Article

AMERICAN CHORAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

IJRCS

International Journal of Research in Choral Singing

The Scientific Research Journal of the American Choral Directors Association

International Journal of Research in Choral Singing
(2026) Vol. 14 1-19

Teaching Music through the Melodies of Christian Hymns: Philosophy and Application

Jody N. Blake[1]

Abstract

Historically, hymns are the bedrock of Christian church music, with their melodies echoing through time, shaping the very nature of music as we know it. These tuneful melodies often provide common patterns that shape musical understanding, teaching concepts such as scales, phrasing, and intervals, or the foundations of song. The text paired with these melodies served the utilitarian purpose of teaching basic Christian doctrines since the hymn's inception. Together, hymn tunes (melodies) and written words work in tandem to create the beauty of the Christian hymn. Alice Parker once wrote: "I sometimes think of song as an invisible presence always around us, an ever-present possibility hovering like a cloud above us." Indeed, it seems that Christian hymns always find their way into the musical canon. How do our hymns pervade the musical landscape? One reason is the melody (tune). The purpose of this philosophical paper is to substantiate hymn tunes as a resource for teaching musical concepts, specifically melody, and provide an example for instructional application. The philosophical concepts and proposed application operate within a systematic framework based on the Kodály method, Music Learning Theory, and Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP), and Alice Parker's writings.

Keywords: *hymns, melody, Kodály, Music Learning Theory, Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP), Alice Parker*

[1] The University of Tennessee at Martin, 554 University St, Martin, TN 38237, USA

Corresponding author: Jody N. Blake; email: jblake17@utm.edu

Introduction

Melody is the foundation for song, and it is through melody that musicians often experience the remarkable beauty music offers. Unfortunately, melody is regularly overlooked for other, seemingly more complex, musical elements such as harmony. The late choral composer, hymnologist, arranger, conductor, and teacher Alice Parker characterized the blatant disregard for melody as such: "We are living in a culture that doesn't value melody, one that seems to have lost touch with this primal means of expression. We are surrounded by sounds so insistent, so varied in intent and clangor, that we've forgotten how to listen to a single line."[1]

For music educators, the pedagogical value of a musical work is an immediate thought when selecting literature.[2] Music educators often analyze the elements presented within the work to determine its appropriateness for teaching. For example, few can argue the value of teaching a chorale by J. S. Bach. It contains all the varying elements of music, which provides a plethora of topics for pedagogical purposes. However, what information for teachers does a simple melody provide? Only a few music theorists and pedagogues have written at length on the topic, with many electing to focus on other elements (Kamien, 2015; Ferris & Worster, 2010; Parker, 2006).

Before delving directly into the pedagogical information melodies provide, it is prudent to examine the meaning of the word. Roger Kamien defines melody as "a series of single notes that add up to a recognizable whole."[3] Here, the word "recognizable" is essential, as it denotes a certain level of coherence with regards to the concept of melody. A melody, or the tune (as I use the two terms interchangeably throughout this paper) is something humans innately understand within a given cultural context. In a similar fashion, Jean Ferris and Larry Worster define melody as "a succession of tones logically conceived to make musical sense. [Melodies] must be organized in order to be meaningful."[4] Ferris and Worster provide a more cogent definition, utilizing the terms "logically" and "meaningful" that travels beyond Kamien's "recognizable." Ultimately, melodies are meaningful, logical, and recognizable, serving as the foundation of song that the human ear responds to with almost immediate understanding.

Songs comprise a melody, rhythm, and most of the time, a text. Melody and song were chief concerns of Alice Parker, one of the few composers to write extensively on the topics. In her book, *The Anatomy of Melody*, Parker describes song as "primary human communication," and highlights its primacy over the other musical elements, stating: "The tune itself

---

[1] Alice Parker, *The Anatomy of Melody* (GIA Publications, 2019). xiii.

[2] Throughout this paper, I use "music educators" to mean anyone who teaches music, whether in a school or church setting. Though primarily directed at choral directors, I hope this article will be useful to any music educator. Due to the religious nature of hymns, public school educators will need to exercise professional judgment in their discernment of the appropriateness of using hymns for teaching.

[3] Roger Kamien, *Music: An Appreciation* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2015), 40.

[4] Jean Ferris and Larry Worster, *Music: The Art of Listening* (Mcgraw-Hill, 2010).17.

(text + rhythm + pitch) contained, like a seed, all the elements for its growth."[5] Thus, melody provides the framework for musical growth and other compositional devices. For music educators, melodies are the beginning of musical knowledge.

Another often-ignored aspect of contemporary music education is the genre of hymns. Throughout musical history, hymnody provided a firm foundation for education, composition, and liturgy; however, as postmodernist thought prevailed, hymnody unfortunately suffered, especially in the realm of education. Hymnologist Erik Routely described hymns as "the people's music" and emphasized the hymn's role in "English thought and speech."[6]

The purpose of this philosophical paper is to investigate the melodies of Christian hymn tunes for teaching musical concepts and to provide examples of practical application. In order to establish a systematic approach, information from established music education methods such as Kodály, music learning theory, and comprehensive musicianship through performance (CMP), and Alice Parker's writings provided a theoretical framework in which to operate. A suggested practical application is then supplied based on the theoretical framework and philosophical tenets discovered within scholarly literature. Though philosophical ideas are implicit within this study and provide the foundational underpinning, the fundamental goal is practical: to provide models of skill-based and affective learning using melodies of a hymn tune.

