

A Christmas Carol

Charles Ives (1874-1954)

Arranged: Paul C. Echols

#100 from *114 Songs by Charles Ives*

Background

A Christmas Carol, words and music by Charles Ives, was originally written for solo voice and piano. It was later arranged for SATB chorus by Paul C. Echols.

The text was likely written by Ives himself. In the notes at the end of *114 Songs by Charles Ives* (the volume of songs from which this piece is taken), the following information is provided:

“Where no author is indicated [sic] the words are by Harmony Twichell Ives [Ives’ wife] or her husband”. [Ives himself]. More than one source attribute the text to Ives (Hitchcock, 22, Ezust, http://www.lieder.net/get_settings.html?ComposerId=1307, Songs of America, <https://songofamerica.net/song/christmas-carol-1/>). The words combine English (a vernacular language) and Latin, a practice not uncommon in the Middle Ages.

In notes in the papers of Charles Ives, Ives indicates that the song was written in 1864 and performed the same year for the first time. [Hitchcock, 22]. Hitchcock believes that the song was written around 1894, or at least prior to 1898 and revised in 1933. [Hitchcock, 22].

Resources on Charles Ives

Hitchcock, H. Wiley. *Critical Commentary for Charles Ives 129 Songs*. To accompany *Music of the United States of America*, Volume 12. *Recent Researches in American Music*, Volume 46. Published for the American Musicological Society by A-R Editions, inc., Middleton, Wisconsin. 2004.

[https://charlesives.org/sites/default/files/Ives_129_Songs.pdf]

SongofAmerica.net. Celebrating 250 years of American Song. *Song of America* is the project of the *Hampsong Foundation*, Thomas Hampson, artistic director. Both the Hampsong Foundation and the Song of America website provide resources for the “study and proliferation of the **art of classic song**” [Hampsong Foundation, 2019].

Recordings

Chanticleer, 2008: <https://youtu.be/m1z5PsdFijw>

Text

Little star of Bethlehem!
Do we see Thee now?
Do we see Thee shining
O’er the tall trees?

Little Child of Bethlehem!
 Do we hear thee in our hearts?
 Hear the Angels singing:
 Peace on earth, good will to men!
 Noel!

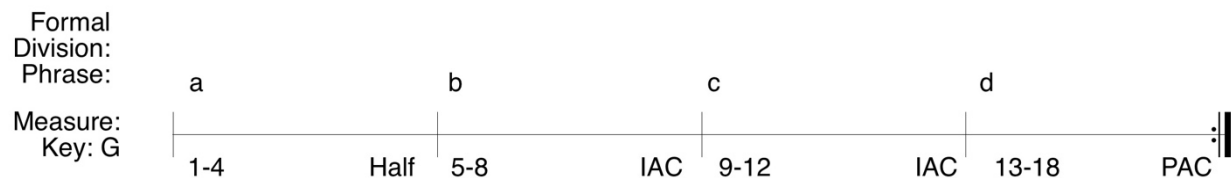
O'er the cradle of a King,
 Hear the Angels sing:
 In Excelsis Gloria, Gloria!
 From his Father's home on high,
 Lo! for us He came to die;
 Hear the Angels sing:
 Venite adoremus Dominum.¹

Analysis

Key: G Major (original key was F major)
 Harmonically a conservative, tonal setting.

Meter: 6/8

Structure: Strophic
 Each strophe has four phrases
 4 + 4 + 4 + 6



A few interesting things to note about the structure:

- The second phrase is actually three measures long, but is followed by a measure of rest – an unusual choice, possibly to balance the phrases.
- The final phrase has a two-measure phrase extension at the beginning of the phrase.

¹ Ives, Charles. "A Christmas Carol". *Songs of America*. [accessed 6/22/2019].