

O How Lovely is the Evening

Traditional German Folk Song

ANALYSIS

Broad Description/Type Folksong and round

Background Information *O How Lovely is the Evening* is an anonymously composed traditional canon, originally in German, but popular throughout Europe and the United States as early as the beginning of the 19th century. The simple text, with the sound effect of the chiming bells, translates well into many languages. It is included in various song collections in English, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Italian, Russian and probably many other languages.

The musical notation is in 3/4 time and consists of three phrases, each six measures long. The notes are simple, stepwise movements with some skips. The lyrics are written below the notes, with English above and German below. The first two phrases end with a double bar line, and the third phrase ends with a final double bar line.

I
 D R M D F M M R D F M M R D
 O how love - ly is the eve - ning, is the eve - ning!
 O wie wohl ist mir am A - bend, mir am A - bend,

II
 M F S M L S S F M L S S F M
 When the bells are sweet - ly ring - ing, sweet - ly ring - ing.
 Wenn zur Ruh die Glock - en läut - en, Glock - en läut - en,

III
 D D D D D D
 Ding, dong! Ding, dong! Ding, dong!
 Bim, bam! Bim, bam! Bim, bam!

ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

Melody

O How Lovely is the Evening consists of three six measure phrases in triple meter. The 5th and 6th measures of each line are identical to the 3rd and 4th measures. The second phrase is exactly like the first phrase, only a third higher. The final phrase is the chiming of the evening bells, ringing out 6:00 in the evening on the tonic.

For students beginning to read music notation, this short canon is ideal, as students can compare identical, similar and contrasting melodic segments. The first two phrases contain only two skips, so the new reader can begin to see and hear the space-line-space pattern created by stepwise motion. The repetition in each of these phrases is also encouraging to the new solfège. And of course, the note reading on the final phrase is so easy, that it is ideal for simply practicing lining up one sung syllable per notated pitch.

Though all third graders might not have “officially” been introduced to the syllable “fa”, the prominence of “fa” and “la” in these first two phrases is a major part of the melodic appeal of this piece. In my experience, this song is a great piece to come back to for fourth and fifth graders that are becoming more accomplished at solfège and canonic part singing.

Harmony

The underlying harmonic structure in *O How Lovely is the Evening* can be as simple as I, I, IV, I, IV, I, making it very accessible for use with Orff instruments and for writing simple ostinatos (especially since “do” can fit in every chord).

The lack of much harmonic tension or movement contributes to the overall sense of relaxation and peace.

The parallel thirds, when the first two phrases are sung together, are more difficult for the young singer than canons with contrasting motion, but the static final line provides an option for creating a first step harmony experience. With many young choirs, I often use the last line as an ostinato and save the parallel third harmony for a time when they have had more experience with part singing.

Rhythm and Meter

The triple meter and dotted half notes are two excellent concepts to teach through *O How Lovely is the Evening*. I can't think of another piece where 6 dotted half notes feel so aesthetically pleasing to sing (especially in canon)!

The half, quarter, half, quarter rhythm in the triple meter creates an easy, lullaby feel to this canon and provides a musical clue, in addition to the textual clues, that the context is of the piece is a lovely evening (versus the morning rush hour!).

The Heart

The heart is the simple, repetitive melody that is evocative of tolling bells echoing during a more tranquil time when one could sit, take notice and reflect.

SKILL OUTCOME

Students will perform rhythms and melodies in two part canon.

STRATEGIES

• Follow the Leader

A take-off on the popular playground version, the teacher, as the leader, begins with all the students mirroring (unison) and progresses to movements in groups of four. Then those four beat movements begin to be followed four beats behind (canon). Example: 4 steps, 4 skips, 4 twirls, 4 jumps, 4 hops, 4 arm flaps, etc...

• Rhythm Canon

Follow the leader 4 beats behind, only in place and with more of an emphasis of different rhythms, versus different gross motor skills. Rhythm canon can become rhythm/solfège canon as the students progress.

• Circle Movement, Circle Movement in Canon

The first phrase of the song, students in a circle move (by beat or rhythm) clockwise. In the second phrase, they move the opposite way. For the third phrase (bell ringing), they move a step in to the center followed by a step out. Rather than teach specific motions, another option is to have the students design the movement for each phrase. After moving in unison, have one part move only the last line, while another group moves the whole song. Progress to two groups moving the entire song, starting one line apart—in canon.

• Solfège in canon (instruments, voices)

Use short patterns, pentatonic or other scales to play or sing in unison and then in canon. Try letting the students select how many beats the second part waits before entering.

• Stairway Stepping—Strategy for Stepwise Motion and Canon

(This works in places with a large, open stairway and a class that isn't too large.) Have students in groups of three or four stand on a stair. Spread the groups out by 3-4 stairs. They listen to a solfège pattern (do, re, mi, re, do) and then step it on the stairs. As they get accomplished at stepping together (and I throw in the occasional skip for fun), the groups can be divided so that 1-2 people in each group are canon part two and they start the pattern 2 beats behind the other group.

• Color Canon

Have a paper with colors used in a specific order. Have student groups design colors underneath that are in "canon" with the other colors. A quicker version is to have several examples of patterns—some random, some "unison" and some in canon and have students identify the visual canons. (This is also a quick cognitive strategy that assists with the skill.)

ASSESSMENT

• "5 against 25"

Listen to students in small groups of 3-6 sing one part of the canon (starting first) while the rest of the class sings the other part. This can be modified to have the class sing one line repeated while the small group sings the whole song.

5 Able to sing independently all the way through the song

3 Maintains melodic shape and text, but pitch and/or rhythm are affected by the other part

1 Unable to sing own line when the second part enters

- **Informal Assessment of all canon activities**

Do the students imitate 4 (or other designated number) beats behind or are they mirroring? When they lose their place, do they get back on again? Are they able to come up with their own strategies for successful canon singing? (Listen to those on a like part, find strategic places to restart, use awareness of pitch and shape differences, etc...)