Hymn Tunes and Singing in Early American Music Curricula

Since its beginning, American music education was closely tied to Christian hymnody. Even for the first immigrants who founded the American colonies, hymns were of great importance. These immigrants, who were Puritans, brought with them the *Ainsworth Psalter* (1612), a hymnal that contained the *Book of Psalms* and thirty-nine tunes.[7] Though these psalm-tunes were passed down mostly by oral tradition, their importance may be implicitly recognized due to their widespread dissemination. Interestingly, the first book published in America was the 1640 edition of the *Bay Psalm Book*, which persisted in various forms through the eighteenth century.[8] Among the most musical settlers in early America were the Moravians, who arrived in the 1700s.[9] Vocal music, which consisted mostly of hymns, was taught daily as part of the school curriculum.[10] Even before the proliferation and formalization of music in public schools, the hymn was part of vocal music instruction in early America.

The advent of the Singing School Movement in the 1700s ushered in a new type of music education. During this period, hymns remained the mainstay of the curriculum; however,

[5] Parker, *The Anatomy of Melody*, 3–4.

[6] Erik Routley, *Hymns and Human Life* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1959), 3–4.

[7] Michael L. Mark, *A Concise History of American Music Education* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 10.

[8] Robin A. Leaver, s.v. "Bay Psalm Book," in *Worship Music: A Concise Dictionary,* ed. Edward Foley (The Liturgical Press, 2000).

[9] Harry H. Hall, "Moravian Music Education in America, ca. 1750 to ca. 1830," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 29, no. 3 (1981): 225, doi:10.2307/3344996.

[10] Hall, "Moravian Music Education in America," 227.

the singing schools only provided a temporary solution for musical illiteracy, as there was no systematic approach to instruction or materials. It was not until Lowell Mason's relentless advocacy for public school music and fierce support of hymnody that a systematic approach became more widespread. Many of Mason's songbooks for musical instruction, such as *The Song Garden*, included religious songs (i.e., hymns).[11] In describing Mason's influence and the centrality of hymnody in American life, Peter Mercer-Taylor states:

> In the church, in the home, in the choral society, at the heart of the American musical experience was the music Americans sang themselves; at the heart of the repertoire they sang was the hymn; and at the heart of the hymn repertoire, as Lowell Mason and his highly influential circle presented it, was the question of what could be learned and, frequently, what could be borrowed from European masters.[12]

Though Mason borrowed extensively from the ideas of European composers, his writings and compositions had a profound impact on the overall trajectory of American music education and religious life. Due to Mason's implementation of European teaching methods, normal schools (i.e., teacher colleges) adopted similar instructional materials, such as the *Pestalozzian School Song Book*, which included hymns.[13] As an instructional resource, hymns provided a foundation for musical learning not only in America but throughout much of western European history.

Situating Pedagogy, Melody, and Hymns

Teaching methods and instructional strategies used in tandem with hymns date back to the Middle Ages. Using a popular medieval hymn, *Ut queant laxis*, Italian monk Guido d'Arezzo developed a method of teaching music that persists to the present day: solmization.[14] This method, later adapted by John Curwen and Sarah Glover, spread throughout the world and was later utilized by Lowell Mason in the Boston Public Schools.[15] When teaching songs, Mason arranged the solfège using the first letter of each syllable (e.g., d, r, m, and f) and taught by pattern, where the teacher demonstrated and the student repeated.[16]

---

[11] Cynthia M. Colwell and George N. Heller, "Lowell Mason's The Song Garden (1864–66): Its Background, Content, and Comparison to a Twentieth-Century Series," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 51, no. 3 (2003): 236, doi:10.2307/3345376.

[12] Peter Mercer-Taylor, "Mendelssohn in Nineteenth-Century American Hymnody," *19th-Century Music* 32, no. 3 (2009): 242, doi:10.1525/ncm.2009.32.3.235.

[13] Phillip M. Hash, "Music Instruction at Selected State Normal Schools during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 67, no. 4 (2019): 420, doi:10.1177/0022429419888740.

[14] Lydia Kee, "Medieval Methods: Guido D'Arezzo's Innovative Approaches to Music Education," *Musical Offerings* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2022): xx, doi:10.15385/jmo.2022.13.2.1.

[15] Sondra W. Howe, "Music Teaching in the Boston Public Schools, 1864–1879," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 40, no. 4 (1992): 321, doi:10.2307/3345839.

[16] Howe, "Music Teaching in the Boston Public Schools," 321.

The use of solfège and "phrase-by-phrase" teaching is still popular among music teachers today, as solfège provides a method for teaching music literacy, and teaching songs "phrase-by-phrase" provides a model to students and increases music listening.

Several studies indicate the effectiveness of using an immersion method (sometimes called "holistic" method) of teaching new songs. Klinger, Campbell, and Goolsby describe the immersion method as such: "as the teacher sings the entire song repeatedly, children gradually begin to learn the words, rhythm, and pitches."[17] Their study found that students who learned a song through immersion performed with fewer errors than students who learned using the phrase-by-phrase method.[18] In a similar, more recent study, Persellin and Bateman found that students who learned using the holistic (or immersion) approach performed with only slightly fewer errors and the result was not significant.[19] Clearly, as suggested by the limited sample size of both studies, more research is needed in this area.

