

Joseph Mohr, 1816, alt.

trans. John Freeman Young, 1859

Franz Xaver Gruber, 1818



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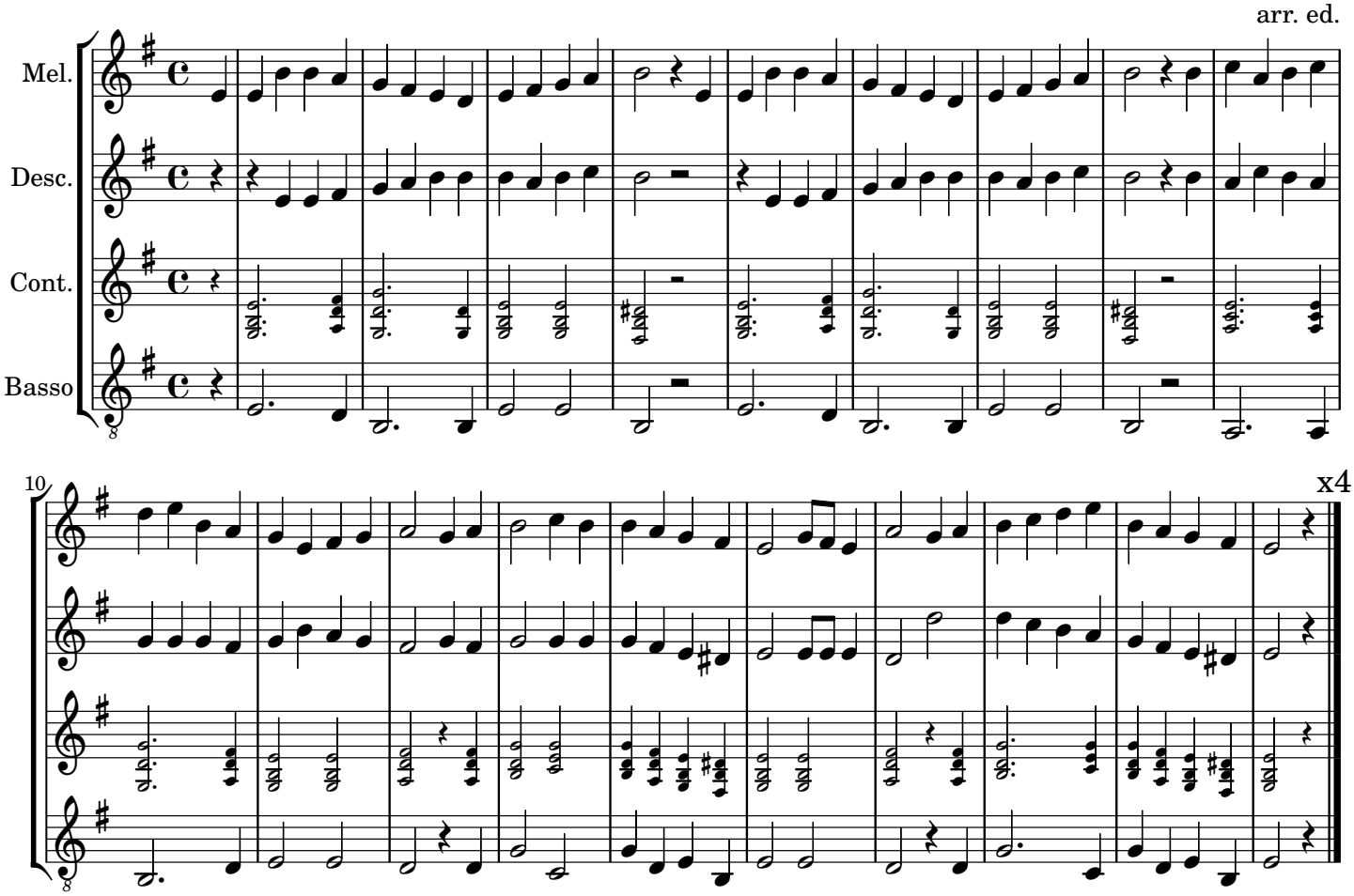
God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

traditional (London)

Ibid.

arr. ed.



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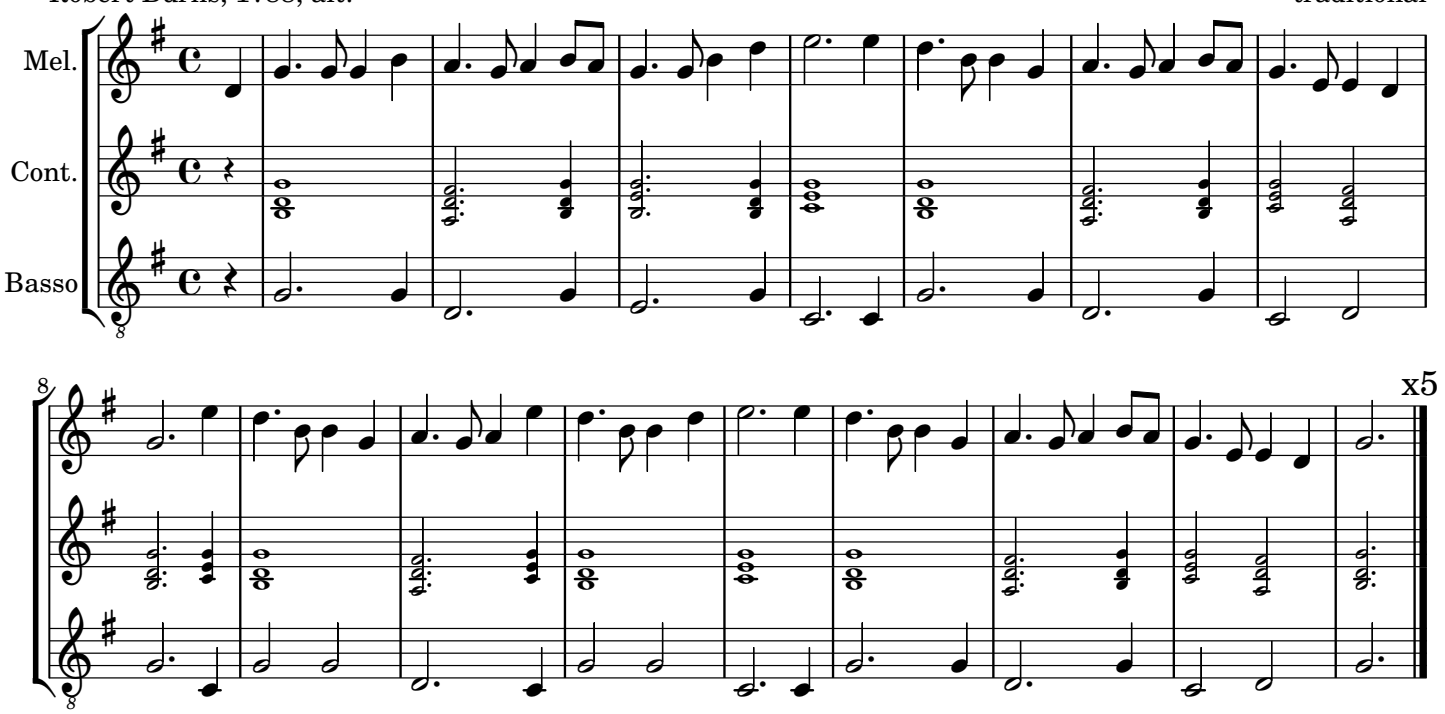
Auld Lang Syne

