Gwyneth Walker

Directions for Singing

an educational adventure for

Chorus and Venerable Instructor

Commissioned by the Thetford Chamber Singers

in celebration of their 25th season 1978-2003

Premiered by the Thetford Chamber Singers Valerie Miller, Music Director Thetford, Vermont May 10, 2003

Duration: 7 minutes

Notes

John Wesley's preface to the hymnal, <u>Sacred Melody</u> (1761), forms the basis of **Directions for Singing**, a light-hearted educational adventure for Chorus and Venerable Instructor. Professor Wesley pays a visit to our local chorus. His ever-relevant instructions are taken to heart by the singers, who endeavor to follow his advice. Singing correctly, modestly and in time take some effort. However, the instruction to "sing lustily" seems to catch on quickly with the chorus!

Professor Wesley imparts his wisdom with a stern demeanor. However, once the lessons are completed and the singing abounds, he enjoys the fruits of his labor. In his own words: "Sing all, and with good courage!"

Performing resources:

Able-bodied Chorus Able-bodied Conductor Guest Artist to portray Professor John Wesley (does not need to know how to read music!) [Conductor addresses the audience with the following words (or similar sentiments, ad lib.)]:

I have had the pleasure of conducting our chorus for the past 25 years. With each season, we have made steady progress and I am proud of how much the singers have grown. Hard work is rewarded by improved musicianship. I congratulate the singers.

However...

There is always room for growth! And today, as we celebrate our 25th season, I feel that it is both appropriate and necessary to turn our focus once again to the basics of singing. One can never overdo the attention paid to the fundamentals!

With this is mind, I have enlisted the help of a True Musical Scholar, Professor John Wesley of the Society for the Preservation of Propriety in Hymnology. Professor Wesley has journeyed far to join us for today's lesson. Let us welcome him now.

[Conductor gestures to stage door. Professor Wesley appears, dressed in 18th century garb with a wig. He is holding a parchment scroll from which he will read the "Directions for Singing". Professor Wesley walks to center stage. After many bows, he slowly opens the scroll. The Chorus and Audience are asked to sing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," verses 1 & 3 (see p.4), with much emphasis on trying to sing very correctly. The chorus continues to hum the hymn tune as a background while Professor Wesley reads the first three "directions".]

Directions for Singing

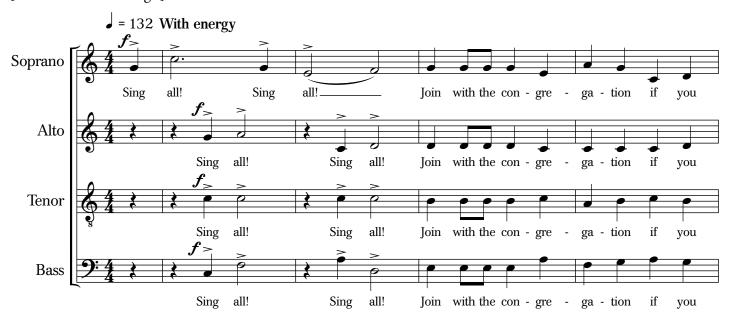
- I. "Learn these tunes before you learn any others; afterwards learn as many as you please."
- II. "Sing them exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all; and if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can."
- III. "Sing all. See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up, and you will find it a blessing."

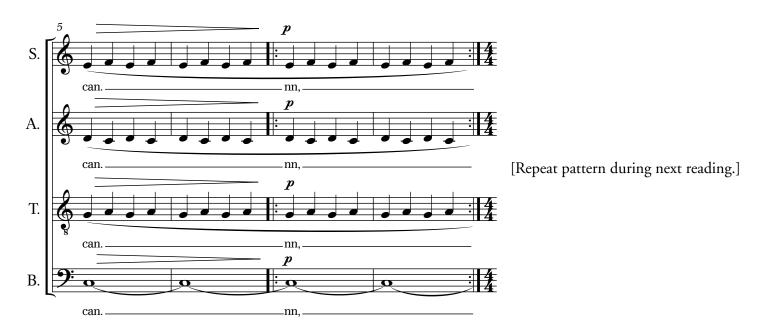
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God



[The Chorus finishes humming the hymn. Professor Wesley concludes reading the first three "directions".]

[Then the Chorus sings:]



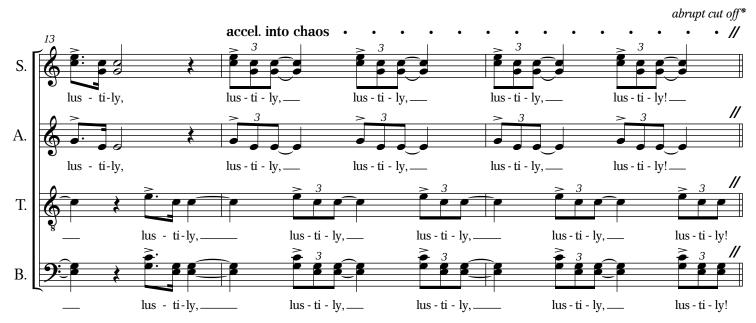


[Professor Wesley continues:]

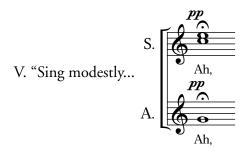
IV. "Sing lustily and with a good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan."