- **Students design their own visual representation of canon**

- 5 The representation shows imitation at a regular interval
- 3 The representation shows some imitation, but not consistently
- 1 There are no repeating patterns

COGNITIVE OUTCOME

Students will recognize melodic contours visually and aurally and read stepwise patterns.

STRATEGIES

- **One of These Things is Not Like the Others (Melody-Phrase Shape)**

Have 3-4 examples of melodic patterns, one having a different contour. Students can indicate by finger numbers (if it is in the front of the room), check marks (if on paper) or by a designated physical motion which pattern does not imitate the same melodic shape as the others. Advance to being able to describe the differences between the patterns—even those that have the same shape, but are on different pitches.

- **People Patterns (Melodic Shape)**

Choose people with similarities or differences to show phrase shape patterns. For example, in O How Lovely, it there are two similar phrases and one different one, so I could pick 2 people with blue pants and one with red to show the pattern. The class needs to guess the pattern and then can rearrange to find another way to show the same pattern (2 no glasses, one glasses; two long hair, one short hair—many possibilities). After establishing the pattern, look in the music to find the same kind of pattern. This works well for larger form analysis as well.

- **(I bet you can't) Sing Where I Point (Reading Notation)**

Start very simple (on a solfège chart or the staff) and move slowly up and down melodic patterns by step. Gradually get fast and put in more direction changes where the students don't expect it. It is fun to track how long they can go without making a mistake. I make up different levels and give the strategy a video game-like quality.

- **Stepwise Floor Jumping (Reading Notation, line/spaces notes)**

Using blue (or another color) painters masking tape, I make a giant staff on the floor. The students are the notes. They can jump what I sing on solfège (or note names) and really get used to the idea of space-line-space with their whole body. They can figure out how to move parts of songs that they know, show with their body what they think they are hearing, move songs in canon, jump big intervals... The possibilities with a giant floor staff are endless.

- **Stairway Singing**

This strategy is described in the canon section. I would use the strategy for understanding ascending and descending stepwise motion before using it for canons.)

- **Listen, Think and Draw**

Have the students use their pencil (or finger in the air) to draw the shape of short melodies that they listen to. As they look at melodies on the staff, connect the “dots” (notes) and compare the shape to the drawings that they made.

- **Silly Putty Phrase Shape**

Using silly putty, play-doh or another pliable material, have the students show ascending, descending, staying the same or some combination of note sequences.

- **People Sculpture Phrase Shape**

Like the play-doh idea, only with a group of people. How can three people show “do, re, mi” or “so, la, so”? Rather than one person per note, students can try this on their own also (but it is a little bit harder). “So, la, so” might look like a student on hands and knees. Have students explain their own sculptures.

ASSESSMENT

- **Quiz**—Give the students three options (stays the same, 3 descending notes, 3 ascending notes), play or sing the musical example, they check (or put a sticker) by the notes that look like what they hear.

- **Informal Assessment of kinesthetic activities**

Are the students moving line to space? Do they switch directions appropriately? Are they discerning direction (ascending or descending) correctly? Can they explain their sculptures or drawings articulately and accurately?

- **Hand Staff**

Have students show what they hear with their “hand staff.”

AFFECTIVE OUTCOME

Students will uncover stories about time periods, places and people suggested by a song.

STRATEGIES

- **CSI (Canon Special Investigators)** *What can you find out from clues in the canons we are singing?*

- **Making it personal**

Where do you go that is quiet enough that you can really notice things around you?

What are some synonyms for “lovely”? Can you think of an evening that was “lovely”?

Draw a picture of your “lovely evening.”

- **The Secret Messages of Bells**

Do some investigative research into the uses of bells in “olden” times—especially in European and early American history. Have students think about and list all the ways we communicate messages (cell phones, computers, TV, etc...) and imagine a time without those devices.

Show how cities used bells to fill some of their communication needs.

Have the students develop their own musical codes using bells, voices, or other instruments. Working in groups, they can decide on a few secret messages and the bells for the message and then demonstrate the sending and receiving of the messages for the class.

ASSESSMENT

- **Peer Sharing**

Have students share and describe their “lovely evening” memories.

- **Concept Transfer**

Choose another piece we are singing and use “clues” within the music and text to make guesses about the time and place it was first sung. What in the song helped you to come up with your guess?

Can you find a song that you know that tells something about who you are or where you live?

Other Outcomes Ideas for This Piece

This is not an exhaustive list. For the purposes of this plan, I chose to concentrate on a few specific outcomes that worked really well with *O How Lovely*. Here are some other outcomes that I have taught with this piece:

Skill

- Legato Singing
- Singing with Dynamic Variation (using the echo section)
- Sforzando (or accents) using the “bell” section

Cognitive

- Dotted Half Note Rhythms
- 3/4 Meter
- Rhythm versus Beat

Affective

- Explore imitation and canon-like patterns in nature, architecture, mathematics or visual art.

Music Selection

There are many reasons that this song has remained in the standard folk song and canon repertoire and is beloved by people of different nations and ages.

For those who do not speak English (or German, or whatever language the canon is presented in) as their first language, the fact that there are very few words, that the short text is repetitive and that a third of the song is bell ringing helps to turn the focus away from text declamation and on to the melody and lilting triple meter.

Also, the parallel third phrases against the static tonic “bell chime” line feel very harmonically rich and full, though the melody is relatively easy and accessible.

Simply put, *O How Lovely* does not try to compete with flashier melodies that have exciting leaps or catchy rhythms. Instead, it captures a sweetness and serenity that is beautiful and rewarding to sing for both children and adults.

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