

The Great Nativity

lyrics based on Gaelic oral tradition
as collected and translated in the 19th century by Alexander Carmichael

set to music by Sheena Phillips

for SATB voices a cappella

Alexander Carmichael (1832 – 1912) made many 'collecting pilgrimages' to the Hebridean islands of western Scotland during the second half of the 19th century. Aware that use of the Gaelic tongue was dying out, he was dedicated to recording the fine poetry and song of the Gaelic oral tradition. He transcribed – and to some extent edited – numerous lyrics, brought together in the 1992 publication *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns & Incantations* (Floris Books, Edinburgh).

This setting of a Christmas lyric (simply titled 'Christmas Carol' in Carmichael's collection) starts in an atmosphere of hushed anticipation, moving to a declamation of the reasons that Christmas night is celebrated. A long joyful section follows, first elaborating the Christmas message and then repeating phrases of the declamation, to a background mantra of the phrase 'this night is the long night'. The rhythmic Gaelic refrain 'Hù ri vi ho hù' weaves through the whole piece in many guises - from intoned unison at the start to joyful improvisation at the end.

duration c 5:30

perusal score – not for rehearsal or performance

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The Great Nativity

This night is the long night,
Hù ri vi ho hù
It will snow and it will drift,
Hù ri vi ho hù
White snow there will be,
Hù ri vi ho hù
White moon there will be,
Hù ri vi ho hù
This night is the eve of the Great Nativity,
Hù ri vi ho hù
This night is born Mary's Son.
Hù ri vi ho hù
This night is born Jesus, Son of the King of glory,
Hù ri vi ho hù
This night is born to us the root of our joy,
Hù ri vi ho hù
This night gleamed the sun of the mountains high,
Hù ri vi ho hù
This night gleamed sea and shore together,
Hù ri vi ho hù
This night was born Christ the King of greatness.
Hù ri vi ho hù
Ere it was heard that the Glory was come,
Hù ri vi ho hù
Heard was the wave upon the strand.
Hù ri vi ho hù
Ere it was heard that His foot was on earth,
Hù ri vi ho hù
Heard was the song of the angels glorious.
Hù ri vi ho hù
This night is the long night.
Glowed to Him wood and tree,
Glowed to Him mount and sea,
Glowed to Him land and plain,
When that His foot was come to earth.

Pronunciation: the Gaelic phrase *Hù ri vi ho hù* (roughly equivalent to 'Tra la la' in an English song) is pronounced 'hoo ri vi hoh hoo' (IPA hu: ri vi hɔ hu:)

Alexander Carmichael (1832 – 1912)

Extracted (with a few minor word changes and omissions) from 'Christmas Carol', collected and translated by Alexander Carmichael, published in *Carmina Gadelica: hymns and incantations collected in the highlands and islands of Scotland in the last century*, Lindisfarne Press 1992. (Public domain).

The Great Nativity

based on Gaelic oral tradition

Alexander Carmichael

Sheena Phillips

Moderato ♩ = 63 *in hushed anticipation*

Soprano (S): This night is the long night,
It will snow and it will drift,

Alto (A): This night is the long night,
It will snow and it will drift,

Tenor (T): This night is the long night,
It will snow and it will drift,

Bass (B): Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Piano (Pno.): *(for rehearsal only)*

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perusal score - not for rehearsal or performance

9 *p* poco marcato *p*

S White snow there will be, White moon there will be,

A *pp* *p* *pp* *mp*
 White snow, Hù ri vi ho hù White moon, Hù ri vi ho hù

T *pp* *p* *pp* *mp*
 8 White snow, Hù ri vi ho hù White moon, Hù ri vi ho hù

B *pp* *p* *pp* *mp*
 White snow, Hù ri vi ho hù White moon, Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno.

subito più forte

13 *mf* *poco f*

S This night Hù ri vi ho hù is the eve Hù ri vi ho hù of the

A *mf* *poco f*
 This night Hù ri vi ho hù is the eve Hù ri vi ho hù of the

T *mf*
 8 This night is the eve of the

B *mf*
 This night is the eve of the

Pno. *mf*

17 *div. f* *mf* *p* *pp*

S Great Na-ti-vi-ty, Hù ri vi ho hù This night Hù ri vi ho hù is born

A *f* *mf* *p* *pp*

T *f* *mf* *pp*

B *f* *mf* *pp*

Pno. *f* *mf* *pp*

21 *rit.* *broadly maestoso* *mp* *f*

S Ma-ry's Son. This night is born Je - sus, Son of the King of Glo-ry.

A Ma-ry's Son. This night is born Je - sus, Son of the King of Glo-ry.

T Ma-ry's Son. *div.* This night is born Je - sus, Son of the King of Glo-ry.

B Ma-ry's Son. *mf* *f*

Pno. *mp* *f*

24 **a tempo**

S This night is born to us the root of our joy, This night gleamed the sun of the moun-tains

A This night Hù ri vi ho hù This night

T This night Hù ri vi ho hù This night

B This night Hù ri vi ho hù This night

Pno.

