

In the Month of January

For SATB Choir or solo-voice ensemble

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In the Month of January

Words

'Twas in the month of January, the hills all clad with snow,
And over the hills and valleys I carelessly did go.
'Twas there I spied a pretty, fair maid, with a salt tear in her eye.
She had a baby in her arms and bitter she did cry.

"O cruel was my father who barred the door to me,
And cruel was my mother, this dreadful crime to see,
And cruel was my own to love for to change his mind for gold,
And cruel was the bitter wind that pierced my heart with cold.

For the taller that a palm tree grows, the sweeter is the bark,
And the fairer that a young man speaks, the falser is his heart.
He will kiss you and embrace you 'til he thinks he has you won,
Then he'll go away and leave you all for some other one."

So come all you fair and tender maids, a warning take by me,
And never try to build your nest at the top of a high tree,
For the leaves they will all wither, and the branches will decay,
And the beauties of a false young man will all soon fade away.

Notes on arrangement style and suggested teaching sequence

This arrangement is designed to enable an efficient, fun learning process, with minimal note-bashing, and plenty of unison singing. The harmonies are influenced by casual observations about traditional harmony singing that I made during my years of touring with Northumbrian folk bands. I noticed that harmonies tend to have very intuitive relationships with melody lines, since they are generally developed by individual singers, either from the melody itself, or from other harmony lines, rather than by one arranger with a top-down conception of the overall harmonisation. Despite *being* a single arranger with a 'top-down' perspective on this harmonisation myself, I've tried to preserve the spirit of this approach, by designing a harmonic structure that branches out from the melody line in stages, with each part subtly developing a previous one (or the melody), so that everyone can learn continuously, even when not focusing on their own part, in a natural, 'low-stress' manner. The learning sequence below is one suggested way of achieving this, with regular opportunities for revision. But it's a suggestion, not an instruction. I don't mean to imply that fellow choir leaders should follow this sequence like a checklist in rehearsals! It should be interpreted more as a rough guide, to read and absorb (very approximately) in advance... and discard entirely if not suitable! Every choir is different. In my experience, the arrangement can be memorised aurally in c. 3 hours. Learning with the score is of course much faster. – SC

Fig. 1: In the Month of January, main melody

The image shows a musical score for the main melody of the song 'In the Month of January'. It consists of four staves of music in treble clef, with lyrics written below each staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The dynamics are marked as *mf*, *f*, *mf*, and *mp* across the staves. The lyrics are: 'Twas in the month of Jan - u - a - ry, the hills all clad with snow, And ov - er the hills and val - leys I care-less - ly did go 'Twas there I spied a pret - ty fair maid, with a salt tear in her eye, She had a ba - by in her arms and bit - ter she did cry.

mf

'Twas in the month of Jan - u - a - ry, the hills all clad with snow, And

f *mf*

ov - er the hills and val - leys I care-less - ly did go 'Twas

there I spied a pret - ty fair maid, with a salt tear in her eye, She

mp

had a ba - by in her arms and bit - ter she did cry.

Verses 1 and 4

These two verses have the same notes, so when it comes to learning verse 4, the process below can be repeated more quickly, with a focus on getting to grips with text underlay.

1. Teach the whole choir the melody (Fig. 1), in unison.
2. Teach line 1 soprano harmony.
3. Sing line 1 all together ('all together' meaning full SATB).
4. Teach line 2 soprano harmony, with the option for altos to join in, since their harmony only diverges by one note, on the final cadence.
5. Teach line 2 alto harmony.
6. Put line 2 soprano and alto harmonies together.
7. Sing line 2 all together.
8. Put lines 1–2 together, with all parts, rehearsing individual parts and/or revising harmonies as needed.
9. Revise lines 3–4 melody with tenors and basses.
10. Teach line 3 tenor harmony.
11. Optionally sing the whole of verse 1 with tenors and basses, focusing on the emergence of the tenor harmony in line 3.
12. Teach line 3 soprano harmony, then rehearse the transition from lines 1+2 into 3.
13. Teach line 3 alto harmony, then rehearse the transition from lines 1+2 into 3.
14. Sing line 3 all together.
15. Revise line 4 melody (alto, tenor, and bass).
16. Teach line 4 soprano harmony (exactly the same as line 1).
17. Sing verse 1 all together.
18. Rehearse individual parts as needed.
19. Sing verse 1 all together, again.