Robert Burns, 1788, alt. traditional



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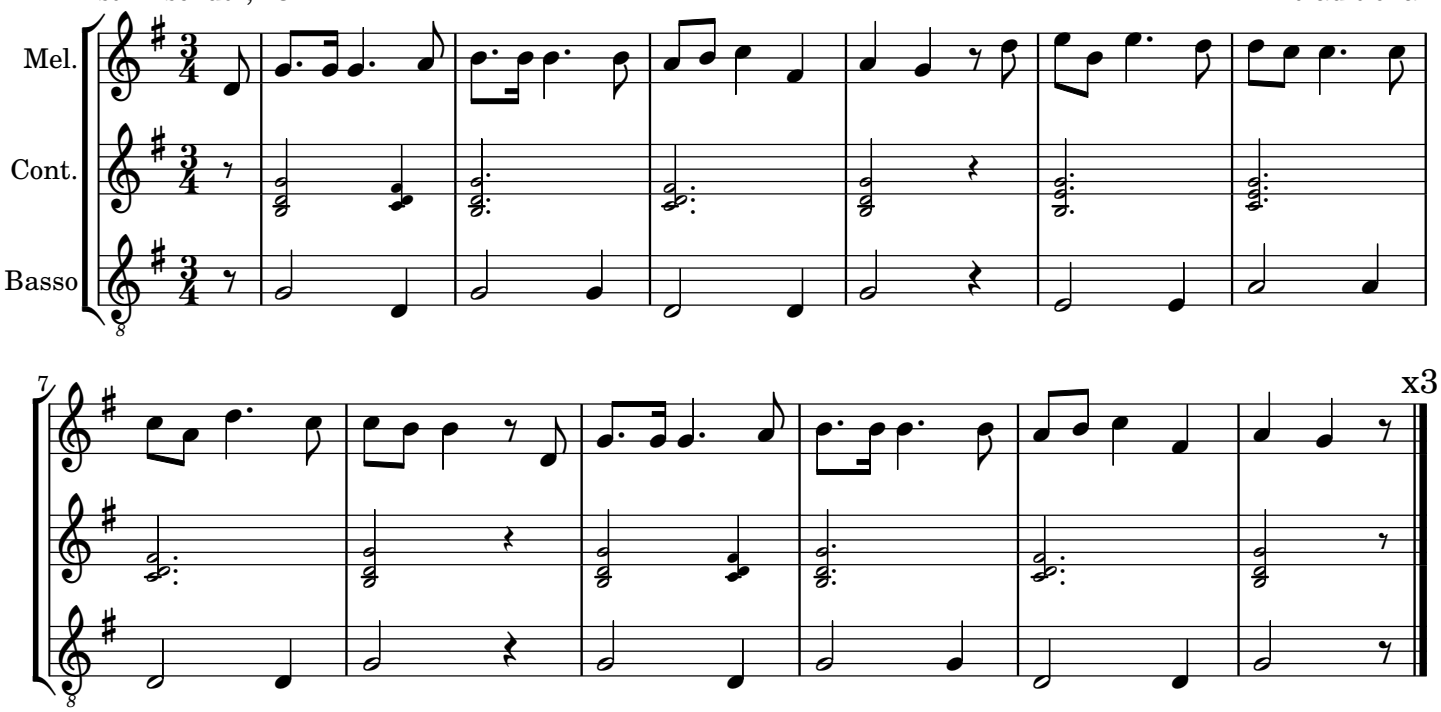
Part III

Music for Christmas, mostly not in English.

