Christmas-tide

RESOURCES ► CD track 33 ► Warm ups: Nos. 10a, 11a, 15a, 17, 18b

Information

This carol, another masterpiece by Bob Chilcott, has the most exquisite words, which repay reading before attempting to learn the music. They blend the human and divine, with the message that Mary's love for her child could not be any stronger, even though he was prophesied a king. It has some real 'close harmony' in parts, and although it is written for SATB, the men's parts would suit young baritone voices as the range is sympathetic, and the tenor parts manageable. The piano accompaniment supports the voices very well.

Starting

- Begin with smooth slow scales and long-held notes for breath control.
- Sing the first exercise below smoothly, with supporting chords if possible. Modulate to higher keys, taking the voices as high as you like. At the very least, sing the exercise in the key of the piece, Eb major (as in the second exercise below), before moving on.



Lul-lee, lul-lay lul-lee, lul-lay

■ Teaching and rehearsing

- Learn the melody of bars 5–8 with everyone. Look at bars 21–5: this is the same melody plus a bar, with different words.
- · Stay with this chunk of melody and try the harmony parts in bars 13-15. They are simple and move very little, and are relatively open chords compared with other passages.
- Some sectional work would help at this point unless singers can read and learn quite easily all together. Focus on the passages at bars 9 to 10, 25 (end) to 27, and 30 to 32.
- Tenor and baritone will need to practise their solo in bars 15-19. Support from the piano will make this easier, although the Cb in bar 17 has to come from the

- singers first! Likewise the Gb in bar 18.
- Put the sections together, not worrying too much about very quiet singing or ritenutos and tempo changes just now-go for continuity.

Ideas

• In the early stages of rehearsing a piece like this, particularly for a young or less experienced choir taking on new challenges, continuity and a sense of achievement can be accomplished by singing it through with just the main melody. For example, the sopranos and altos could sing bars 5-12; possibly add the harmony in bars 13-15; boys/men take their solo in bars 15–19; then everyone sings the melody from bar 21; soprano bars 26–7; then tutti (everyone) the last five bars. Variations on this idea are possible to suit your situation.

Listen out

- If the sopranos are finding the top F too high, build in some gentle exercises such as 'sirening' (see notes to song No. 11 or warm up No. 35), which will encourage voices into the head voice. Also try some scales which gradually go up high enough.
- With such close harmony, less experienced singers lose confidence in holding their notes. Revisit some sectional work and piece the parts together gradually so that the singers can hear where they are in the collective sound.
- The boys/men may need to work on tone production to give their solo some strength. Don't force voices but encourage singers to project them. Improve the tone by using the finger-squeezing technique (see song No. 5,
- In bar 24, make sure the two phrases feel as though they join, despite the rest and large interval. This is only a matter of thinking and intention by the singers!

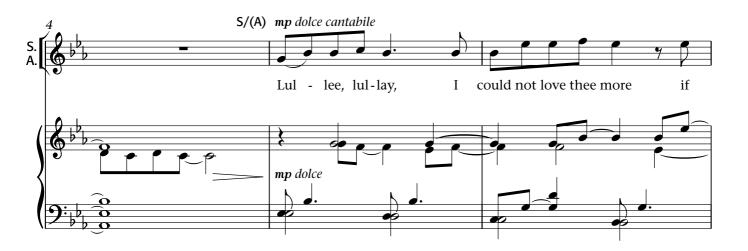
Performing

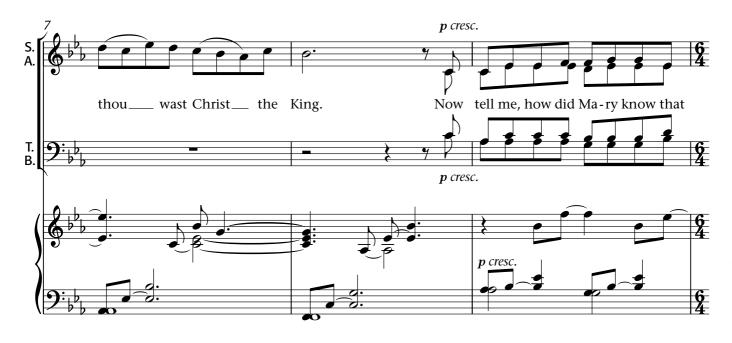
- The performance may be helped by increasing the tempo a little so that longer phrases don't run out of energy. Whatever the tempo, the words must be very clear and as expressive as possible.
- Follow what's in the music, and let it speak for itself.

30 Christmas-tide

Words: Janet Lewis Bob Chilcott









Piano part bars 13–14 ad lib.





Piano part bar 31 ad lib.

for Joanne Hart

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