Verses 2 and 3

These two verses have exactly the same notes, but are printed on separate systems in the score, because of minor differences in dynamics and text underlay. As with verses 1+4, the process below can be repeated for verse 3, once verse 2 has been taught, with the focus on differences in dynamics and text underlay.

1. Teach alto line 1 melody, giving sopranos the option to join in, and pointing out the important difference from verse 1 in up-beat notes. A historical point of interest (which will help singers to remember this potentially confusing difference) is that in Gregorian chant and other medieval genres, it was typical for pieces to begin with a rising fifth (as a sort of 'call to attention'), but not repeat the gesture again during the rest of the piece.

2. Teach/revise line 1 soprano harmony (the same as verse 1).
3. Put line 1 soprano and alto parts together.
4. Optionally repeat the process for line 4, pointing out that line 4 is a note-for-note repetition of line 1 in every verse.
5. Teach line 1 tenor harmony (pointing out that both tenor and bass parts retain the rising fifth from the first-verse melody, but in an accompanying role).
6. Teach line 1 bass harmony.
7. Sing line 1 all together.
8. Optionally repeat steps 5–7 for line 4.
9. Teach lines 2–3 soprano melody, and optionally revise the whole verse, with lines 1+4, encouraging altos to join in with lines 1+4.
10. Teach lines 2–3 alto harmony and repeat several times.
11. Put lines 2–3 soprano and alto parts together.
12. Put lines 2–3 soprano and alto parts together, revising individually if needed.
13. Sing the whole of verse 2 with sopranos and altos, giving tenors and basses the option to join in with line 1+4.
14. Repeat/rehearse sections of soprano and alto parts if needed.
15. Teach lines 2–3 tenor harmony and repeat several times.
16. Sing tenor line for the whole of verse 2.
17. Teach lines 2–3 bass harmony and repeat several times.
18. Sing bass line for the whole of verse 2.
19. Sing verse 2 with tenors and basses.
20. Sing verse 2 with sopranos and altos.
21. Sing verse 2 all together.
22. Revise individual parts as needed.
23. Sing verse 2 all together, again.

In the Month of January

TRAD. ARR. S CONNER

S.A. *unis.*
mf

1. 'Twas in the month of Jan - u - a - ry, the hills all clad with snow, And_
4. So_ come you fair and ten - der maids, a warn - ing take by me, And_

T.B.
mf
T.B. unis.

6

ov - er the hills and val - leys I_ care - less - ly did go. 'Twas_
nev - er_ try to build your_ nest at the top of a high tree, For the

T.B.
f *mf*

10

there I spied a pret - ty fair_ maid, with a salt tear in her eye, She_
leaves they will all with - er, and the bran - ches will de - cay, And the

T.B.
unis.

14

had a ba - by in her arms_ and bit - ter she did cry.
beaut - ies of a false young man_ will all soon fade a - way.

T.B.
mp *Fine*

S. *f*

A. 2."O_ cruel was my fath - er who barred the door to me, And

T. *f*

B.

22 *ff* *f*

S. *ff* *f*

A. cruel_ was my moth - er, this dread - ful crime to see, And

T. *ff* *f*

B.

26 *ff* *f* *unis.*

S. *ff* *f* *unis.*

A. cruel_ was my own true love for to change his mind for gold, And

T. *ff* *f*

B.

30 *mf* *mf*

S. *mf*

A. cruel_ was the bit - ter wind that pierced my heart with cold.

T. *mf*

B.

34 *mf*

S. A. *mf*

3."For the tal - ler that a palm tree grows, the sweet - er is the bark, And the

T. B. *mf*

39 *f* *mf*

S. A. *f* *mf*

fair - er___ that a young man speaks, the fal - ser is___ his heart. He will

T. B. *f* *mf*

43 *unis.*

S. A. *unis.*

kiss you and em - brace___ you 'til he thinks he has you won, Then he'll

T. B.

47 *mp*

S. A. *mp*

go a-way and leave___ you all for some oth - er one."

T. B. *mp*

D.C. al Fine