

CMP Unit Teaching Plan

Concert Choir – Chippewa Falls High School

OUT OF THE ORIENT CRYSTAL SKIES

Contemporary arrangement of a 17th century traditional carol

Richard Zgodava

SATB a capella with optional percussion

English sacred text

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Broad Description: The piece is a contemporary setting of the classic English carol ‘Out of the Orient Crystal Skies’. It begins in a distant manner as if the singers are being heard from miles away. As the song progresses, the choir tells the story of the three kings and the blessed birth of Jesus Christ. Throughout the storytelling, the choir expresses joy and exultation at arrival of the King! After a section of climatic rejoicing, the singers begin to fade into the distance once more, bringing the piece full circle.

Background Information

Richard Zgodava is a contemporary composer of both choral and piano works. He was featured in the 1985 Frederic Chopin Society 175th Chopin Birthday Gala in Minneapolis, MN.

Unfortunately, there is little printed information available on the biography and works of Zgodava.

The text of “Out of the Orient Crystal Skies” dates back to the 17th century and was most likely written not long before 1613. Since its creation, numerous composers have set this ancient English text and melody. Zgodava’s piece maintains the purity of the original melody in the soprano line, but adds new ostinato patterns as well as harmony to create an interesting and pleasing arrangement for the listener.

The text is as follows:

1. Out of the orient, crystal skies
 A blazing star did shine,
Showing the place where poorly lies
 A blessed Babe divine.
2. Born of a maid of royal blood
 Who Mary hight by name,
A sacred rose which once did bud
 By grace of heavenly flame.
3. This shining star three kings did guide
 Even from the furthest East,
To Bethlehem where it betide
 This blessed Babe did rest,

5. And for the joy of His great birth
A thousand angels sing:
"Glory and peace unto the earth
Where born is this new King!"

Zgodava omits verses four and six of the original English carol in his piece:

4. Laid in a silly manger poor,
Betwixt an ox and ass,
Whom these three kings did all adore
As God's high pleasure was.

6. The shepherds dwelling thee about,
Where they this news did know,
Came singing all even in a rout,
"Falantidingdido, falantidingdido, falantidingdido.

Elements of Music

Melody

The melody is very simplistic and singable. It contains mostly stepwise motion and small leaps of a 5th or less that often outline the minor triad. The traditional carol melody is found primarily in the soprano voice with the lower voices providing homophonic harmonies and ostinato accompaniments.

Harmony

The majority of the piece is in the key of d minor with the exception of a short modulation to the dominant (A Major) at measures 101-116. There is little dissonance within the harmonies and most are quickly resolved. The harmonic structure is very strong and predictable throughout, with frequent V-I cadences establishing d minor.

Texture

The texture varies from verse to verse. The first verse is quite thin with the sopranos carrying the melody line and only the altos singing in homophonic harmony with them. The men's parts sing a light, dry ostinato that creates a thin delicate texture. The remaining verses are sung homophony creating a thicker, broad sound. The texture shifts back to the light ostinatos with the brief key change to A Major, but returns to homophony with the 'alleluias' at measure 117. The texture lightens again at measure 145 as the piece slowly fades away and comes to a close.

Timbre

The timbre should be warm and light, especially in the ostinato sections. The homophonic sections can be sung in more robust manner, but the melody still needs to dance.

Expression

There are many dynamic and stylistic markings throughout the piece. The piece begins and ends at a pianissimo dynamic, creating the feeling of a hushed and distant sound. Zgodava clearly

marks which vocal lines are to be heard above the rest. Often, one or two lines will be marked mezzo forte, while the other two are marked piano. Stylistic markings are also placed explicitly above the vocal lines. These markings create the contrast in texture Zgodava desired. Phrases are clearly marked in the score and staggered breathing among sections will need to be used frequently. The piece should dance at an allegretto tempo (quarter note equals 120-132

The Heart

The heart is the setting of a beautifully simple traditional carol melody in a variety of ways that contrast and complement each other, creating an ever-changing and therefore engaging piece for the listener.

Introducing the Piece

- Play a recording of the piece for the students before handing out any music. Ask the students to listen for and jot down three different articulation styles that are used in the piece.
- Following the listening session, have the students discuss the various styles they heard. Ask them how these styles were used. Did all the voices sing in the same style at the same time? How did this affect the texture?
- Explain how the beauty of this piece is in the contrast yet surprising continuity of the piece created through the variety of styles and textures that accompany the melody.
- Stress the importance of the flowing melody and have all students learn the melody on solfege syllables. Have the students use their arms to show the flow of the melodic line and help them create a seamless legato.

Outcomes

Knowledge Outcomes:

1. Students will define and describe legato, staccato, and marcato and will recognize when the various vocal parts exhibit these articulation styles.
2. Students will be able to write the pattern of whole and half steps in a minor scale and will write their own 8-bar melody in a minor key.

Skill Outcomes:

1. Students will sing with accuracy legato, staccato, and marcato styles.
2. Students will identify and correctly sing the dynamic markings in the score.

Affective Outcomes:

1. Students will explore the overall meaning of the carol's text and write a short explanation of how it relates to their lives today.
2. Students will consider musical traditions and how they are preserved, changed, or lost.