

A MANGER SUITE

**Featuring the songs and arrangements from
Michael W. Smith's
*IT'S A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS***

**Arranged and Orchestrated by David Hamilton
Created by David Hamilton and Don Cason
Narrations by Rhonda Courtney**

PRODUCTION NOTES

by
Don Cason
President
ClearCall Music

INTRODUCTION

Welcome. We appreciate your coming to our site and selecting these Production Notes to review. You may be here because you have already selected *A MANGER SUITE*, or some of the individual anthems available from this collection/musical, for your Christmas program. Possibly, you're here because you want to review this work in more detail to help determine if it effectively meets your needs for this coming Christmas season. I hope you find this information helpful; but if you have questions that are not addressed here, feel free to email me using the email form under the "Contact Us" tab of my website... www.clearcallmusic.com.

DEVELOPMENT OF "A MANGER SUITE"

Some of my favorite Christmas recordings that I play every year have been recorded by Michael W. Smith – one of contemporary Christian music's premiere songwriters and artists. In the Fall, 2007, Michael released the third of his Christmas recordings entitled *IT'S A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS*, and that recording is the source of the songs in this musical.

A MANGER SUITE is comprised of four of the songs from that recording, all of which were written by Michael. Added to Michael and his extraordinary ability to craft powerful music and lyrics are his songwriting collaborators – David Hamilton, Tony Wood, Jonas Myrin and Ryan Smith, Michael's son. Together, these five have written songs that help us focus on the mystery and majesty of the birth of our Savior, Jesus.

Joining Michael in the production of *IT'S A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS* was David Hamilton, who arranged, orchestrated, conducted, and co-produced Michael's recording.

We are pleased to bring you the actual arrangements and orchestrations from Michael's recording, which have been adapted, rearranged and rerecorded by David to make them accessible to churches, universities and schools.

David and I selected four of the songs from Michael's recording which had a lyrical thread through them – essentially the ones that spoke both about the Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled with the birth of Christ and the celebration of all of creation with that birth. Each of the four presented a Christmas moment centered on the manger – hence the title of the work....but more on that later.

David traveled to Prague, Czechoslovakia to record this work with the 60-piece City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra. Michael's original artist recording had been recorded in the Abbey Road Studio in London, England with many of the players from the London Symphony, and we wanted to replicate as best we could the sound of that large orchestra with this recording. If you haven't heard any of the audio clips available on the website, you will instantly detect the difference from many of the other choral recordings you may have heard. The remainder of the recording was done here in Nashville, Tennessee, using many of the singers who were on Michael's original recording.

A MANGER SUITE is a four-song collection / mini-musical which utilizes an adult SATB choir, an SAT(B) vocal ensemble, a children's choir, one soloist, instrumentalists, and a single narrator. Unlike many of the works published these days, this work is intended to incorporate possibly all of the facets of one's music ministry into a single combined performance. When was the last time you had several, if not all of your choirs singing together? And what better part of a Christmas program would you want to combine all of these groups together than in a stirring presentation centered around the manger of the Christ child.

A MANGER SUITE is a short, nineteen minute work that can be used in a variety of ways during the Christmas season. Hopefully, it will fit a need for you this year.

CONCEPT

This suite opens with a song ("The Promise") that reminds us that Jesus' birth brought about the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as the world was yearning for a savior. In a brief narration, we follow the story of Mary and Joseph each being visited by an angel and their eventual journey to Bethlehem. The second song ("Son of God") describes the power of Heaven's perfect plan unfolding in the birth of this child, as we sing "Gloria, Alleluia – our God is with us." Then we join with the angels and all of creation in sharing our joy to the world through the final two songs ("Sing Noel, Sing Hallelujah" and "Christmas Angels").

In order to follow the textual flow of the concept, I've provided the entire sequence of text (lyrics and narration) to the entire work. Take a moment to read this from beginning to end. Also, it will help your production team to recognize the flow of the work if they read it as well.

Narrator: As it was told by the prophets of long ago, God himself shall give you a sign: “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name ‘Emmanuel.’” (Isaiah 7:14) Hear, O Israel, God *is* with us. He has come to save us.

