

## **Lully, Lulla (The Coventry Carol)**

The carol dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was traditionally performed as part of a mystery play, called The Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors, which was regularly performed in the city of Coventry. The play retells the Christmas Story according to Matthew's Gospel, specifically remembering the Massacre of the Innocents, carried out by King Herod.

Although the author of the text is anonymous, the oldest known version was written by Robert Croo in 1534 (his manuscript bears the exact date 14<sup>th</sup> March 1534) and the oldest known version of the melody being known to date from 1591. The exact date of the text is obscure, but there are references to the Coventry Guild Pageants from 1392 onwards.

There are many versions of the melody, although two are mainly performed to-day, namely the original authenticated manuscript version dated 1591, set for three voices, and a modern version penned by Martin Shaw, set for four voices, in which the tune has been 'modernized'. In the mystery play the carol is sung by three female singers, women of Bethlehem, who enter on stage with their babies after a warning to Joseph by the archangel that peril is amidst. It should be noted that the 1591 3-part setting is for alto, tenor and bass and as would have been normal at the time, the parts of the three mothers would probably have been acted by male performers. Furthermore, being in three parts could indicate that the melody was composed well before Croo recorded it.

Musically, although the melody has a 'feeling of modality', it is actually written in the minor mode. The melody is of considerable interest as it provides an early and important example of the 'Picardy 3<sup>rd</sup>', also known as the 'Tierce de Picardie', a compositional technique in which the 3<sup>rd</sup> note in a minor scale is transposed up a semitone, thus providing a major chord.

In this version I have written a completely new melody and have attempted to capture a 'medieval flavour' reflecting the character of the older melody. The setting is for five voices (SSATB) and it fluctuates between the Aeolian and Dorian modes and the modern major/minor modes.

The carol was first performed on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2016 at St. Mary's Church, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, UK by the Orpheus Choir of North Herts, to whom it is dedicated.

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