

A Christmas Songbook

edited by

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Viola 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 arrangements. 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 Layritz'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 originated 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 executed 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

Ibid.

trans. Frederick Oakeley, 1841

Sheet music for the hymn "Adeste Fideles" in G major, 3/4 time. The score is arranged for five voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Bassoon (Basso). The first system (measures 1-10) shows the vocal parts with various melodic lines and rests. The second system (measures 11-20) continues the vocal parts, with a repeat sign at the end of measure 20 and a "x3" marking indicating a triple repeat. The Bassoon part is written in the bass clef and follows the vocal lines.

Ding Dong Merrily on High

George Ratcliffe Woodward, 1910

Thoinot Arbeau, 1589

Mel. Cont. Basso Rhyt.

12 x3

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Phillips Brooks, 1868

traditional (SE England)

arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1903

The musical score is arranged for SATB voices and piano. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 1-5) shows the vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The second system (measures 6-10) continues the vocal and piano parts. The third system (measures 11-15) concludes the piece, with a double bar line and a repeat sign at the end. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/2. The piano part features a prominent bass line and harmonic support for the vocal melody.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Charles Wesley, 1739 (alt.)

Felix Mendelssohn, 1840

adapt. William H. Cummings, 1855

The musical score is presented in four systems, each containing four staves for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) voices, along with a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into three systems, with measures 1-7, 8-14, and 15-21. The score includes a repeat sign at the end of the third system with a 'x3' multiplier.

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Edmund Sears, 1849

Richard Storrs Willis, 1850

arr. Uzziah Christopher Burnap

The musical score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 6/8. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 7. The second system begins with a measure rest for 8 measures, followed by measures 9 through 15. The Soprano part features a melodic line with various intervals and rests. The Alto part provides harmonic support with similar rhythmic patterns. The Tenor and Bass parts have lower melodic lines. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady bass line and chords that support the vocal harmony. The score concludes with a final measure marked with a repeat sign and a 'x3' multiplier.

Angels We Have Heard on High

traditional (Languedoc)

Ibid.

trans. James Chadwick, 1862

arr. Edward Shippen Barnes (1887-1958)

Score for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) voices. The music is in 12/8 time, key of B-flat major (two flats), and common time signature. The score consists of two systems. The first system contains 8 measures. The second system starts at measure 9 and contains 12 measures, including a repeat sign and first/second endings. The Soprano part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts provide harmonic support with various note values and rests. The piece concludes with a repeat of the final two measures, marked 'x3'.

Once in Royal David's City

Cecil Frances Alexander, 1848, alt.

Henry John Gauntlett, 1849

arr. Arthur Henry Mann, 1919

The image displays a musical score for the hymn "Once in Royal David's City". It is arranged for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The score is written in 12/8 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The first system contains six measures of music. The second system, starting at measure 6, contains seven measures and ends with a repeat sign and a "x4" instruction, indicating that the final measure is repeated four times. The notation includes various note values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and accidentals.

In the Bleak Mid-Winter

Christina Rossetti, 1872

Gustav Holst, 1905

S
A
T
B

9 x3

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

anonymous, 1599, alt.

Ibid.

trans. Theodore Baker, 1894

arr. Michael Praetorius, 1609

The musical score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a keyboard accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system consists of 8 measures. The second system, starting at measure 9, also consists of 8 measures and ends with a repeat sign and a 'x2' marking, indicating a double bar line and repeat. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and note values (quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, rests, and accidentals).

Joy to the World

Isaac Watts, 1719

Lowell Mason, 1839

Sheet music for the first system of "Joy to the World". The system includes five staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Continuation (Cont.), and Bass (Basso). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music is written in a 19th-century style with various note values and rests.

Sheet music for the second system of "Joy to the World". The system includes five staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Continuation (Cont.), and Bass (Basso). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music is written in a 19th-century style with various note values and rests. The system is marked with a repeat sign and a "x4" multiplier at the end.