O Tannenbaum

Ernst Anschütz, 1824 — traditional



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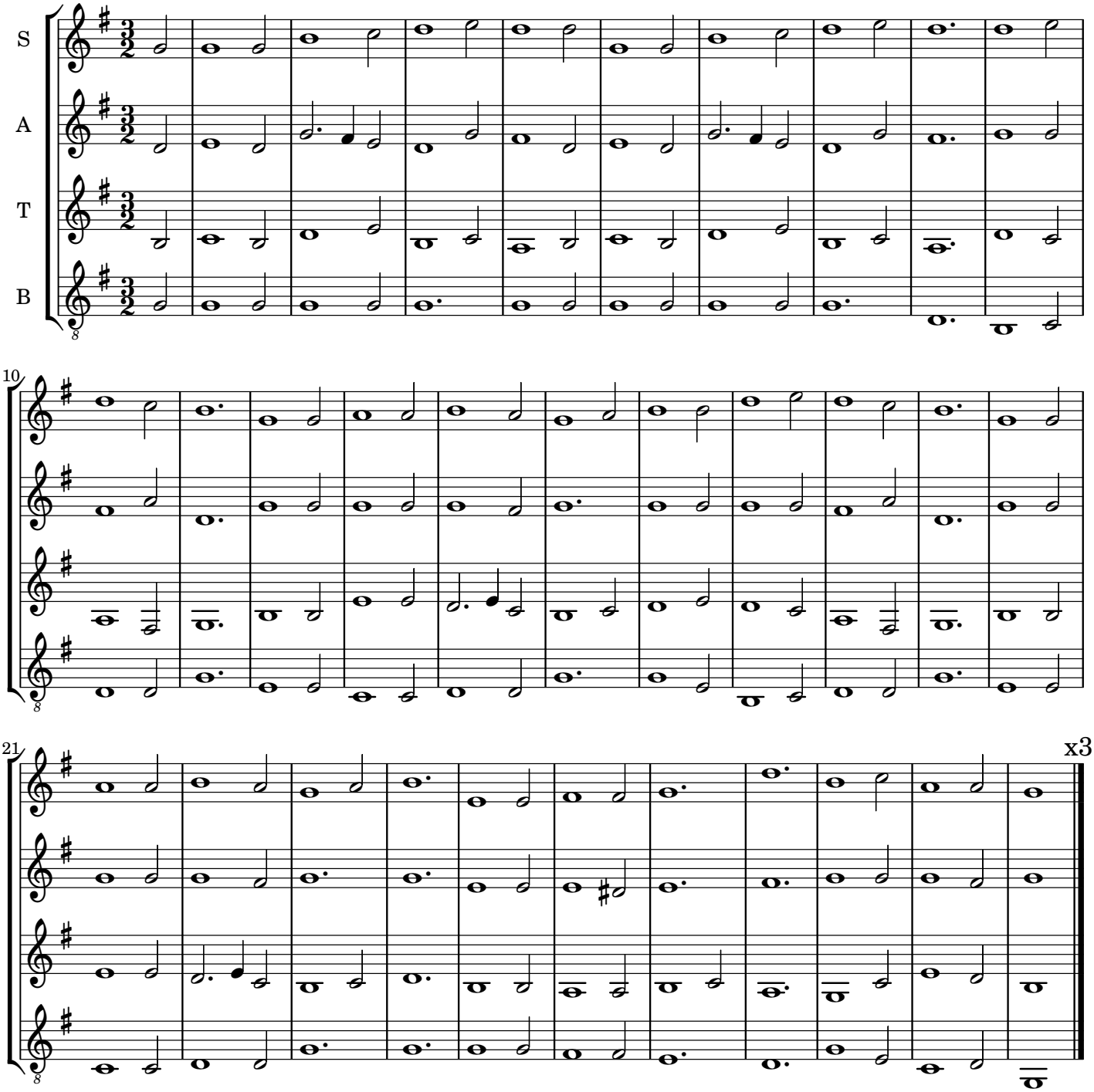
In dulci jubilo

Heinrich Seuse, c. 1328

traditional

arr. Robert Lucas de Pearsall, 1837



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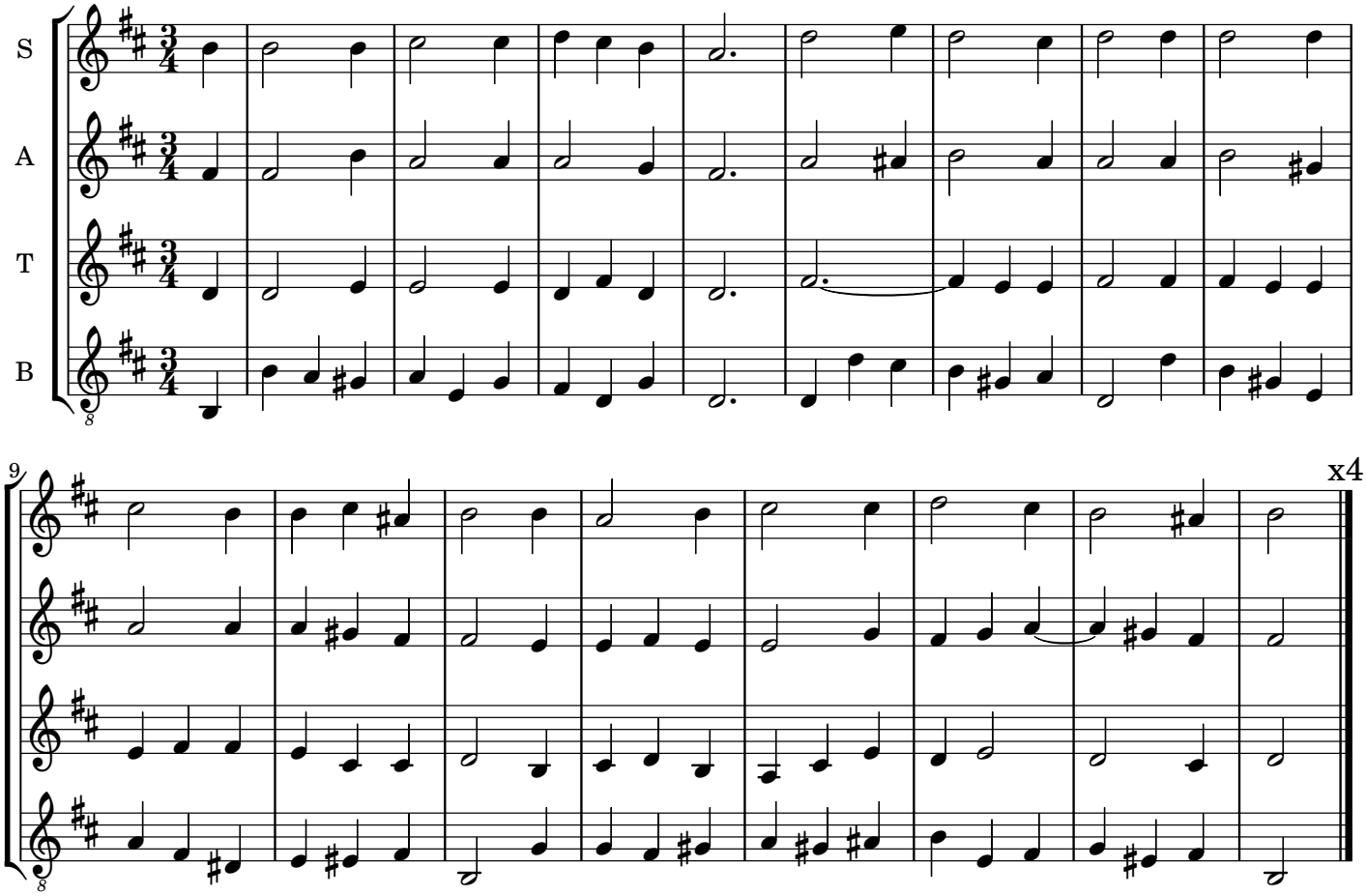
Puer natus in Bethlehem

Anonymous, 1582

Ibid.