THE PROMISE

Music by Michael W. Smith / Words by Ryan Smith and Michael W. Smith

Fear not O Israel
For there is peace still to come
A word to break the silence
A promise yet to bloom
The promise to redeem us
One to free us
Break the silence
End the violence
In our hearts.

Emmanuel is sure to find us soon
The mighty root of Jesse, Star of Truth
And bring our sons to glory
Tell the story
Heal the broken and restore thee
To His name.

The star will guide us to the humble place
Where Christ the King reveals His earthly face
And we will sing Emmanuel, God is with us
God is for us
God is in us
We will sing...

We're singing Alleluia
We're singing Alleluia
Emmanuel, our God is with us
Emmanuel, our God is with us.

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Narrator: The angel, Gabriel, was sent by God to the virgin Mary, saying, “Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God. You shall bring forth a Son. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:26, 30-33)

An angel of the Lord appeared also to Joseph, son of David, saying, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son, and you shall call His name ‘Jesus,’ for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20-21)

And Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. While they were there, the time came for her Baby to be born. She wrapped Him in a blanket, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:4-7)

With this Child, God’s redemption plan was born.

SON OF GOD

Music by Michael W. Smith / Words by Tony Wood, David Hamilton and Michael W. Smith

Son of God, purest light
Lord on high is here tonight
Stepping through this sacred sky
Suddenly our eyes behold
Heaven's perfect plan unfold
Son of God.

Son of God, love divine
Timeless one steps into time
Who could dream of such a thing?
With us now, the King of kings
Men and angels bow and sing.

Singing alleluia, alleluia

We're singing gloria, alleluia
We're singing gloria, alleluia
We're singing gloria, alleluia
We're singing Gloria.

We're singing gloria, alleluia
We're singing gloria, alleluia
We're singing gloria, alleluia
We're singing Gloria.

We're singing gloria, alleluia (Emmanuel)
We're singing gloria, alleluia (Emmanuel)
We're singing gloria, alleluia (our God is with us)
Alleluia, singing Gloria.

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Narrator: Now there were in the same country shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. An angel of the Lord appeared before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not fear, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For born to you this day, in the city of David, is a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:8-12)

SING NOEL, SING HALLELUJAH

Music by Michael W. Smith / Words by David Hamilton

Sing Noel! Sing Noel!
Sing we all Noel!
Sing we all Noel!
Sing, O sing, O sing we all Noel!
Sing we all Noel!

Come behold this child in the manger
Gift of the Father's great love
Angels look down
As His glory surrounds them
Starlight from Heaven above.

Sing Noel, sing Hallelujah
God with us now come to dwell
Sing Noel, lift high His praises
Christ, our Emmanuel
Christ, our Emmanuel.

Lift up your heads
All who wander in darkness
Shine for your light has come
Down through the ages
Though sin's battle rages
Christ, our Messiah, has won.

Sing Noel, sing Hallelujah
Come adore on bended knee
Sing Noel, lift high His praises
Christ, come to set us all free
Christ, come to set us all free.

Let every daughter and son of the Father
Rise on this Christmas morn
With Heaven voicing all praise and rejoicing
Christ, our Redeemer, is born.

Sing Noel, sing Hallelujah
All creation great and small
Sing Noel, lift high His praises
Christ, come to save us all
Christ, come to save us all.

Sing Noel, sing Hallelujah
All creation great and small
Sing Noel, lift high His praises
Christ, come to save us all
Christ, come to save us all.

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Narrator: So the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father. (John 1:14)

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men. Hallelujah! (Luke 2: 13-14)

CHRISTMAS ANGELS

Music by Michael W. Smith / Words by Jonas Myrin

Christmas angels sing all around us
Spread good tidings over the earth
Telling of a child in a manger who is born
He is the King of kings.

King of Glory, hope for all nations
Sent to earth to save and redeem
Prince of Peace, behold and adore the Son of God
Has come to set us free.

Celebrate, oh sing hallelujah
Raise a banner, dance and rejoice
Celebrate the birth of Messiah
He's the Savior King, the Lord of all.

Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest
Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest

Joy to the world, the Lord has come
(He is the One, God's only Son, Emmanuel)
Joy to the world, the Lord has come
(Who was, and is, and is to come, Emmanuel)
Joy to the world
(God here with us)
He is here
Forever and always.

Christmas angels sing all around us
All creation hears what they say
Bow before Him, come and behold the Son of God
Born on Christmas day.

Christmas angels sing all around us
All creation hears what they say
Bow before Him, come and behold the Son of God
Born on Christmas day.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come.
Let earth receive her King.
Sing joy!

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HOW SHOULD THIS WORK BE PERFORMED?

A MANGER SUITE was conceived first as simply a choral piece with narration. We believed that just the presentation alone of such emotional music, enhanced ever so slightly with brief narrations that tie the sequence of events together, was enough to create a moving experience. Considering that the entire work is just nineteen minutes

long, added with the variety of different vocal groupings, we thought that there would be enough for the congregation/audience to focus on that it didn't need much staging.

However, we know that Christmas music presentations can take a variety of approaches. Some will want to perform this with their choirs alone as a concert piece, where others will prefer to stage dramatic action that might incorporate a manger, shepherds, wise men and angels, in tandem with the music. Others will see this as a work that's perfect for their Living Christmas Tree, while others will want to use it for their Christmas Eve service. There is also the possibility of taking each of the songs and blending them into a Lessons and Carols service. Whatever your preference, this work will adapt to any setting you choose. So, as we look at each song and offer staging suggestions, know that we are attempting to prompt those creative thoughts in you that will give this work the shape that best fits your congregation and performance plans.

NARRATION

There is a very small amount of narration for this work, and most of it is underscored in the introductions for the songs. Rhonda Courtney, who wrote the narration, simply approached this by using as much actual scripture as possible. She wanted the familiarity of the scripture to resonate with the audience, and yet to fill in the sequence of the events around Jesus' birth that needed to be retold. She has provided the chapter and verse location of each scripture in case you prefer to use a different translation or version than what has been selected.

The work was written for a single narrator. There is no preference as to whether the person is male or female. It just needs to be someone with a warm, rich voice that can give shape and color to the words without rushing through them. There is plenty of time in the music to present the lines of narration with intentional pauses, so as to let the words slowly sink into the minds of your audience. Rushing through the narration is the last thing that you want to do.

Let me also urge you to find a narrator who is willing to memorize these narrations. They are short and easy to remember, since the majority of it is scripture your narrator has likely heard or read for many years. Speaking these lines by memory will add significantly to the connection that can be made with the audience.

SONG-BY-SONG SUGGESTIONS

“The Promise”

After a cinematic orchestral introduction, this song opens with a narration using what is probably the most known prophecy from Isaiah. The minor tonality gives it a mysterious feeling, over which the lyrics retell the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Christ child.

The opening lines of each verse are sung by the Vocal Ensemble. Make sure they are sung in a hushed tone and build with each of the three verses, as they express the yearning for a savior. With each verse the choir adds some additional perspective on what the Messiah will be to His people, closing with the line, “where Christ the King reveals His earthly face. And we will sing Emmanuel, God is with us, God is for us, God is in us. We will sing.”

The chorus at measure 65 is the first entrance for the Children’s Choir. It is presumed that they may not have understood the feelings of yearning for a savior, but they welcome the chance to sing about the coming Emmanuel. This opening statement of the Chorus, which is now in a major key, is sung in unison by the choir and children. It should be a bold declaration of their hope for a Savior.

Since this work does not include drama or staging specifically, the choir and singers are the visual center of this work. Their dress should be chosen based on its appropriateness to the setting of your service.

The first song is intended to create a moment in time in which to enter this Christmas program. Since it tells about the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, it’s not designed to be staged with drama or actors. However, if you have theatrical lighting available in your auditorium, effective moments can be built with a gradual building of lighting throughout the entire piece.

“Son of God”

Beginning with the opening, non-underscored, narration to this song, the Christmas story is retold. Using commonly known scripture texts, we focus our story on three particular events – Mary being visited by an angel, Joseph being visited by an angel, and their travels to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus. These are short scriptural narrations that move the listener quickly to the manger setting.