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)

Prin.

Org.

9

x3

We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Traditional (England)

Ibid.

arr. ed.

Mel.

Cont.

Basso

8

x4

The Snow Lay on the Ground

traditional (Ireland)

Ibid.

S
A
T
B
Basso



9



17 x4



Here We Come A-wassailing

traditional (England)

Ibid.

arr. ed.

Mel. Harm. Cont. Basso

The musical score is arranged in four staves: Melody (Mel.), Harmony (Harm.), Continuation (Cont.), and Bass (Basso). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The melody is written in a treble clef, while the other three staves are in bass clefs. The score consists of two systems. The first system has 8 measures, and the second system has 8 measures, with a repeat sign at the end. The melody is a simple, folk-like tune. The harmony consists of chords. The continuation part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass part provides a steady accompaniment.

What Child Is This?

William Chatterton Dix, 1865

traditional

The musical score is written for four parts: Melody, Descending, Continuation, and Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The score is divided into three systems, each containing four staves. The first system (measures 1-5) shows the initial melody and accompaniment. The second system (measures 6-10) continues the melody and accompaniment. The third system (measures 11-15) concludes the piece with a final cadence. The Descending part is a simple descending scale. The Continuation part is a simple accompaniment. The Bass part is a simple accompaniment.

I Saw Three Ships

traditional (Derbyshire)

Ibid.

arr. William Sandys, 1833

Mel. 

Harm. 

Cont. 

Basso 

Masters in This Hall

William Morris, c. 1860

Marin Marais, 1706

arr. ed.

Mel. Harm. Cont. Basso

12/8

9

4th verse only

17

The Holly and the Ivy

traditional (Gloucestershire)

transcr. Cecil Sharp, 1911

arr. David McCarthy, 2021

The musical score is arranged in four staves: Melody (Mel.), Harmony (Harm.), Continuation (Cont.), and Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 7. The second system begins with a repeat sign and a measure number '8' above the first staff, indicating the start of a repeated section. This section continues for 8 measures, ending with a double bar line and a 'x3' multiplier, indicating that the preceding 8 measures are to be repeated three times. The melody features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, while the harmony and bass provide a steady accompaniment with chords and single notes.

Deck the Hall

Thomas Oliphant, 1862

traditional (Wales)

Mel.

Cont.

Basso

8

x3

Away in a Manger

anonymous, 1883

William J. Kirkpatrick, 1895, alt.

S
A
Cont.
Basso

The first system of the musical score for 'Away in a Manger' features four staves. The Soprano (S) and Alto (A) staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 3/4 time signature. The Contralto (Cont.) staff is in alto clef with the same key signature and time signature. The Bass (Basso) staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The Soprano and Alto parts consist of a series of eighth and quarter notes, while the Contralto and Bass parts provide harmonic support with chords and single notes.

9 x2

The second system of the musical score continues the composition. It begins with a measure number '9' and ends with a repeat sign and 'x2'. The notation for all four parts (Soprano, Alto, Contralto, and Bass) follows the same format as the first system, maintaining the 3/4 time signature and one-flat key signature. The Soprano and Alto parts continue their melodic lines, and the Contralto and Bass parts continue their harmonic accompaniment.

Silent Night

Joseph Mohr, 1816, alt.

Franz Xaver Gruber, 1818

trans. John Freeman Young, 1859

The musical score for 'Silent Night' is presented in four systems, each containing four staves. The staves are labeled S (Soprano), A (Alto), Cont. (Continuo), and Basso (Bass). The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 6/8. The score begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The first system shows the initial melody in the Soprano and Alto parts, with the Continuo and Basso parts providing harmonic support. The second and third systems continue the melody, with the Soprano and Alto parts featuring more complex rhythmic patterns. The fourth system concludes the piece with a final chord and a repeat sign. The score is written in a clear, legible style with standard musical notation.

