

Silent night

Franz Xaver Gruber arr. Owain Gethin Davies



Grading

Intermediate

About this song

This is a popular Christmas carol. The original words – ‘Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht’ – were written by Father Joseph Mohr. The melody was composed by Franz Xaver Gruber.

Vocal range

A 12th



Vocal format

Unison/independent parts

Themes/subjects

Religion/Christian/Christmas

Musical elements

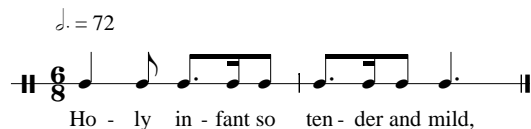
Texture and structure

Musical characteristics

Unison and three-part harmony, simple strophic structure

Exercises

- Ask learners to stand with their backs straight, and feet slightly apart, facing ‘five minutes to one’.
- Learners should blow out for four beats, and then slowly breathe in through their mouth to a silent count of four, and out to a count of eight, concentrating on producing an even flow of air. Repeat the exercise, this time asking learners to blow out and then breathe back in through their nose.
- Ask learners to rotate their shoulders backwards then forwards, together and individually, in extreme and subtle movements. (Remind learners about good posture when singing, whether standing or sitting.)
- Try a simple activity of ‘repeat after me ...’
- Say or sing different words from the song, such as ‘silent’, ‘dawl’, ‘stille’ and ‘sanctaidd’.
- Demonstrate the characteristic rhythm of the song:



Recommended CânSing 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

- Listen with learners to the first verse of the recording. Then listen again, this time joining in by clapping and chanting the rhythm.
- When learners are familiar with the words, start with the melody (Part 1) in unison. Sing or play the first phrase (bars 5 to 8) several times, preferably unaccompanied or using the CânSing backing track. Elicit that the rhythm and pitch of the first half of this phrase are repeated exactly in the second half of the phrase.
- When learners are familiar with this, move on to the second phrase (bars 9 to 12).
- Attempt to work through the verse, making sure learners follow the part accurately. Remind learners to concentrate on singing through each phrase and to sustain the long note at the end of each phrase.
- Perform the first verse in unison with the recording, reminding learners to aim for a consistent sound quality. If learners struggle with a specific phrase, ask them to listen to you or the track and then join in.
- Introduce Part 2 to everyone, a phrase at a time. This part begins before the melody with a long-held note (C). This is followed by two held notes (C and E₂) against the first phrase of the melody. Most of the harmony part follows the same rhythm as the melody, and in the second phrase (bars 9 to 12), the harmony part is sung mainly a third lower than the melody.
- When everyone is confident with Part 2, divide learners into two equal groups. Give one group the melody (Part 1) and the other group the harmony (Part 2), and try to perform with or without the recording. Change the parts around so that everyone has an opportunity to sing both parts.

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Next steps

- ♪ This song calls for smooth (legato) singing, so encourage learners to breathe two phrases at a time.
- ♪ Encourage learners to sing through the long vowel sounds to develop a consistent sound in all phrases.
- ♪ This song has four verses and a third harmony part. Read through the Welsh lyrics of Verse 2 and the German lyrics of Verse 3, and practise singing in unison with the recording. Divide the class into three, and try singing the verses in three-part harmony.
- ♪ When learners are feeling confident, try to perform the song without any accompaniment, as this will encourage them to listen carefully to the quality of the sound.

Performing, composing and appraising

- ♪ In pairs, learners could compose their own melody to the rhythm and lyrics of this Christmas carol. Ask learners to use the pentatonic scale (CDEGA) and compose a new melody for all four phrases. Encourage learners to start and end with the home note C, using their voices or tuned instruments. Ask pairs to perform to the class and appraise each other's work.
- ♪ Listen to another recording of 'Silent night' and ask learners to comment on timbre and pace.
- ♪ Teach a contrasting Christmas carol, for instance, 'We wish you a merry Christmas'. When learners are familiar with this, ask them to compare both carols, commenting on structure, pace and rhythm. Discuss the qualities of an effective Christmas carol.
- ♪ Divide the learners into small groups and give them time to compose their own call and response and movements. 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 else might we arrange a performance of this song?

Feedback

Tool: Comments only

Give specific feedback to groups on their attention to duration and pitch. You may need to demonstrate the long-held notes at the ends of phrases and the high notes in the penultimate phrase.

Self- and peer assessment

Tool: Peer assessment

Ask learners to give comments on each other's work. For example:

- ♪ Remember to sustain the long notes at the end of each phrase.
- ♪ Try to articulate the words clearly.
- ♪ Listen carefully to your tuning on high notes and in harmony parts.