

# Simple Gifts

American Shaker Hymn

The musical score is written in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of six staves of music. The lyrics are: 'Tis a gift to be sim-ple, 'Tis a gift to be free. 'Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be, And when we find our - selves in the place just right, It will be in the val - ley of love and de-light. When true sim - plic - i - ty is gained, To bow and to bend we shan't be a-shamed, To turn, turn will be our de-light, Till by turn - ing, turn - ing we come round right.

Chords indicated above the staff: F, F, F, C7, C7, F, F, C7, F, F, F, C7, F, F.

## Accompaniment voice chords

The accompaniment voice chords are shown in a single staff with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The first measure contains the F chord (Bb, D, F) and the second measure contains the C chord (C, E, G). Below the staff, the word 'loo.' is written under each measure, followed by a blank line for the singer to write the lyrics.

Lyrics: 'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free.  
'Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be.  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
It will be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gained.  
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed.  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come round right

## SINGING

Introduce this song first by giving students information about Shakers. This religious group wrote thousands of songs. but this is probably the best known. The principles of their religion included love, peace, purity, justice, and simplicity. If you have a recording of this song, let the students listen to the recording. (It can be found in both the Silver Burdette and Macmillan music series.) If not, sing all the way through the song. Discuss the words. The Shakers got their name because of their movements and dancing during worship so the "tum, tum" refers to these movements. This song is best taught a phrase at a time. Shaping the phrase with large semi-circle hand motions may help give the students the connected feeling of the phrase. When the students are very familiar with the song, you can have some students sing a chord accompaniment on a "loo" syllable while others sing the melody. (See music.)

## PLAYING/MOVING

This song can be easily accompanied with an autoharp, or a dulcimer to provide a simple authentic style accompaniment. The Shakers were known for their dancing, but they did not dance in partners. Dancing in trios with the men and women separated was most common.

Movement: Form rows of three boys and girls. In measures 1-16 take three steps forward then close. Circle in place to right four steps. Take three steps back and close. Circle in place to left four steps. In measures 17-32 step-close-step twice to the rhythm of two eighths-quarter note. Bow for two beats and straighten for two beats. Circle in place to right four steps. Circle left four beats.

## LISTENING

American composer Aaron Copland used this tune in his ballet score Appalachian Spring. Once the students know the song, they will enjoy listening to it in the suite. The action of the ballet. set in Pennsylvania in the spring, centers around a new farmhouse. The "Simple Gifts" theme which comes in the form of theme and variations occurs near the end. Have the students listen and discuss ways Copland varied the theme to create interest. He changes instrumentation, dynamics. tempo, rhythm and harmonies. Help the students make a listening map of the song, notating ways Copland changed the tune with each variation. Composition outline ... Theme:

Clarinet solo with flute Bridge Variation 1: duet by oboe & bassoon Bridge Variation 2: augmented theme (doubling of note values) done in canon format Bridge Variation 3: brass with march-like feel & fast notes in violin Bridge Variation -I: full orchestra, majestic with augmentation Coda: slower & more peaceful.

#### CREATING

Have the students create their own theme and variation piece. Divide the class into small groups and give each group at least one instrument that can play a melody like piano, tone bells, recorder, or xylophones and some percussion instruments. Choose a simple tune like "Twinkle, twinkle" or "Hot Cross Buns". Let the students make up one or two variations.

#### CURRICULUM CONNECTION: (Social Studies/Language Arts)

Learn about the Shakers. They were well known for the high quality of their crafts. Today the simple lines of their furniture are still very popular. Locate pictures of Shaker furniture, buildings, and crafts. Have students draw pictures of one of the items. Write stories about the item from the point of view of the item itself...how it came to be, how it was used, how it "feels" now.