arr. Johann Sebastian Bach, BWV 65



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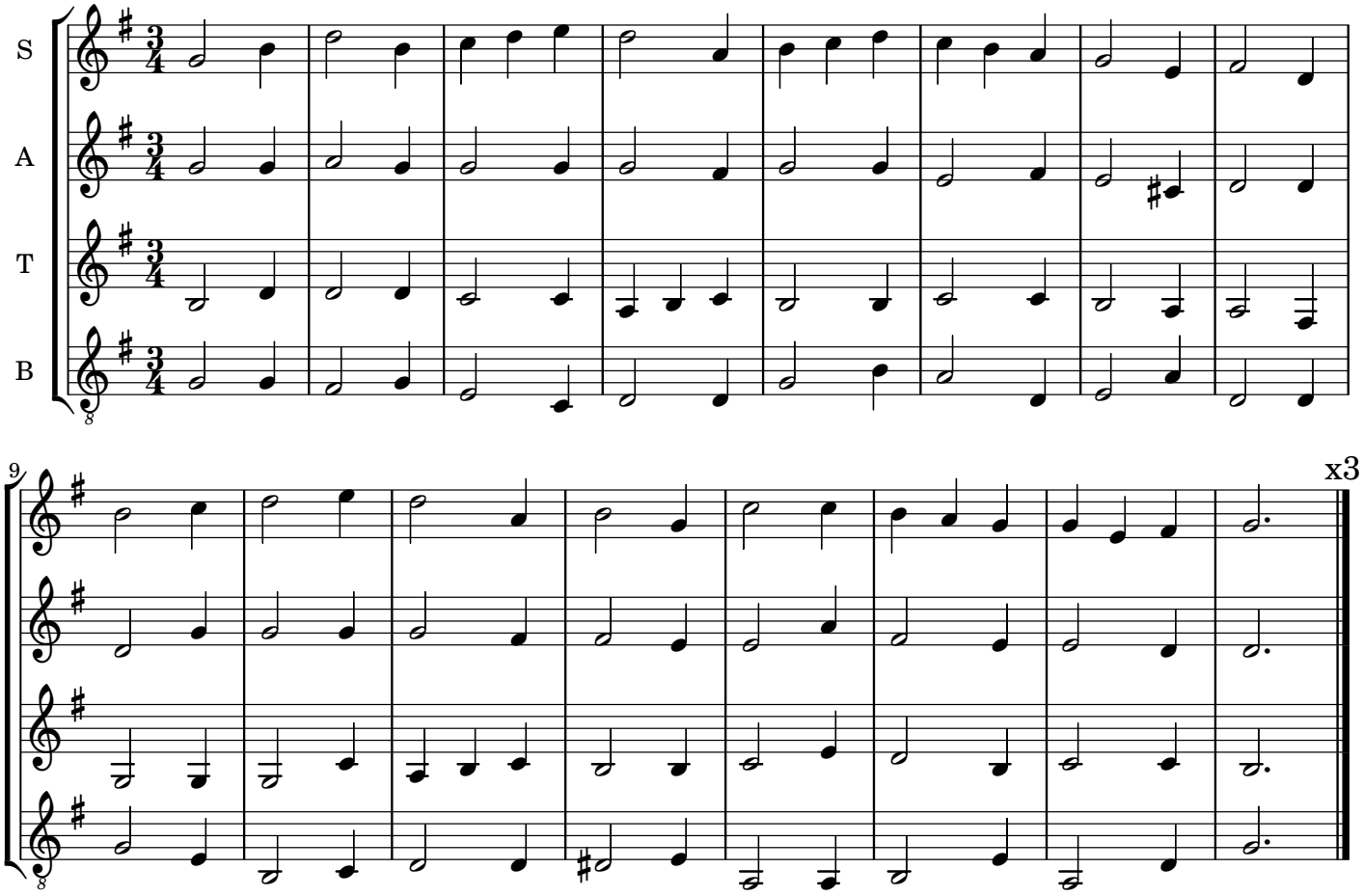
Quem Pastores

Anonymous, 14th c.

Ibid.

arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams,1928



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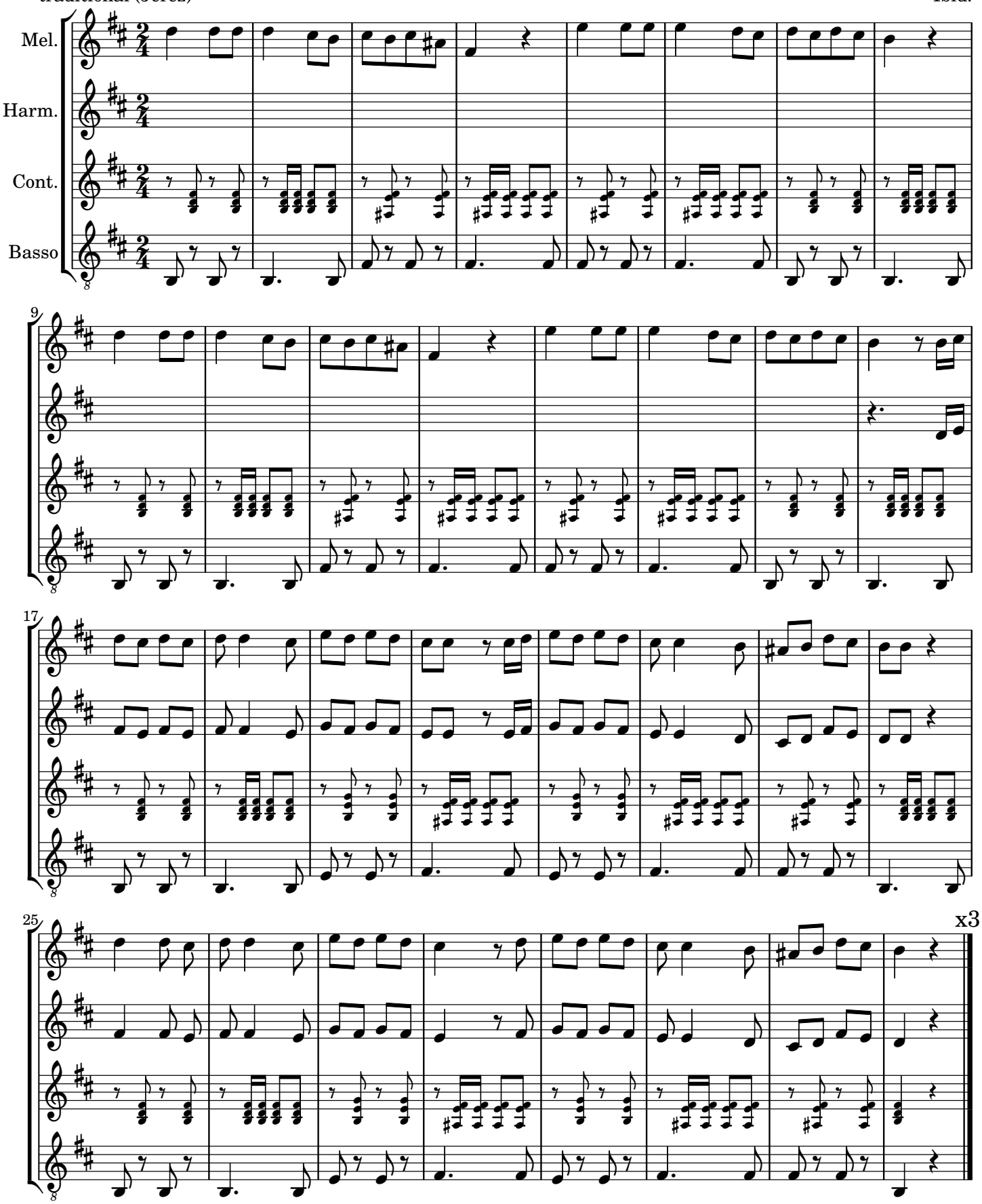
Los Peces en el Río