27

S high, This night Hù ri vi ho hù

A Hù ri vi ho hù This night Hù ri vi ho hù

T Hù ri vi ho hù This night gleamed sea and shore to - geth-er, —

B Hù ri vi ho hù This night Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno.

the great nativity 5

30

S This night Hù ri vi ho hù SA div. a 3

A This night Hù ri vi ho hù

T This night was born Christ the King of great-ness, TB div. a 3

B This night Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno.

poco più mosso c. ♩ = 69

32 with a joyful swing always let the words be heard above the ostinato *mf*

S Ere it was heard that the

A

T *mf* Hù ri vi ho hù *mp* Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar *mf* Hù ri vi ho hù *mp* Hù ri vi ho hù

B *mf* Hù ri vi ho hù *mp* Hù ri vi ho hù

32 Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno. *mf*

the great nativity 6

mf

35

S Glo-ry was come, Ere it was heard of the Glo - ry,

S *mf* Ere it was heard that the Glo-ry was come,

A Ere it was heard of the Glo - ry,

T *mf* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

B Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno. 35

38

S *mf* Heard was the wave up-on strand.

S *mf* Heard was the wave up-on the strand.

A *mf* Heard was the wave up-on the strand. *mp* Hù ri vi ho hù

T Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

B Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno. 38

the great nativity 7

41

mf

S
Ere it was heard

S

A
Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

T
f Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar
Ere it was heard that his Foot was on earth,

B
Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno.

43

mf that his Foot was on earth,

S
mf Ere it was heard that his Foot was on earth,

S
mf Ere it was heard that his Foot was on earth,

A
mp Ere it was heard that his Foot was on earth,

T
mp Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar
mp Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

B
mp Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno.

the great nativity 8

45 *f*

S Heard was the song of the an - gels glo - ri - ous.

S Heard was the song of the an - gels glo - ri - ous. *f*

A

T *mf* Heard was the song

8 *mf* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar *mf* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

B *mf* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno. *f*

47 *mp*

S Hù ri vi ho hù

S Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

A of the an - gels glo - ri - ous. *mp*

T Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi

Bar Hù ri vi ho hù

B *mp* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno. *mp*

bring out the lyrics and the long phrases

the great nativity 9

50

p

S: Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

S: *mp* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

A: This night is the

T: *p* ho hù Hù ri ri vi Hù ri

Bar: *mf* This night is born to us the root of our joy,

B: *mp* This night is the

Pno. 50

52

S: Hù ri ri vi Hù ri ri vi

S: Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

A: long night,

T: *p* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar: *p* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

B: long night,

Pno. 52

poco a poco più forte

the great nativity 10

54 *mp*

S *Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

S *Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

A *mp*
This night is the

T *Hù ri ri vi Hù ri ri vi*

Bar *mf*
This night gleamed the sun of the moun - tains high,

B *mp*
This night is the

Pno. *mf*

56

S *Hù ri ri vi Hù ri ri vi*

S *Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

A *long* *mp* *night,*

T *Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

Bar *mp*
Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

B *long* *night,*

Pno. *mp*

the great nativity II

poco a poco più forte

58 *mp*

S *Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

S *mf Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

A *This night is the*

T *f This night gleamed sea and shore to - geth - er,*

Bar *This night is the*

B *Hù ri ri vi Hù ri ri vi*

Pno.

60 *mf*

S *Hù ri Hù ri vi ho hù ri vi Hù ri vi ho hù*

S *mf Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

A *long night,*

T *Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

Bar *long night,*

B *Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù*

Pno.

the great nativity 12

62 *mp*
S Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù
S *mf* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù
A This night is the
T *mp* Hù ri ri vi Hù ri Hù ri vi ho hù
Bar *mf* This night is the
B *f* This night is the
62 This night was born Christ the King of great-ness,
Pno. 62
S Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù
S Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù
A long night,
T Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù
Bar long night,
B *mp* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù
64
Pno. 64

poco a poco diminuendo

the great nativity 13

66

S *p* Hù ri vi Hù ri vi ho hù

S *mp* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

A This night is the

T *p* Hù ri ri vi Hù ri ri vi

Bar This night is the

B *p* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno.

68

S Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri Hù ri

S Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

A long night,

T Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar long night,

B Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno.

the great nativity 14

70 *mp*

S Ere it was heard that the Glo - ry was come, _____

S *p* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

A This night is the

T *p* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar This night is the

B *p* Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno. 70

72 *p*

S Hù ri vi ho hù

S Hù ri vi ho hù

A long night.

T Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Bar long night,

B Hù ri vi ho hù Hù ri vi ho hù

Pno. 72

74

pp

S *mp* *pp* *p*

ri vi ho hù

mp

Heard was the song of the an - gels glo - ri - ous.

A

T *pp* *p*

ri vi Hù ri vi

Bar

p

is the long night.

B

Hù ri vi ho hù

74

Pno.

mosso ♩ = 100

77

p *mf* *mf* *pp tremolo** *mf* *pp tremolo** *mp* *p* *mf*

S

Glowed to Him wood and tree, Glowd to Him mount and sea,

A

Glowd to Him mount and sea,

T

Glowd

B

Glowd

77

Pno.

p *mf*

* tremolo on the 'o' vowel = "oh oh oh oh oh"

the great nativity 16

82 *div. f*

S
Glowed to Him land and plain, *div. p* Glowd,

A
Glowed to Him land and plain, *p* Glowd,

T
Glowed to Him land and plain, *p* Glowd,

B
Glowed land and plain, *p* Glowd,

Pno. *f*

allargando ♩ = 72

86 *mf*

S
When that His foot was come to earth.

A
When that His foot was come to earth.

T
When that His foot was come to earth.

B
When that His foot was come to earth.

Pno. *mf*