

# Evening Prayer (Abendsegen) - Engelbert Humperdinck (Original German - Adelheid Wette/ English translation - David Pountney)

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## Grading

Challenging

## About this song

The 'Evening Prayer' is a famous duet from the fairy tale opera *Hansel and Gretel*. It is sung by the two main characters (Hansel and Gretel) during Act II. The opera was originally sung in German and first performed in Germany in 1839. The libretto for the opera was written by Humperdinck's sister, Adelheid Wette and based on the Brothers Grimm fairy tale. The song is set when the children are in the woods. The Sandman comes to send them to sleep, sprinkling sand in their eyes. The children sing their Evening Prayer and, falling asleep, dream of angels watching over them.

## Vocal range

An 11th



## Vocal format

Unison/independent parts

## Themes/subjects

Opera/Religion/Prayer

## Musical elements

Texture and duration

## Musical characteristics

Different vocal textures, unison and two-part harmony, use of dotted rhythms.

## Exercises

- Stand with your back straight, feet slightly apart facing five minutes to one. Exhale out for four beats, breathe in for four beats and as you exhale sing the first note of the song (C) to 'Oo' for a count of 4 beats. Concentrate on the quality of the tone, repeat if necessary.
- Using your thumbs and fingers tap all over your forehead as fast as you can. Keep tapping and move over the top of your head and down towards the back of your neck. Do the same but start from your feet, move up to your legs and back up towards your neck.
- Then ask them to echo back the first phrase of the song sung by yourself on one note (C) using the same rhythm (see characteristic rhythm below). Gradually change to use a higher pitch and ensure that all learners give an accurate response.
- Demonstrate the characteristic rhythm of the song:



## Recommended C nSing exercises

- Body exercise 6 (Posture, standing and sitting)
- Breathing exercise 2 (Mirror image)
- Vocal exercise 1 (It's so cool)
- Vocal exercise 9 (Sneeze)

## Teaching and learning

- Begin by reading slowly through the lyrics of the first verse (bar 3 –10). Listen to a recording of the melody going over any words that are unfamiliar to learners or difficult to pronounce.
- Listen with learners to the first verse of the recording. After listening once, ask learners to listen again, this time joining in by clapping and chanting the rhythm.
- When learners are familiar with the words, start with the melody of (Part 1) in unison. Sing or play the first phrase a number of times, preferably unaccompanied or using the C nSing backing track provided.
- Attempt to work through the verse, make sure that all learners follow the part accurately and concentrate on accuracy of rhythm and pitch.
- Perform the first verse in unison with the recording and remind learners to sing through all the phrases and to sustain the long note at the end of each phrase.
- When all learners are confident with the melody of the first verse introduce the new words in the second verse and sing in unison. If learners struggle with a specific phrase, ask them to listen to you or the track and then join in.
- You may find that learning the melody is enough for one session and decide to tackle the second harmony part (part 2) in the following session.
- When all learners are confident with the melody in both verses, divide them into two equal groups. Give the Red group the melody (Part 1) and the Purple group the harmony (Part 2).
- Introduce Part 2 of the first verse to the Purple Group a phrase at a time. The rhythm is in the main the same as Part 1, the first note (C) is in unison with part 1. It is a challenge to ensure secure intonation.
- After practicing both parts thoroughly, try to perform in two parts with the recording.

# Evening Prayer

## Next steps

- ♪ This song has a contrapuntal/polyphonic texture in the second verse. After practicing both parts thoroughly, try to perform in two parts with the recording, singing all the verses expressively.
- ♪ Try to vary the performance. For example, begin with a solo voice in Verse 1, duet in Verse 2, and the whole class in the repeat of both verses. After experimenting with different vocal textures, try to vary the dynamics in different sections of the song. For example, begin with quiet dynamics in the first verse, crescendo through the second verse, and a diminuendo on the last phrase.
- ♪ Try to perform in two part harmony without any accompaniment to encourage learners to listen carefully to the sound of the harmony. Words need to be very clear, with strong consonants and focused vowels.

## Performing, composing and appraising

- ♪ Ask learners to listen to the recording of the song and comment on its structure, texture, pace and the mood and atmosphere. Discuss how the song conveys the emotions of the story behind the lyrics.
- ♪ Learners could listen to other instrumental and vocal arias/choruses from the opera *Hansel and Gretel* and identify similarities and differences between each piece. If necessary, remind learners of the correct vocabulary and encourage them to identify the main characteristics.
- ♪ Divide learners into smaller groups and ask each group to compose its own short vocal prayer. Limit the melody to the pentatonic scale (CDFGA), and encourage learners to create suitable lyrics and rhythm. Give them all an opportunity to perform to the other groups, and appraise each other's performances.

## Assessment for learning and developing thinking

### Questioning

#### Tool: Group responses

- ♪ What kind of atmosphere does this song create? How?
- ♪ What is the structure of this song? Explain your answer.
- ♪ How many beats are there in each bar? Does it change at all?

### Feedback

#### Tool: How to improve

Show learners through target setting how to improve. A suitable target for some learners might be to sustain the high pitched notes in the verses and for others, it might be focus on achieving crisp diction, you could demonstrate yourself or by playing a recording. After giving time to improve check that targets have been reached.

### Self- and peer assessment

#### Tool: Learner-to-learner dialogue

Ask learners to take it in turns to be the teacher when discussing the performance and to ask questions. You may need to give them some suggestions of possible questions, for example:

- ♪ Was this a hard or easy song to learn? Why?
- ♪ What do you like/dislike about this song?