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

traditional (London)

Ibid.

arr. ed.

Mel.

Desc.

Cont.

Basso

10

x4

Auld Lang Syne

Robert Burns, 1788, alt.

traditional

Mel.

Cont.

Basso

8

x5

Part III

Music for Christmas, mostly not in English.

O Tannenbaum

Ernst Anschütz, 1824

traditional

Mel.
Cont.
Basso

7 x3

The musical score is written for three parts: Melody, Continuo, and Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a repeat sign at the end. The continuo and bass parts provide harmonic support with chords and single notes. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 7 and ending with a repeat sign and a 'x3' marking.

In dulci jubilo

Heinrich Seuse, c. 1328

traditional

arr. Robert Lucas de Pearsall, 1837

First system of musical notation for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) voices. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/2. The Soprano part begins with a treble clef and a 15/8 time signature, while the other parts begin with a 15/8 time signature. The music is written in a four-part setting.

Second system of musical notation, starting at measure 10. It continues the four-part vocal setting for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass.

Third system of musical notation, starting at measure 21. It continues the four-part vocal setting for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, ending with a repeat sign and a 'x3' marking.

Puer natus in Bethlehem

Anonymous, 1582

Ibid.

arr. Johann Sebastian Bach, BWV 65

9 x4

Quem Pastores

Anonymous, 14th c.

Ibid.

arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1928

S A T B x3

3/4

Los Peces en el Río

traditional (Jerez)

Ibid.

The musical score is written for four staves: Melody (Mel.), Harmony (Harm.), Continuo (Cont.), and Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into four systems, each starting with a measure number (9, 17, 25). The first system (measures 1-8) features a melody with eighth and sixteenth notes, a harmonic accompaniment of chords, a continuo line with chords and some eighth notes, and a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system (measures 9-16) continues the melody and accompaniment. The third system (measures 17-24) shows the melody becoming more active with sixteenth notes. The fourth system (measures 25-31) concludes the piece with a repeat sign and a 'x3' marking. The bass line consistently provides a rhythmic foundation with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Fum, Fum, Fum

traditional (Catalonia)

Ibid.

Mel. I II III Basso

10 x3

Guillô, pran ton tamborin

Bernard de la Monnoye, c. 1700

Ibid.

arr. ed.

The musical score is written for four parts: Melody (Mel.), Harmony (Harm.), Continuo (Cont.), and Bass (Basso). The time signature is 13/8. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains 7 measures, and the second system contains 6 measures, ending with a repeat sign and a 'x4' multiplier. The Melody part features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The Harmony part consists of chords, some of which are marked with a 'p' (piano). The Continuo part uses a shorthand notation with numbers 1-7 and accidentals. The Bass part is written in a standard staff with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Minuit, chrétiens

Placide Cappeau, 1843

Adolphe Adam, 1847

Mel. Cont. Basso

5

10

15

21 x3

How Great Our Joy

anonymous, 1623

trans. Theodore Baker, alt.

Ibid.

arr. ed.

echo

Score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 11. The second system starts at measure 12 and ends with a repeat sign and 'x3'. The vocal parts are labeled S, A, T, and B. The piano part is indicated by a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The word 'echo' is written above the vocal parts in measures 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100. The word 'echo' is also written above the piano part in measures 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100. The word 'x3' is written at the end of the score.

Eesus Ahatonyah

Jean de Brébeuf, 1643

traditional

transcr. John Steckley

arr. ed.

The musical score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a keyboard accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 8. The second system, starting with a measure number '9' at the beginning, contains measures 9 through 16. The keyboard part is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The vocal parts are written on single staves. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign, with a 'x3' marking indicating a triple repeat of the final measure.

Boh predvičny narodilsja

traditional (Transcarpathia)

Ibid.

trans. Joseph Roll (alt.)

arr. ed.

16

x3

The musical score is written for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The score consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system contains measures 1 through 15. The second system starts at measure 16 and ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals.