

CAROLS

SATBB and organ

OXFORD

JOHN RUTTER  
CANDLELIGHT CAROL



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2023



### Composer's note

I wrote the *Candlelight Carol* in 1984 as a result of a conversation at a choral convention in Pittsburgh with the director of a Catholic church choir. He said 'we're only a small choir, nothing special, but we'd love you to write us a carol featuring the Virgin Mary.' This request was so touchingly put that I agreed, and when I started work the image that came into my mind was of Geertgen's lovely painting *Nativity at Night* (c.1490), which hangs in the National Gallery in London. In a dark stable the Virgin Mary gazes down at the crib where Jesus is radiating a miraculous light illuminating her face and the figures of a group of kneeling angels, with Joseph standing by in wonder and a lone bright angel in the sky above.

In the text of my carol the supernatural light became anachronistic candlelight – but then, carols have never been noted for literal accuracy. Three ships could not have sailed into inland Bethlehem either. The words and music of *Candlelight Carol* seemed to emerge together – so in this case, the answer to the question all composers are asked, 'which comes first, the words or the music?', is 'both'.

For the curious . . . another question I am sometimes asked is 'why do you like the key of G flat?'. The simple answer is that it is a lovely warm expressive key suited to gentle pieces. In equal temperament all keys are theoretically the same, but in reality they are not. When a stringed instrument plays a scale of G flat, every note has to be fingered, vibrato can be applied to it, and the bright resonant ring of an open string is never heard. For the soprano voice, G flat is a friendly key because it avoids what for some singers is an awkward break in the voice around E a tenth above middle C. And then there is custom and practice: Dvořák's *Song to the Moon*, Berlioz's exquisite love duet from *Les Troyens* and Stanford's *The Blue Bird*, to take three examples at random, sound right in G flat and would not be the same transposed up or down. It is true that absolute pitch has risen since those pieces were written, but the effect is somehow unchanged.

### Performance hints

The melody of the verses has a wide range, and it may prove a little low for sopranos and tenors in bar 7(43) and a little high for altos and basses in bar 14(48). Discreet dropping out of voices should solve any problem here.

In bars 6–7 and 14–15 the falling sevenths in the melody (unconsciously influenced, perhaps, by Elgar's *Nimrod*) need to be sung cleanly, without swooping.

The first chord of the refrain may need rehearsing: its pitches do not follow on from the last bar of the verse, and it needs to be clear and confident.

### Publisher's note

This carol is scored for very small orchestra/chamber ensemble (flute; oboe; harp; strings). Single strings are possible, though in a few places some *divisi* cello and bass parts would have to be omitted. Conductor's scores and instrumental parts are available on sale – score (ISBN 978-0-19-341055-8); set of parts (ISBN 978-0-19-341056-5) – and on hire – score and parts (ISBN 978-0-19-353368-4) – from Oxford University Press or its appointed agent.

A version of this carol for upper voices, SSAA, (ISBN 978-0-19-353365-3) is also available. This version is compatible with the instrumental accompaniment, but no conductor's score is available showing the SSAA voicing.

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for John Romeri and the Church of the Assumption, Pittsburgh

# Candlelight Carol

Words and music by  
**JOHN RUTTER**

**Andante con moto** ♩ = 92

Verse 1: SOPRANOS (and ALTOS)

Verse 2: TENORS (and BASSES)

*mp legato e dolce*

VOICES

ORGAN

Sw. *p legato*

Man. Ped.

Sw.

1. How do you cap-ture the  
2. Shep-herds and wise men will  
Ch.

7(43)

wind on the wa-ter? How do you count all the stars in the  
kneel and a-dore him, Se-ra-phem round him their vi-gil will

12(48)

sky? How can you mea-sure the love of a mo-ther, Or  
keep; Na-tions pro-claim him their Lord and their Sa-voir, But

*cresc.* *dim.* *p*

*cresc.* *dim.*

17(53)

how can you write down a ba-by's first cry?  
Ma-ry will hold him and sing him to sleep.

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**A** **(C)**

21(57) *p* molto legato *cresc.*

S. Can-dle-light, an-gel light, fire-light and star-glow Shine on his

A. Can - dle - light, an-gel light and star - glow Shine on his

T. Can - dle - light, an-gel light and star - glow Shine on his

1. *p* molto legato *cresc.*

B. Can - dle-light, an - gel light, fire - light and star-glow Shine on his

2. *p* molto legato *cresc.*

Can - dle - light, fire - light and star - glow Shine on his

Play in verse 2 only - verse 1 unaccompanied

**A** **(C)**

Ch.

*p* *cresc.*

26(62)

*f*

cra - dle till break - ing of dawn. Glo-ri - a, glo-ri - a

*f*

cra - dle till break - ing of dawn. Glo - ri - a, glo - ri - a

*f*

cra - dle till break - ing of dawn. Glo - - ri - a

*f*

cra - dle till break - ing of dawn. Glo - - ri - a

*f*

cra - dle till break - ing of dawn. Glo - - ri - a in

Play in both verses

Sw. *mf*





31(67)

*dim.* *mp* *dim.*

in ex-cel - sis De - o! An - gels are sing - ing; the Christ child is

*dim.* *mp* *dim.*

in ex-cel - sis De - o! An - gels are sing - ing; the Christ child is

8 in ex-cel - sis De - o! An - gels are sing - ing; the Christ child is

*dim.* *mp* *dim.*

in ex-cel - sis De - o! An - gels are sing - ing; the Christ child is

*dim.* *mp* *dim.*

— ex-cel - sis De - o! An - gels are sing - ing; the Christ child is

Ch.

*dim.* *p*

**B**

36

S. *1. p* *2. p*

A. *p* *p*

T. *p* *p*

B. *p* *p*

born. born.

**B**

1. 2.

Man. Ped.

73

**D** *p*

3. Find him at Beth - le - hem laid in a

*p* **D**



78

man - ger: Christ our Re - deem - er a - sleep in the hay,

man - ger: Christ our Re - deem - er a - sleep in the hay,

83

*mf cresc.* *f* *p* A child with his

God - head in - car - nate and hope of sal - va - tion: *A. Hum*  
*B. Hum*

*mf cresc.* *f* *p*

88

mo - ther that first Christ - mas Day. **E**

\*Ah

*unis.* *molto dolce*

Can - dle - light, an - gel light,

93

Ch. **E**

Sw. *p*

Ped.

93

Ah

fire - light and star - glow Shine on his cra - dle till break - ing of

\*or hum, at conductor's discretion



98

S. *f* *dim.*  
Glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o!

A. *f* *dim.*  
Glo-ri-a, glo-ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o!

T. *f* *dim.*  
dawn. Glo-ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o!

1. *f* *dim.*  
dawn. Glo-ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o!

B. *f* *dim.*  
dawn. Glo-ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o!

2. *f* *dim.*  
dawn. Glo-ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o!

Sw. *f* *dim.*

103

*mp* *rall.* *dim.* *p*  
An-gels are sing-ing; the Christ child is born.

*mp* *dim.* *p*

Hum *mp* *dim.* *p*

Hum *mp* *dim.* *p*

Hum *mp* *dim.* *p*

Hum *mp* *dim.* *p*

Ch. *p* *rall.*

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