[Chorus responds immediately:]





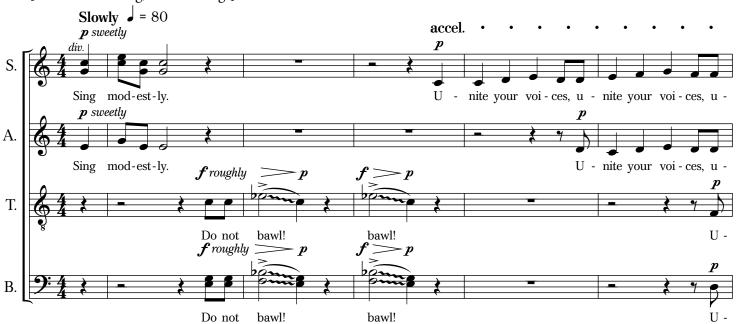
* Conductor attempts to control overly-enthusiastic Chorus.

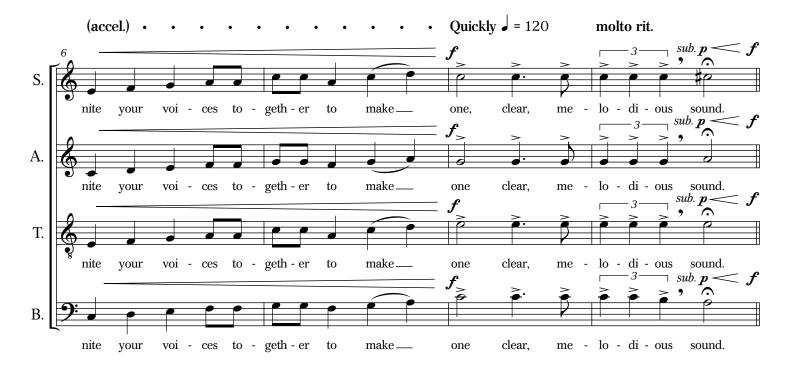


[Women hold chord during following reading.]

Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound."

[At end of reading, Chorus sings]:

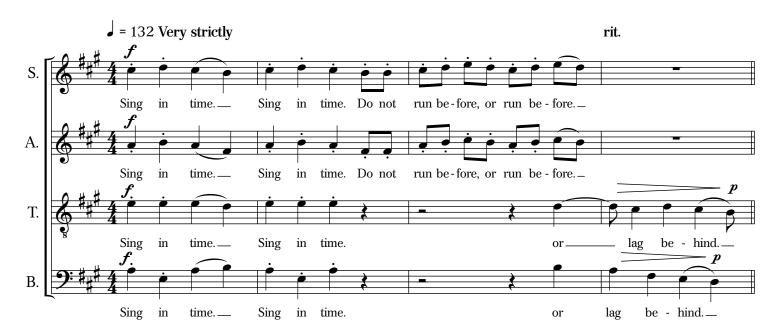


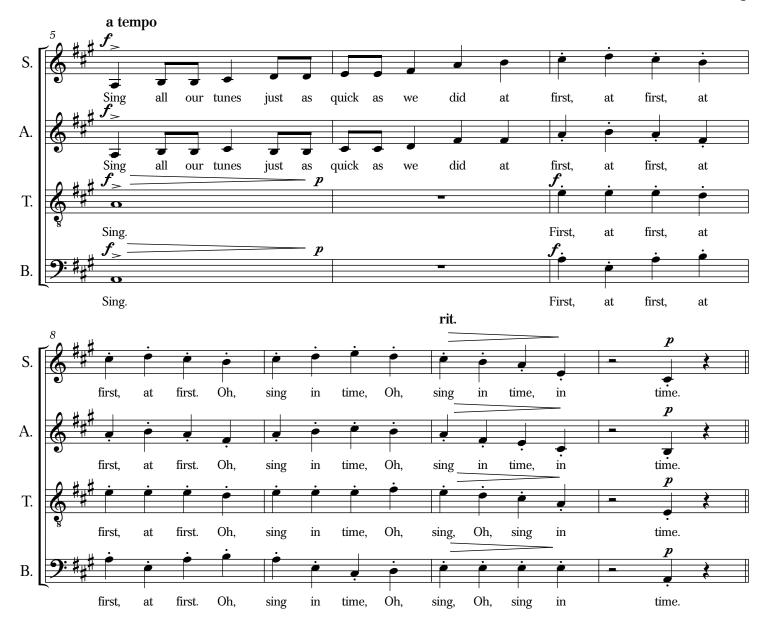


[Basses start to sing, and continue as a background during the reading.]

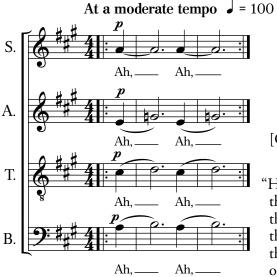


VI. "Sing in time. Whatever time is sung be sure to keep with it. Do not run before nor stay behind it; but attend close to the leading voices, and move therewith as exactly as you can; and take care not to sing too slow. This drawling way naturally steals on all who are lazy; and it is high time to drive it out from us, and sing all our tunes just as quick as we did at first."





VII. "Above all sing spiritually."



[Continue pattern during reading]

"Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when he cometh in the clouds of heaven."