traditional (Jerez) Ibid.



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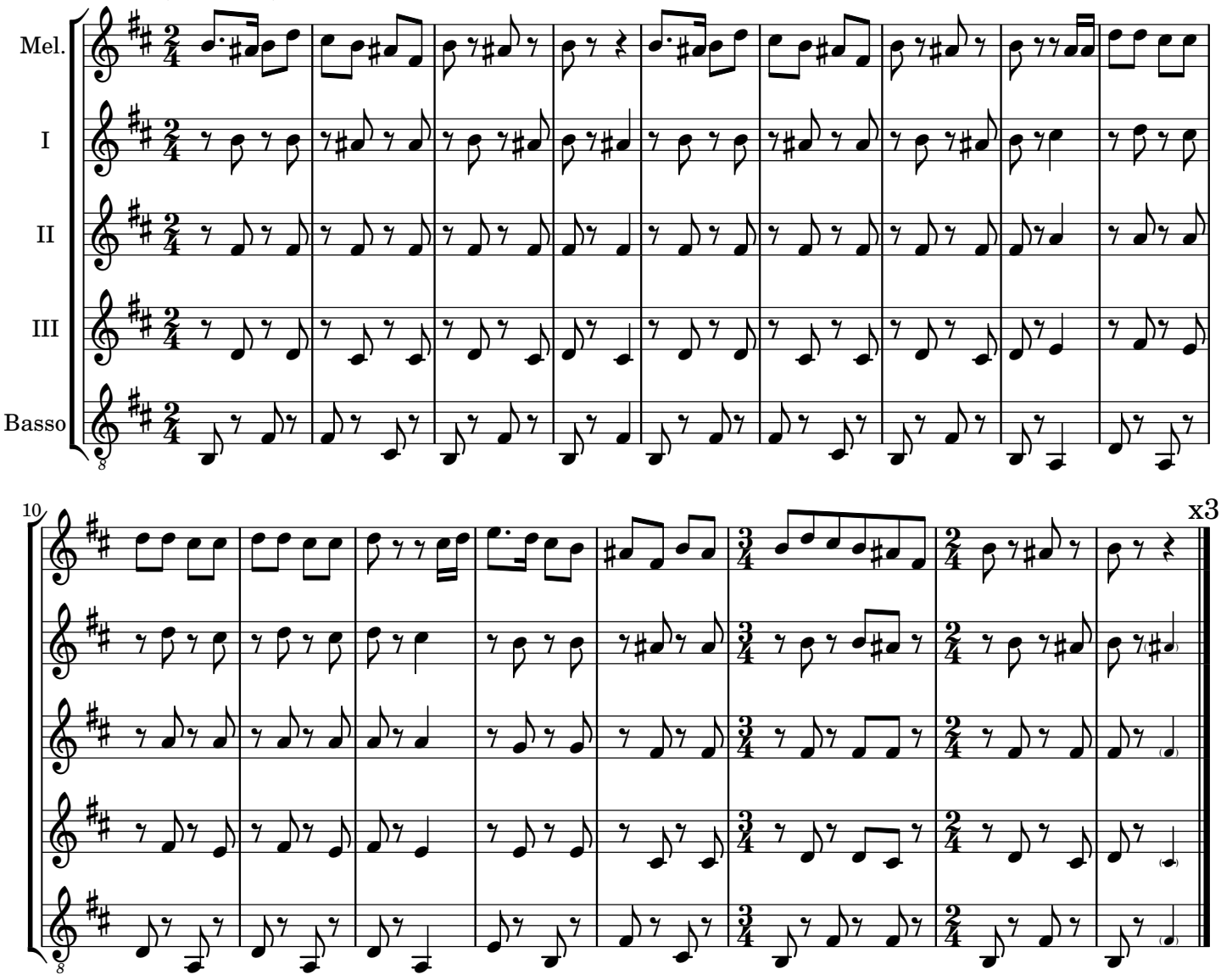
Fum, Fum, Fum

traditional (Catalonia) Ibid.