While few studies explore the efficacy of hymns as pedagogical tools, research involving the use of folk songs is abundant. Hymnologist Erik Routley famously called hymns the folk song of the church; thus, there is inherent value found within folk song pedagogy.[20] Zoltan Kodály is perhaps best known for his advocacy of music literacy. Kodály opined that the Hungarian people "have provided one of the best examples of how to use folk songs for educational purposes," and further explained, "In church they joined the community, learned the hymns by ear and, before adulthood, collected a substantial repertoire of songs."[21] It is easily surmised that the folk song of the church (i.e., hymns), as Routley put it, worked within the original framework of the Kodály method. The Kodály method has become one of the foremost approaches to teaching music throughout the world. Emphasizing a child-developmental approach, the Kodály method uses the following as its tools for teaching: moveable-do solfège, rhythm syllables for counting rhythms, and Curwen hand signs, with authentic folk songs and good composed music as its primary materials.[22]

Wai-Tong Lau discusses teaching Chinese folk songs authentically in the music classroom, providing insights that are transferable to song pedagogy regardless of genre. Lau encourages the following strategies for teaching the songs: use melodic and percussion instruments to accompany singing, sing the tonal framework first (i.e., intervals and melodic patterns), and emphasize the tonal structures (i.e., scales).[23] Terms such as "structures" and "sequence" appear in much of the literature regarding the pedagogy of song. While Lau emphasizes

---

[17] Rita Klinger, Patricia S. Campbell, and Thomas Goolsby, "Approaches to Children's Song Acquisition: Immersion and Phrase-by-Phrase," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 46, no. 1 (1998): 25, doi:10.2307/3345757.

[18] Klinger, Campbell, and Goolsby, "Approaches to Children's Song Acquisition," 32.

[19] Diane Persellin and Laura Bateman, "A comparative study on the effectiveness of two song-teaching methods: holistic vs. phrase-by-phrase," *Early Child Development and Care* 179, no. 6 (2009): 799, doi:10.1080/03004430902944841.

[20] Erik Routley, *Christian Hymns Observed: When In Our Music God is Glorified* (Prestige Publications, 1982), 3.

[21] Zoltan Kodály, "Folk Song in Pedagogy," *Music Educators Journal* 53, no. 7 (March 1967): 59, doi:10.2307/3391025.

[22] Lois Choksy, *The Kodály Method: Comprehensive Music Education from Infant to Adult* (Prentice-Hall, 1974), 15–23.

[23] Wai-Tong Lau, "Teaching Chinese Folk Songs with an Authentic Approach," *Music Educators Journal* 94, no. 2 (November 2007): 26, doi:10.1177/002743210709400206.

authenticity and sequence when approaching Chinese folk song, Heil espouses the general use of melody for teaching improvisation. Regarding the usefulness of melody, Heil states:

> Beginning the improvisation process by learning melody is most effective in developing the ear for melodic-based improvisation. Melody is a fundamental building block for musicians, serving as a natural approach to music learning and improvisation that can also serve as a basis from which new ideas can be generated.[24]

Melody is at the heart of music education, as it provides a basis for understanding tonal and rhythmic relationships and leads to further musical concepts like improvisation. As part of an ever-growing body of song literature, hymns distinguish themselves, specifically given the variety of hymn tunes available to musicians and music educators.

The Value of Christian Hymnody

I explored the use and applications of Christian hymns for teaching choral music in my doctoral research. Though a majority of the music educators surveyed found hymns useful for teaching, especially in regard to sight-singing and part-singing, the results were mixed concerning the usefulness of melody.[25] This finding was somewhat puzzling, as melody is often viewed as the primary building block for sight-singing and part-singing. When I began follow-up research on the topic of melody, I found the literature pool sparse, with few authors who wrote on the topic, save Alice Parker. Furthermore, hymns provide accessible melodies and a pathway for early musical success.

But why specifically hymns? To reiterate Routley's definition, hymns are the folk song of the church, and the song literature is as varied and accessible as many other types of music. Even within the body of song provided by a single composer, such as Lowell Mason, variety may be discovered. Brandon points out that Mason's hymn tunes "evolved almost like folk songs" and "[he] was constantly revising his own music."[26] In her investigation of hymns as communal song, Hamm correctly asserts that hymnody provides us with a "rich reservoir" of song that stretches back over two thousand years.[27] Regrettably, Hamm also concludes that we are losing a heritage of Christian song, especially in the educational system, which, in turn, has led to the decline of choral singing.[28] Parker characterizes the cultural loss of hymnody in this way: "Our society has not fostered this genre in either poetry or music. We

[24] Leila Heil, "Teaching Improvisation through Melody and Blues-Based Harmony: A Comprehensive and Sequential Approach," Music Educators Journal 104, no. 1 (September 2017): 42, doi:10.1177/0027432117711484.

[25] Jody N. Blake, "The Current Usage and Applications of Traditional Christian Hymns for Teaching Choral Music in the Secondary Setting," (PhD diss., Auburn University, 2019), https://etd.auburn.edu/handle/10415/7082.

[26] George Brandon, "The Enigma of Mason Hymn-Tunes," *Visions of Research in Music Education* 16, no. 28 (2021): 50, https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol16/iss3/28.

[27] Marylin H. Hamm, "Exploring Communal Song and Memory Through Historical Hymnody." *Choral Journal* 53, no. 9 (April 2013), 41–51.

[28] Hamm, "Exploring Communal Song," 49.

emphasize individuality in every way possible."[29] Over the years, music education, and even a large population of the church, lost its innate connection with Christian hymnody. As such, in order to provide a well-rounded curriculum, choral music educators must work to include these gems within the instructional repertory. The melodies of these great works must not be undervalued.

Philosophical Context: Hymns, Songs, and Melody

As previously stated, Alice Parker was one of the few individuals to write extensively on the topic of melody, especially within the context of its relation to song and hymns. Parker eloquently stated:

> Song is a gift to all human beings who have ears and a voice. People have sung since the beginnings of humankind, as naturally as birds and winds. Song expresses the emotions that lie far deeper than rational thought. Song creates a bond between singers and listeners that is instantaneous and profound.[30]

I ascertained several philosophical generalizations based on the writings of Parker. First, the text of a song is of paramount importance to the art of song and inextricably linked to the melody. Parker emphasized the importance of text, saying: "the melody (notes and rhythms) reflect the words and depends on their precise idiomatic pronunciation, not just their meaning."[31] She even urged choir directors to read the text aloud, noting its mood, accents, and overall sonority.[32] Thus, music and text must be equally valued, or as Parker posited, "We would find the music in the text first…."[33] To teach a song is to teach concern for nuance in musicality. For Parker, the primary focus was on musicality and human connection.[34]

Coinciding with the notion of musicality is the idea of rote teaching versus note teaching. Regarding pedagogical issues with her students, Parker stated: "Correctness to the page was far more important than how the music sounded… I had to pull them away from the page (from their eyes) back into the world of sound (into their ears)."[35] Thus, according to Parker, the melody always comes first in order of importance when teaching song. In order to accomplish this, students must be taught to listen and attend to the world of sound instead of the written page. With this, the nuance of musicality (e.g., tempo, dynamics, phrasing, articulation) is taught as well. In her discussion of song, musicality is often juxtaposed with the ideas of communication, mood (human emotion), and energy.[36] The energy behind the

[29] Alice Parker, *Melodious Accord: Good Singing in Church* (GIA Publications, 2013), 64.
[30] Alice Parker, *The Gift of Song* (GIA Publications, 2020).
[31] Parker, *The Anatomy of Melody*, 22.
[32] Susan Merritt, "Text and Tune: Back to the Basics with Alice Parker," *Choral Journal* 25, no. 1 (September 1984): 7.
[33] Parker, *The Anatomy of Melody*, 26.
[34] Joshua Palkki, "'Becoming the song': Alice Parker, community singing and unlearning choral strictures," *International Journal of Community Music* 15, no. 1 (2022), 31–48. doi:10.1386/ijcm_00033_1.
[35] Parker, *The Gift of Song*, 10–11.
[36] Parker, *The Anatomy of Melody*, 14–15.

singing of a song, and even the song itself, evokes human emotion and always communicates an idea. Moreover, these things cannot be transmitted via written notation, hence, Parker's general disdain for initially teaching by note.

Given her affinity for melody, song, and hymns, Parker espoused the view that song (singing) belongs to everyone. "Song," she wrote, "is truly the most democratic of the arts."[37] It is the most accessible and approachable of all musical types; therefore, Parker is indeed correct in stating, "Song is a right and a need."[38] She also reminds us that it is the "most human of all the arts."[39] But, what about hymns specifically?

Parker was a hymnologist in her own right, being granted the honor of "Fellow of the Hymn Society" in 2000 by The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada.[40] One can aver from her writings that she viewed hymnody as interrelated (if not, inextricably connected) to the concepts of song and melody. Parker's innate love for hymnody and its connection to melody is evidenced by the description she provides in her book, *Melodious Accord: Good Singing in Church*: "Here was a collection of tunes that last, a historical anthology of great melodies. Instead of thinking 'how harmonically boring' or 'how old-fashioned,' I tried to put myself in the position of the creator of the hymn."[41] She even once spoke about the hymn's phenomenal power to elicit a deeply human response: "They seem to remain there [in our memory] even after the ravages of physical or mental illness, vestiges of elemental sanity."[42] This statement encapsulates Parker's feelings toward hymnody: the singing of hymns is an innately human activity that impacts us at a deep physical and spiritual level, changing us for the better.

