

Softly Gather Shepherds

SATB with Organ Accompaniment
Christmas Eve, Christmastide

The hymn “Ave Maris Stella” from the *Vespers* of 1610 by Claudio Monteverdi provides the music for this setting. My arrangement draws from various sources, including numerous recordings and live performances. I am particularly indebted to the public-domain edition of the *Vespers* by John Kilpatrick (2009), and as a touchstone I have used photographic copies of the manuscript *Sanctissimae Virgini Missa* (Venice, 1610) provided by Performer’s Edition.

“Ave Maris Stella” comprises seven stanzas of four lines each. It begins:

Ave maris stella,	Hail star of the sea,
Dei Mater alma,	dear Mother of God,
atque semper Virgo,	ever virgin,
felix caeli porta.	blessed heaven’s portal.

For this Christmas anthem Marian has taken the image of *portal* and transferred it to the Bethlehem stable, approached by wondering shepherds. She adopts the Latin poem’s meter, 6666 trochaic. I have matched English syllable placements with the Latin placements of Monteverdi’s musical setting, thereby keeping alive his intricate interweavings, marvelous cross-rhythms, and tender harmonic suspensions.

Albert Blackwell
January 4, 2012

Softly Gather Shepherds

Marian Willard Blackwell

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)*
Arr. Albert Blackwell

Gently flowing

The musical score is arranged in five systems. The first four systems are for vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. Each system contains a staff with a treble clef (except for Bass which has a bass clef) and lyrics. The lyrics are: "1. Soft - ly, soft - ly ga - ther shep - herds, through". The organ part is in the fifth system, consisting of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a grand staff bracket on the left. The organ part provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. The tempo/mood marking "Gently flowing" is placed above the first staff.

* "Ave Maris Stella" from the *Vespers* of 1610

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this sta - - ble por - tal, see him frail and
 this sta - - ble por - tal, see him frail
 this sta - - ble por - tal, see him frail and
 this sta - - ble por - tal, see him frail

sleep - ing, God as in - - fant mor - tal.
 and sleep - ing, God as in - fant mor - tal.
 sleep - - - ing, God as in - fant mor - tal.
 and sleep - ing, God as in - - - fant mor - tal.

[Interlude]

Interlude

(To be played after verses 1, 2 and 3)

Organ

The first system of music is in 4/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays block chords: G4-B4-D5 (with a sharp sign), A4-C5-E5, B4-D5-G5, and A4-C5-E5. The left hand (bass clef) plays a simple bass line: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3.

The second system continues the 4/4 piece. The right hand plays chords: G4-B4-D5, A4-C5-E5, B4-D5-G5, and A4-C5-E5. The left hand plays: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3. The right hand has some melodic movement in the final two measures, with notes like G4, A4, B4, and C5.

The third system concludes the interlude. The right hand plays chords: G4-B4-D5, A4-C5-E5, B4-D5-G5, and A4-C5-E5. The left hand plays: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3. The right hand features a melodic flourish in the final measure, ending on a G4 note with a fermata.

Women

2. See his fin - gers qui - ver, hands

Organ

This system contains the first two staves of music. The top staff is for the Women's voice, and the bottom two staves are for the Organ. The lyrics are: "2. See his fin - gers qui - ver, hands". The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The organ accompaniment features chords and moving lines in both the right and left hands.

now weak - ly cling - ing, one day to be wound -

This system contains the second two staves of music. The lyrics are: "now weak - ly cling - ing, one day to be wound -". The musical notation continues with the voice and organ parts.

ed, be - ne - dic - - tion bring - ing.

This system contains the final two staves of music. The lyrics are: "ed, be - ne - dic - - tion bring - ing.". The music concludes with a final chord in the organ.

[Interlude]

Men

3. Flesh from flesh and spi - rit, new -

Organ

- born child of Ma - ry, ru - mored by the an - - -

gels, love ex - traor - - - di - na - ry.

[Interlude]

Soprano
4. See his mo - - ther fold him, nur -

Alto
4. See his mo - - ther fold him, nur -

Tenor
4. See his mo - - ther fold him, nur -

Bass
4. See his mo - - ther fold him, nur -

Organ

ture our sal - va - tion, nour - ish our sus -

ture our sal - va - tion, nour - ish our

ture our sal - va - tion, nour - ish our sus -

ture our sal - va - tion, nour - ish our

tain - - - er, bear - er of cre - a - tion.

sus - tain - er, bear - er of cre - a - tion.

tain - - - er, bear - er of cre - a - tion.

sus - tain - er, bear - er of cre - a - tion.

sus - tain - er, bear - er of cre - a - tion.