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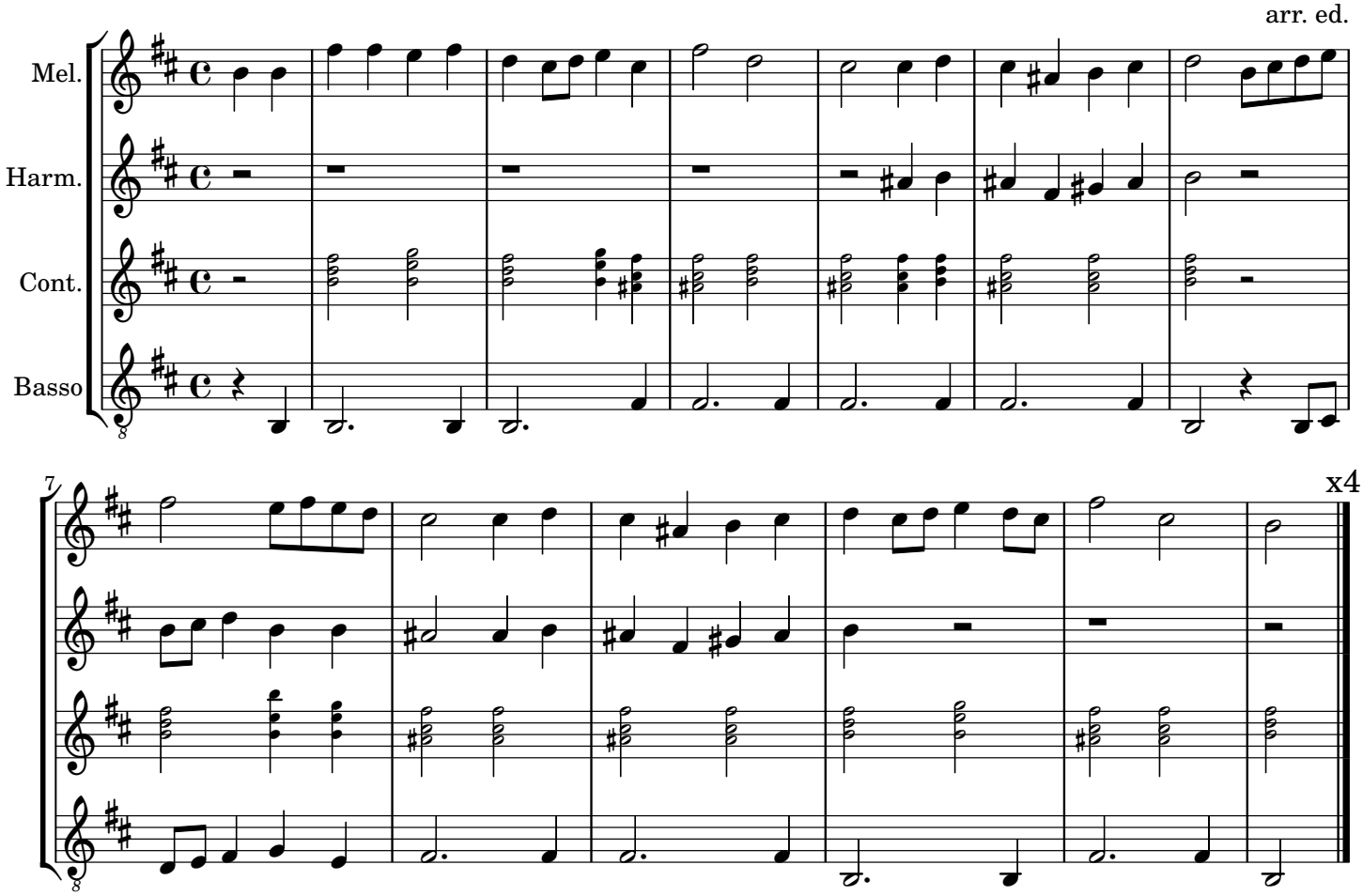
Guillô, pran ton tamborin

Bernard de la Monnoye, c. 1700

Ibid.

arr. ed.



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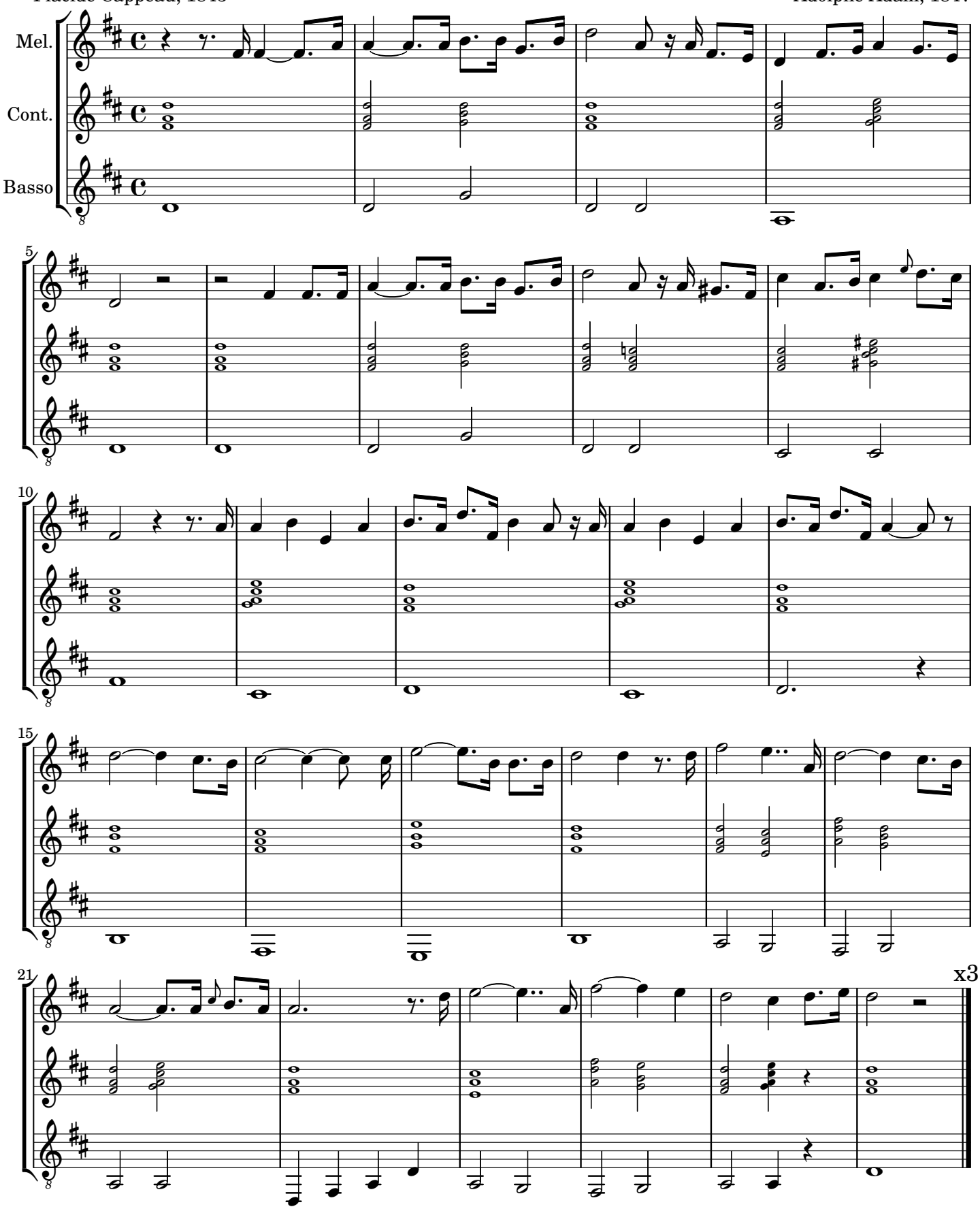
Minuit, chrétiens