Practical Application

Hymn Selection

Using the popular tunes index of Hymnary.org, the tune "ANGEL'S STORY" set to the hymn text "O, Jesus I have promised" was selected. The selection was based on two overarching factors. First, the tune and hymn text are well known and provide a plethora of pedagogical concepts for teaching singers. Second, the hymn happens to be a personal favorite of the researcher due to its musical and textual content. While this may appear to negate the principle of impartiality often promoted in research, selecting a song that moves us is actually within Alice Parker's philosophical paradigm in which this study is grounded. Parker characterized the hymn as a musical form in a captivating manner:

---

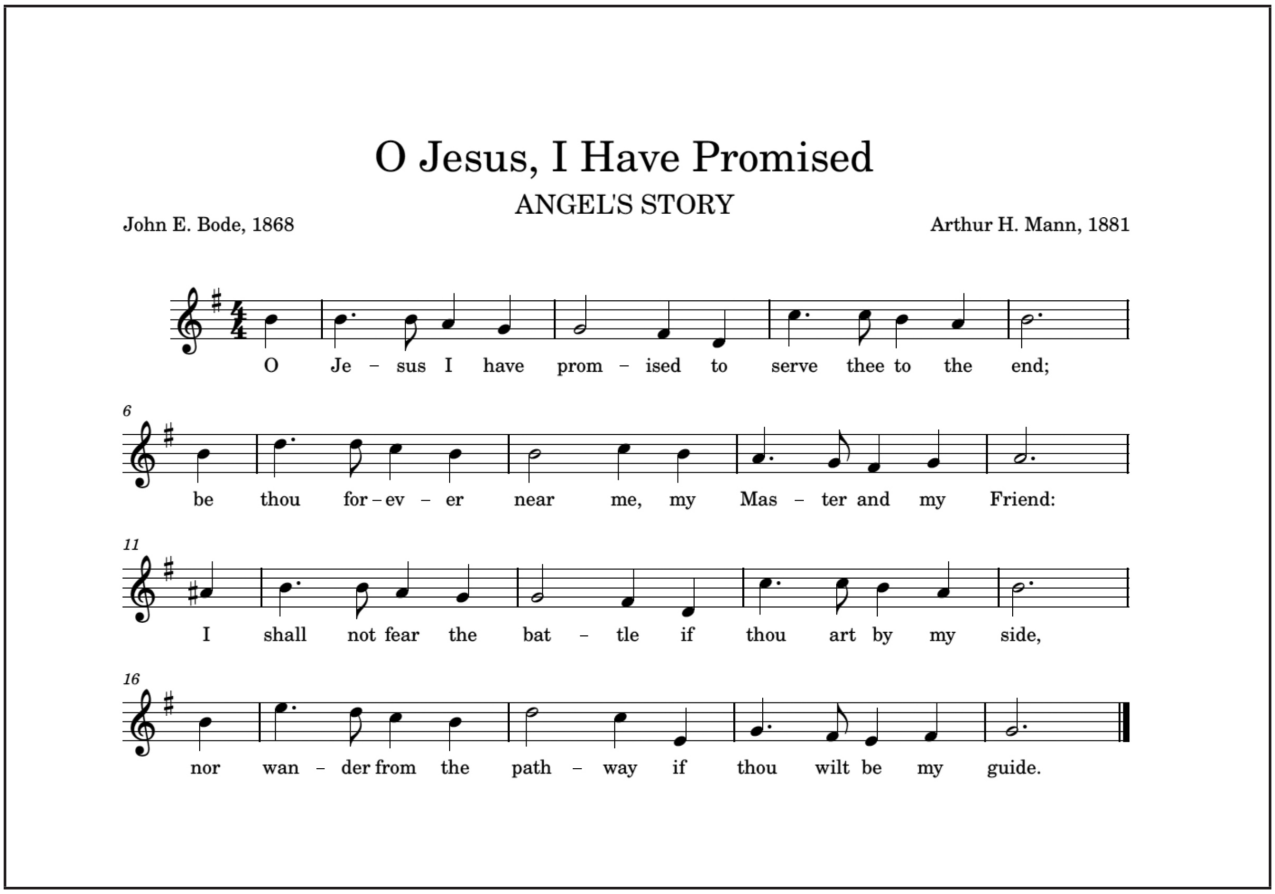
[37] Parker, *The Gift of Song*, 13.
[38] Parker, *Melodious Accord*, 25.
[39] Parker, *Melodious Accord*, 103.
[40] "Fellows of the Society," The Hymn Society, last modified January 23, 2024, https://thehymnsociety.org/fellows-of-the-society/.
[41] Parker, *Melodious Accord*, 63.
[42] Alice Parker, "'Three Times Holy' Observations About the Relationship of Text to Tune in Hymnody and the Story of the Creation of a New Hymn." *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 72, no. 3 (Summer 2021), 44.

> But it is the great hymns that fascinate me: what are those elusive qualities that distinguish them? The texts are in sonorous English, flowing and pleasurable to the tongue. They state their subject and stick to it, with felicitous turns of phrase. The tune is inviting yet individual, well suited to congregational singing. It moves gracefully within the strict boundaries of range and rhythm imposed by the form. Above all, it is memorable: it seems to grow effortlessly to fill its designated space.[43]

Using Parker's own description and my professional judgment, I would categorize "O Jesus, I have promised" as one of the "great" hymns. The concept of quality music selection aligns with what CMP calls "The Heart." Identifying "The Heart" of a work requires a close examination of the music educator's relationship to the music (or, in other words, the affective nature of the music).[44] Even though the task of music selection is not without ambiguity, identifying "The Heart" provides a reflective framework for justifying the selection.

Figure 1

O Jesus, I have promised.



[43] Parker, "Three Times Holy," 44.

[44] Patricia A. O'Toole, *Shaping Sound Musicians: An Innovative Approach to Teaching Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance* (GIA Publications, 2003), 18–19.