If you are looking for staging ideas for this song, note that it is not practical to stage each of these three introductory moments in vignettes, simply because the progression of time would move too quickly to have an effective moment to portray each of them. So, I would suggest focusing on the last one with a simple nativity area. It doesn’t have to be elaborate. Just simply a tableau featuring Mary, Joseph and Jesus will suffice. You simply want to draw your audience’s attention to focus on the manger and the lyric to the song that’s about to be sung.

This song opens with a solo. On the recording we used a male singer, but it could be male or female. I would suggest that you find the right kind of voice that can be warm and rich in soft passages. This is not a dramatic solo, and should be sung with a degree of reverence for the moment. The emotive feelings in the soloist’s voice are more important at this moment than having possibly your “best soloist” singing it. That solo verse is followed by the SATB choir with a mezzo piano entrance, leading to the chorus at measure 38.

This chorus is where we intended for the optional Children's Choir to join in the song. The vocal part for the children is located in the back of the choral book. In our recording, we used Children's Choir in the first and last songs. So, it leaves the children standing through the second and third song, which might be a risky situation if your children are not able to remain fairly still. That is part of the reason of why we provided this optional part for you to use, just so the children stay engaged throughout the entire work and don't become a distraction to the performance.

From a visual standpoint, generally a warm stage lighting set is primarily what you want. The song will build to a very dramatic musical moment at the end, which can be big but you will still need room to go as you get to the finale. Early in the song, you can bring warm lighting to both and/or either the tableau and the soloist.

“Sing Noel, Sing Hallelujah”

The opening narration of this song draws our attention to the angel's announcement to the neighboring shepherds. This is the beginning of the celebration for the Savior's birth. This setting was recorded acappella, but a guide organ track has been provided on the Accompaniment CD. (NOTE: Please refer to the Accompaniment CD Performance Notes, also available on the ClearCall Music website, for specific instructions on how to use the track whether or not you choose to sing sections of this acappella.)

The vocal introduction, “Sing Noel!” is an invitation to your audience to join in this celebration with you and the choir. If you can convey to your choir that they are the angelic voices announcing Christ's birth, then that might add a level of intensity to their singing. This leads to the women's verse at measure 16, urging the listener to behold the Child in the manger.

Up to this point, the entire work has been retelling the story of Christ's birth, but the second verse takes a different approach. The perspective of the lyric suddenly shifts to make a statement to modern-day men and women. (*“Lift up your heads all who wander in darkness, shine for your light has come. Down through the ages, though sin's battle rages, Christ, our Messiah, has won.”*) There should be a change in the lighting here that signifies a new perspective is being taken...though it should be subtle in the way it happens. The third verse follows this same line of thought, imploring your audience to join in the celebration of the birth of our Savior.

This setting is orchestrated primarily for brass, organ and percussion. Of all the songs in this musical, it has classical elements to the way it feels. Make it a strong moment with your choir. I would suggest that you encourage your Vocal Ensemble to sing along with this piece, but stepping away from their microphones so that their voices blend with the choir.

“Christmas Angels”

This is the fourth and final song of this nineteen-minute suite. It opens with the narrator speaking over a solo instrumental played on the Celeste (also celesta). This Celeste part can be performed on the piano or by an extra keyboard player, using a setting that could

resemble the Celeste. It simply just needs to be a keyboard background to the narrator. The big entrance follows at measure 14, where suddenly you have a sense of a multitude of the heavenly host all praising God.

Though this song starts strongly, keep in mind that you've got to have somewhere to go, because it will certainly end bigger than it starts. To this point, each of the three other songs has been purely orchestral in its accompaniment. This is the first song to use a rhythm section. You might elect to have your rhythm section sit through the first three songs, or possibly a few of them could assist with the percussion part, given there are three percussionists requested in the orchestration. (Of course, if you're using the Accompaniment track or keyboards only, this won't matter.)

Each of the three vocal groupings (Vocal Ensemble, SATB Choir, and Children's Choir) has a separate entrance with their own verse in the front half of this song. Make each of their entrances a special moment for them to shine by the way this piece is staged or lit.

