

Project Information

Shepherds and Angels by Pamela J. Marshall Old American Christmas Songs for SATB chorus, harp and violin

Shepherds and Angels is a set of Christmas songs for SATB chorus, violin and harp is modeled after Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* and Conrad Susa's Spanish set *Carols and Lullabies*. My new settings feature old American Christmas tunes, accompanied by harp and violin, sometimes played in a fiddle style.

I've selected tunes from various old collections: *Southern Harmony*, the shape-note songbook from the 1850s; Ruth Crawford Seeger's wonderful collection, *American Folk Songs for Christmas*; and tunes collected by John Jacob Niles, who brought the traditional tune "I wonder as I wander" to the attention of all of us. Some of these early American songs have a simple directness, and others have more pompous verses with vigorous imagery of "celestial fire" and the occasional "awful trumpet". I have not arranged the tunes in a narrative, but alternated between songs of angels announcing to the shepherds and lullabies for baby Jesus.

The violin and harp are featured in the introduction and in interludes and preludes to the carols.

Some of the tunes that will be part of the piece include:

Exultation (by Humphreys, from *Southern Harmony*, No. 88)

Rise Up Shepherd and Follow (from *Religious Folk Songs of the Negro, As Sung on the Plantations*, 1909)

Jesus, Jesus Rest Your Head (collected by John Jacob Niles, date and source unknown, probably somewhere in Southern Appalachia)

The Babe of Bethlehem (by William Walker, from *Southern Harmony*)

Shepherds in Judea (Tune: Emanuel, by William Billings, verses from Ruth Crawford Seeger's Christmas collection)

Oh, Mary and the Baby, Sweet Lamb (from *Archive of American Folk Song*, Library of Congress)

Restoration & Cradle Hymn --two very similar tunes (words from a poem by Isaac Watts, English hymn writer of the early 1700s. The tune Restoration is from *Southern Harmony*, No. 5b, no composer given. Cradle Hymn is from *Devil's Ditties* by Jean Thomas, 1931, published by Hatfield. The tune of Cradle Hymn is from a Tennessee singer, according to R.C.Seeger)

Jesus Born in Beth'ny (collected by John Jacob Niles. Recorded in Virginia in 1932)

Rejoice My Friends (Tune: Knoxville by William Walker, from *Southern Harmony*)