Pedagogical Approach

The methodology was based upon foundational research that I undertook for my educational specialist and doctoral degrees.[45] Research from my educational specialist was later developed into an article, which planted the seed for this current study.[46] Borrowing ideas from the Kodály method, music learning theory, comprehensive musicianship through performance (CMP), and the writings of Alice Parker, a pedagogical approach was established for using a hymn melody for teaching musical concepts. A chart summarizing the pedagogical concepts selected from each approach is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Pedagogical Concepts Compared

Kodály[47]	Music Learning Theory[48]	CMP[49]	Alice Parker[50, 51, 52]
An approach developed by Hungarian composer and educator Zoltan Kodály focused on the development of musical literacy primarily through singing.	A set of theories regarding how humans learn music, largely influenced and assembled by Edwin E. Gordon. Audiation, or hearing and comprehending music in the mind, is a key aspect of this theory.[53]	Based on the concept of comprehensive musicianship originating in 1965, CMP in its current iteration was brought to fruition through the Wisconsin CMP Project. The foundation of CMP is the five-point planning model: selection, analysis, outcomes, strategies, and assessment.	Parker was a composer, conductor, and educator whose work was deeply influenced by the work of Robert Shaw. Parker's deep appreciation for melody and the genre of hymns provided the groundwork for this paper.[54]
• Literacy through singing • Moveable do solfège • Curwen hand signs • Rhythm syllables • Sound before sight • Short forms • Child-developmental approach	• Audiation • Melodic patterns • Rhythmic patterns • Whole-Part-Whole	• "The Heart" • Analysis of elements • Textual analysis • Skill outcomes (perceptual motor) • Knowledge outcomes (cognitive) • Affective outcomes (aesthetic or personal knowledge)	• Importance of text • Text and music equal • Sound before sight • Emphasis on musicality • Song as democratic art form • Hymns as quality literature • Mood/affective connections

[45] Blake, "The Current Usage and Applications of Traditional Christian Hymns."
[46] Jody Blake, "Hymns: An Old/New Resource for Teaching Choral Music," *ChorTeach* 9, no. 2 (Winter 2017), 8–18.
[47] Choksy, *The Kodály Method*, 15-23.
[48] Eric Bluestine, *The Ways Children Learn Music: An Introduction and Practical Guide to Music Learning Theory* (GIA Publications, 2000), 11–21; 35–58.
[49] O'Toole, *Shaping Sound Musicians*, x-xi; 3–41.
[50] Parker, *The Anatomy of Melody*.
[51] Parker, *The Gift of Song*.
[52] Parker, *Melodious Accord*.
[53] Gordon Institute for Music Learning, "About Music Learning Theory," last modified 2025, https://giml.org/mlt/about/.
[54] Brian Murphy, "Alice Parker, choral composer who celebrated beauty and unity, dies at 98," *Washington Post* (December 23, 2023).

The CMP outcomes provide the cornerstone for the pedagogical approach of this study. Developing learning outcomes is a primary component of the CMP planning process. The CMP model uses three types of outcomes: skill (or perceptual motor) outcomes, knowledge (or cognitive) outcomes, and affective (or aesthetic) outcomes. A simplified definition of each is provided:

- Skill outcomes are goals pertaining to what our students should be able to demonstrate in regard to technical facility and performance skills.
- Knowledge outcomes are goals related to historical, conceptual, and theoretical ideas.
- Affective outcomes are goals pertaining to how the student internally responds to the music (i.e., closely connected to the aesthetic experience).[55]

Song Analysis Methodology

After selecting the hymn, Hymnary.org was used to research background information. Unfortunately, few music theory texts expound on melody at any length, thus other sources were consulted. In their music appreciation text, *Music: The Art of Listening*, Jean Ferris and Larry Worster describe several components of a melody:

- Phrase: musical sentence
- Cadence: stopping or resting point
- Theme: recurring melodic statement
- Motive: fragmentary melodic idea that recurs and is developed
- Lyrical melody: repeated, often varied, song-like phrase[56]

Furthermore, given the importance of phrase structures in melodies, a phrase analysis was included as part of the analytical framework. Kodály folk song analysis techniques provided further insight that was easily applied to hymn tunes. The pedagogical-analytical methods promoted by de la Ossa provided pieces of the framework for the hymn tune analysis.[57] The concepts of the tone set, repeated rhythmic patterns, and song form were incorporated. Additionally, pieces of music learning theory provided inspiration for the analysis of melodic patterns, and later, intervallic patterns.

Table 2 on the next page provides basic hymn information. Background research was performed using Hymnary.org, unless otherwise noted.[58]

---

[55] O'Toole, *Shaping Sound Musicians*, 204.
[56] Ferris and Worster, *Music: The Art of Listening*, 17–19.
[57] Sergio de la Ossa, *A Basic Guide to Folk Song Analysis* (Budapest: Liszt Academy of Music, 2019).
[58] "O Jesus, I Have Promised," Hymnary.org, accessed February 3, 2026, https://hymnary.org/text/o_jesus_i_have_promised.