With the sense that all of creation has joined in the celebration of Christ's birth, there can be lots of staging options to explore. Even though I stated early on that our intent in creating this work was to design a suite of songs for combined choirs with no other dramatic action than a narrator, this song will provide the moment to pull out your staging options, if you so choose. The song is approximately three and a half minutes, so it goes quickly. But you could develop a way for the angels, shepherds, and wise men to join in this celebration if you've developed the resources for that and/or simply have the space to do so. This is the place to pull out all of your stops – as they say.

USING THIS WORK IN A LESSONS AND CAROLS SERVICE

I have seen several services incorporating a lessons and carols template. My experience has been that people often build their own services around selections that they enjoy singing and passages of scripture that relate to those songs.

I haven't built a specific lessons and carols service around the songs in this work, but I would suggest that you may find several of them useful as you build or develop your own service, simply by incorporating the scriptures that are used in the narration. We have taken the scriptural accounts primarily from the books of Luke and Matthew. The musical underscoring for some of these scriptures might make a smooth transition as well from the readings to the music.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Accompaniment CD

Given that this entire work is less than 20 minutes long and because it can be performed with or without Children's Choir, we felt that it would be an advantage to you and your choir to have several different mixes of the accompaniment track. In particular, it

provides you with multiple track options, depending on the voices that you have available. For instance:

- 1. If you want to use both SATB Choir and Children's Choir, and you have a balanced sound between the two groups**, you will likely want to use the regular Split Track mix.
- 2. If you want to use both SATB Choir and Children's Choir, and you want to boost the level of the SATB Choir to bring it in balance with a strong Children's Choir**, you will likely want to use the Split Track with SATB Choir over Children's Choir.
- 3. If you want to use both SATB Choir and Children's Choir, and you want to boost the level of the Children's Choir to bring it in balance with a strong SATB Choir**, you will likely want to use the Split Track mix with Children's Choir over SATB Choir.
- 4. If you want to use both SATB Choir and Children's Choir, and you want to boost ONLY the level of the SATB Choir**, you will likely want to use the Split Track mix with SATB Choir only.
- 5. If you want to use both SATB Choir and Children's Choir, and you want to boost ONLY the level of the Children's Choir**, you will likely want to use the Split Track mix with Children's Choir only.
- 6. If you want to use ONLY the SATB Choir with no Children's Choir**, you will want to use the Split Track mix with SATB Choir only.

For additional comments regarding the use of the Accompaniment CD, please refer to the free downloadable PDF entitled "Accompaniment CD Performance Notes" on our website at www.clearcallmusic.com.

How to make your own recording using these tracks

In the event you and your choir would be interested in making a recording of your performance of this work, whether for sale or to be given away, we have provided you with the Stereo Tracks on this Accompaniment CD so that the process can be fairly simple. To do so, written permission will need to be secured from both ClearCall Music for the use of the recorded master, and from the copyright owners of the songs. For more details of how to do this and what is required, please visit our website at www.clearcallmusic.com.

Separate Organ part available

The song, "Sing Noel, Sing Hallelujah," was recorded with organ, brass and percussion. In speaking with several church musicians who have given me input to the creation of this work, it was suggested how helpful it might be to have an organ part written specifically for each of the four songs instead of just the one where an organ was used. So, a separate organ part has been created for each of the four songs, adapting some of the orchestration in the part. The organ accompaniment parts are available individually or as a part of the entire Orchestration CD-ROM.

Separate Anthems available

If by chance you choose not to perform the entire work, we have made each of the four songs available for purchase separately so that you will have access to them without having to purchase the entire collection. We hope that this is helpful, particularly to those of you who prefer to find songs that you can build into your own special program.

IN CLOSING

It is an honor to be serving alongside you in your music ministry. We hope that you will find *A MANGER SUITE* useful in your music program. Please let us know how you've been able to use it...we are always interested. Again, feel free to contact me directly by sending an email using the email form under the "Contact Us" tab of my website: www.clearcallmusic.com. It will come directly to me.

Blessings, and may you have a joyous Christmas season.

Don Cason
President
ClearCall Music