Placide Cappeau, 1843 — Adolphe Adam, 1847



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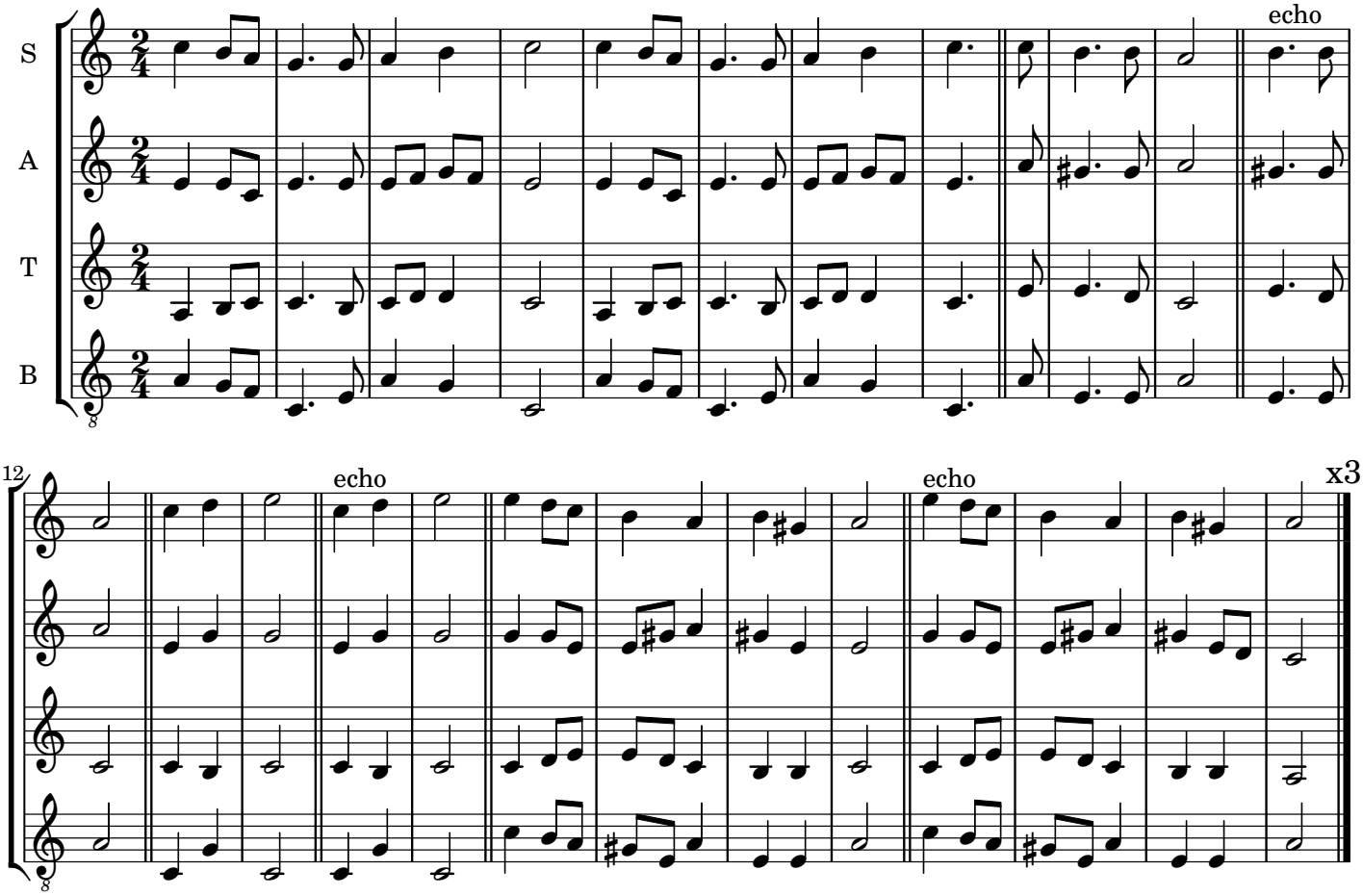
How Great Our Joy

anonymous, 1623

trans. Theodore Baker, alt.

Ibid.

arr. ed.