Table 2

Basic Hymn Information for ANGEL'S STORY

Tune	ANGEL'S STORY
Commonly used text	O Jesus, I have promised (1869)
Author	John E. Bode
Number of hymnal publications	307
Composer	Arthur H. Mann
Origin	English
Year of Composition	1881
Hymn Meter	7.6.7.6
Tune Meter	Quadruple
Commonly Used Key	G major
Meter	Triple with anacrusis
Range	D4-E5
Form Analysis	A(ab)B(cd)A'(a'b)B'(c'd')
Form Type	Strophic
Cadences	Half (V) - Authentic (I)
Contour	Mostly conjunct
Melodic Descriptor	Lyrical
Historical Background	O Jesus, I Have Promised was written in 1866 by John E. Bode as a confirmation hymn for his children. It was first published in 1868 and later added to the 1901 Methodist Protestant hymnal.[59] The tune, ANGEL'S STORY, was composed by Arthur H. Mann in 1881, originally intended for use with a hymn entitled "I Love to Hear the Story Which Angel Voices Tell" by Emily H. Miller.[60] Mann was educated at Oxford, receiving the Doctor of Music in 1882, and in 1876 became the choirmaster of King's College, Cambridge.[61]
Recurring Rhythmic Patterns	

[59] Fred D. Gealy, Austin C. Lovelace, and Carlton R. Young, *Companion to the Hymnal: A Handbook to the 1964 Methodist Hymnal*, ed. Emory S. Bucke (Abingdon Press, 1970), 319–20.

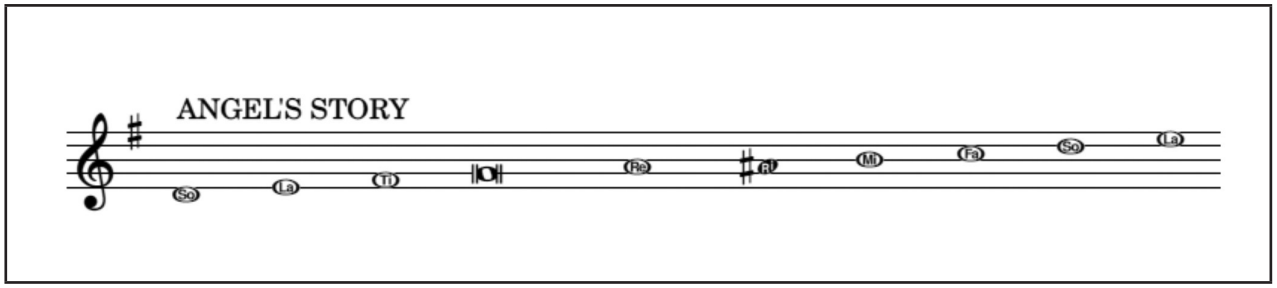
[60] Gealy, Lovelace, and Young, *Companion to the Hymnal*, 319–20.

[61] LindaJo H. McKim, *The Presbyterian Hymnal Companion* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 271.

Next, the hymn tune's tone set was derived from the pitch inventory provided by the melody. Music educators may wish to have students sing the tone set on solfège as demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Tone Set for ANGEL'S STORY



Based on the tenets of music learning theory, the melodic patterns were analyzed with key intervals highlighted. Melody pattern and interval recognition are fundamental concepts of music instruction. Music educators may wish to develop choral warm-ups based on the patterns presented below. Figure 3 provides the melodic patterns found in ANGEL'S STORY:

Figure 3

Melodic and Interval Patterns in ANGEL'S STORY

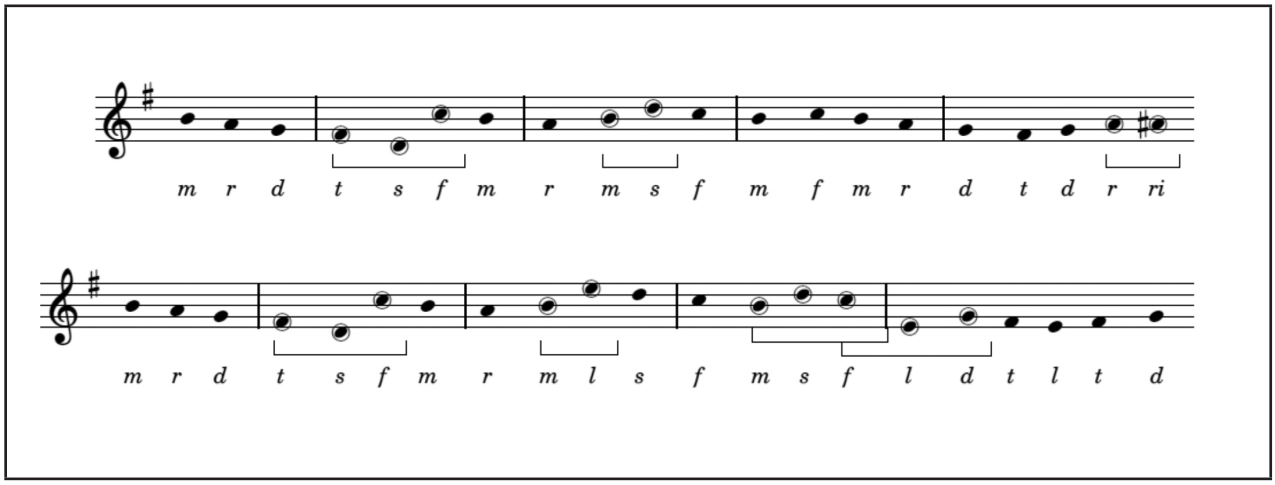


Table 3 on the next page provides the primary intervals found in ANGEL'S STORY. Music educators may desire students to recognize and perform these intervals. Suggested instructional strategies include singing the intervals within in the context of the hymn and creating ear-training exercises to increase interval recognition.