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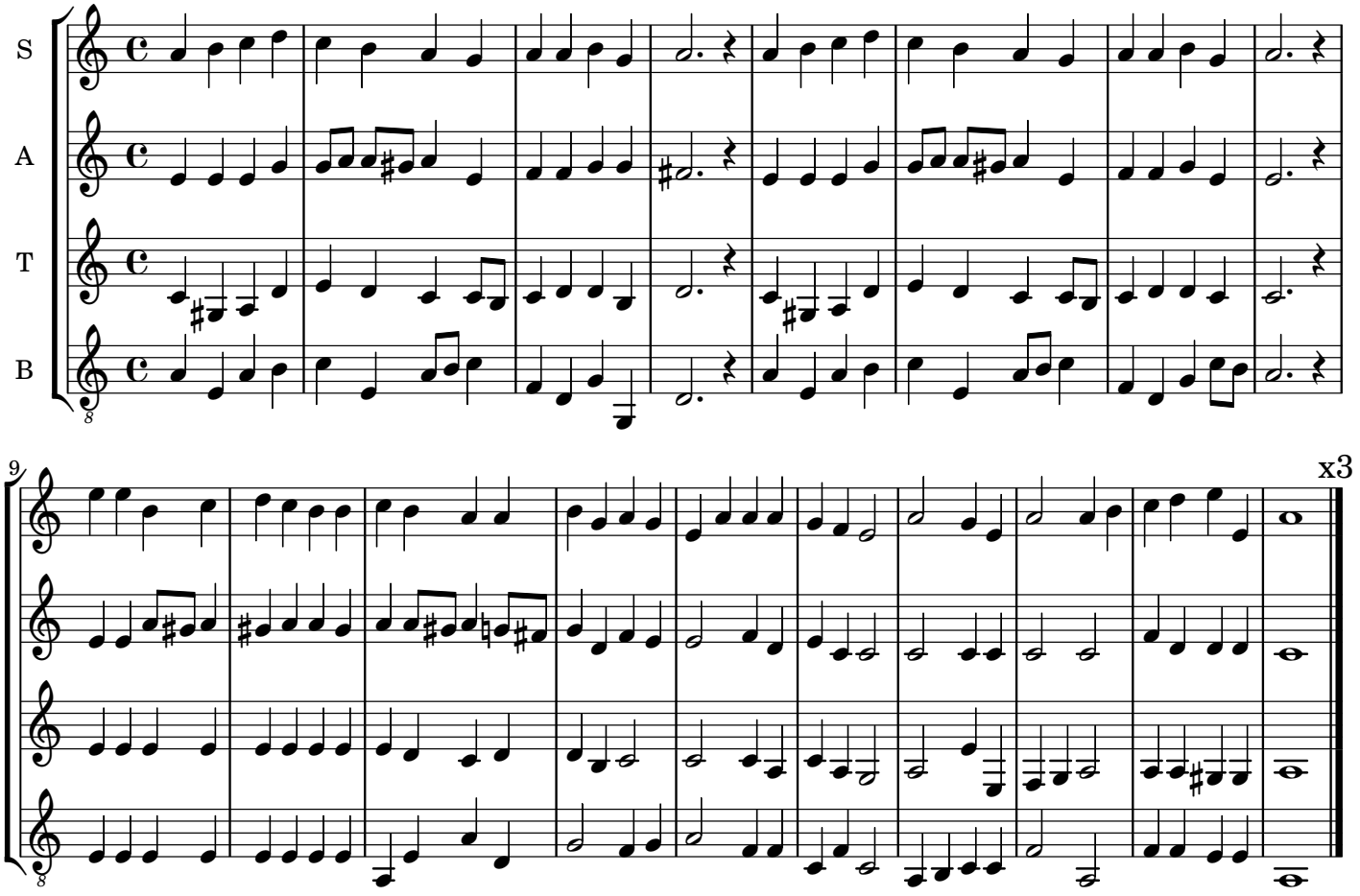
Eesus Ahatonyah

Jean de Brébeuf, 1643 — traditional

transcr. John Steckley — arr. ed.



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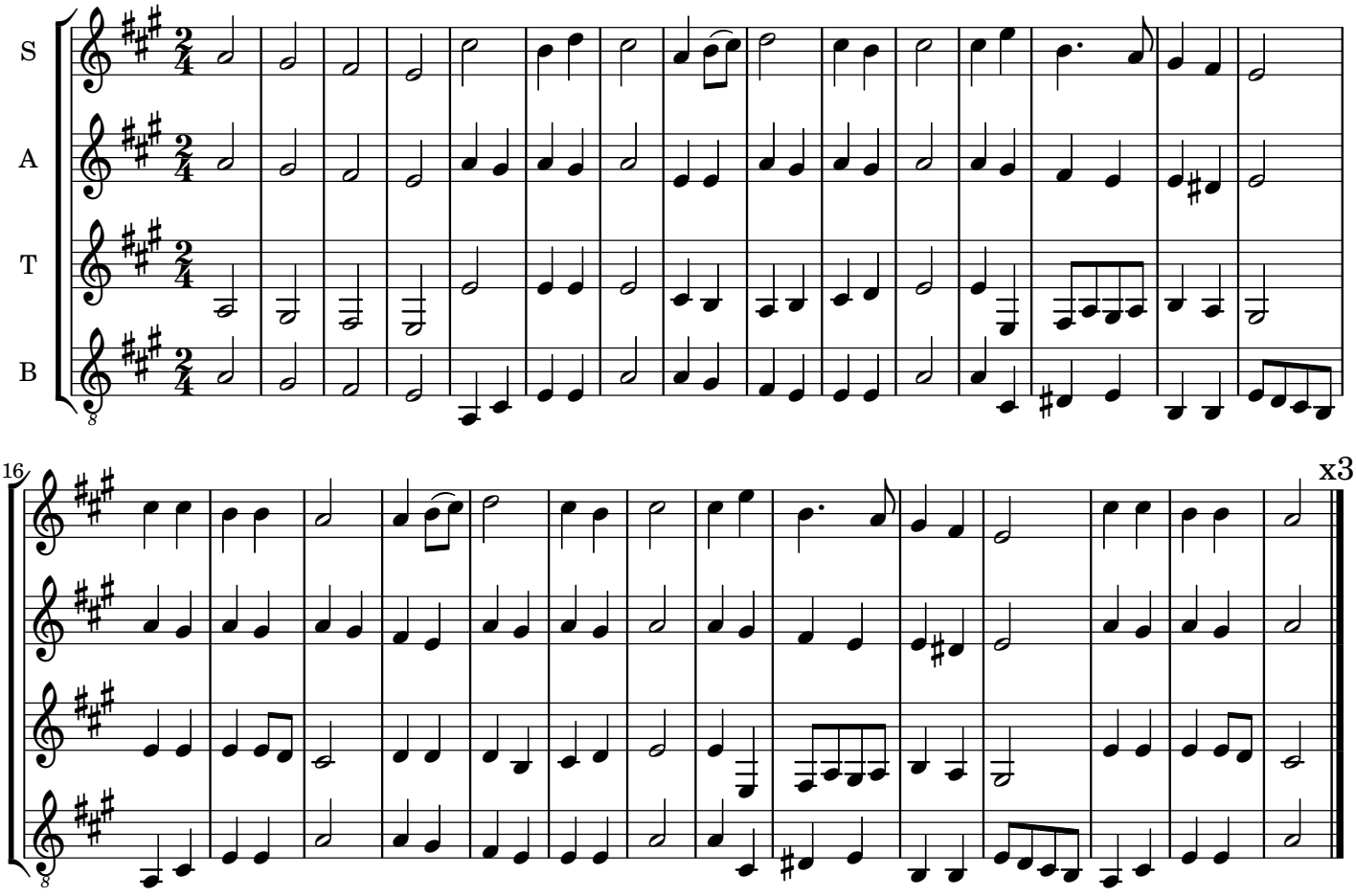
Boh predvičny narodilsja

traditional (Transcarpathia) Ibid.

trans. Joseph Roll (alt.) arr. ed.



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