Figure 4 on the next page provides a formal analysis of ANGEL'S STORY. It is valuable for music educators to emphasize a melody's formal design. As students discover that melodies are composed of patterns, relationships between the text and music can be emphasized. Music educators may wish to develop activities where students recognize ABAB form in other musical works.

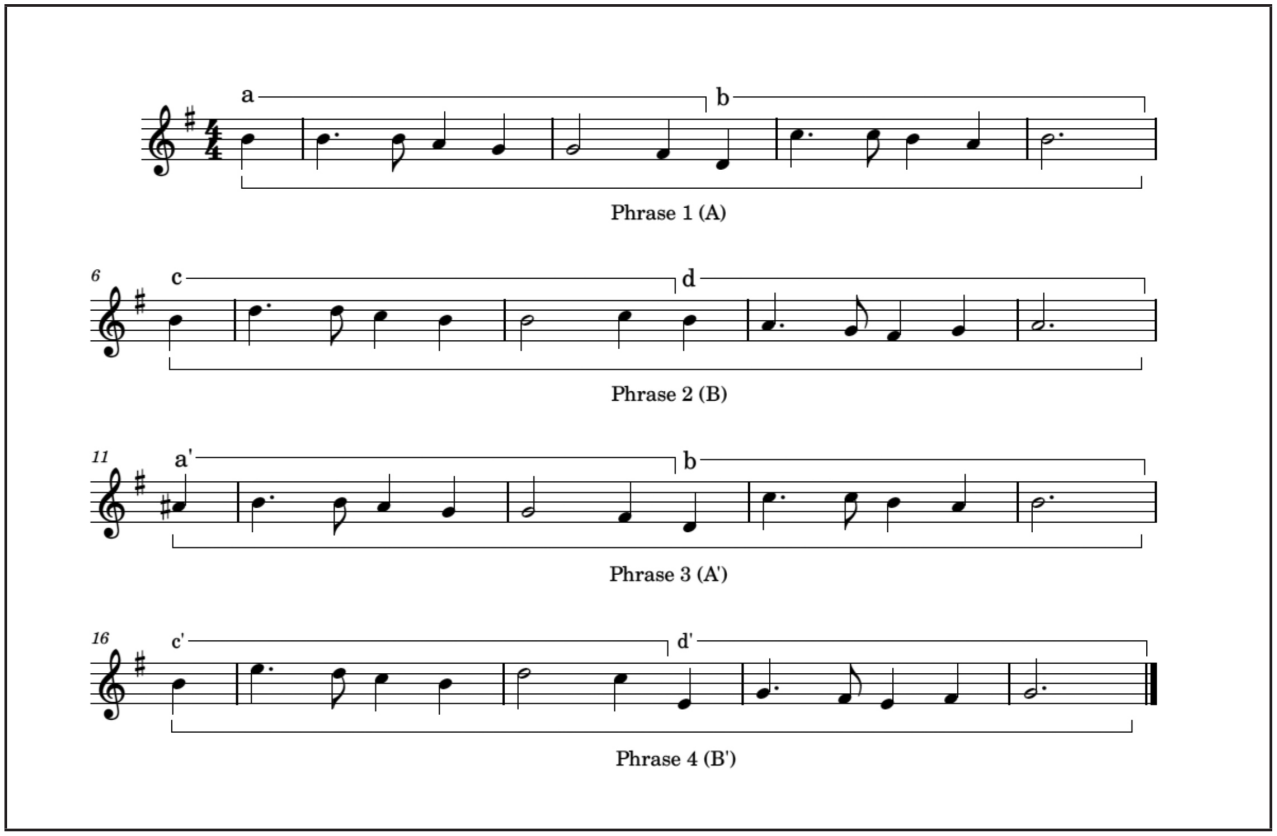
Table 3

Intervals Chart for ANGEL'S STORY

Solfège	Absolute Pitch Names	Interval
t - s (descending)	F# - D	↓M3
s - f (ascending)	D - C	↑m7
m - s (ascending)	A - D	↑m3
r - ri (ascending)	A - A#	↑m2
m - l (ascending)	B - E	↑P4
f - l (descending)	C - E	↑m6
l - d (ascending)	E - G	↓m3

Figure 4

Phrase and Form Analysis of ANGEL'S STORY



See below for an example of "The Heart" for "O Jesus, I have promised." As previously mentioned, "The Heart" provides an anchor for music educators as they create instructional strategies, outcomes, and assessments. "The Heart," as described below, describes both objective and subjective aesthetic elements music educators may desire to emphasize as they teach the work.

"The Heart" of "O Jesus, I have promised."

> "The Heart" of "O Jesus, I have promised" lies in the beautiful coupling of the text and melody, with its driving force being the dotted quarter followed by the eighth note rhythm. The contemplative, yet deeply emotional music embodies the yearning desire of the text, with the climatic rise and fall of the final phrase providing a sense of eternal peace.

Discussion

The aforementioned pedagogical strategies, contextually grounded in Parker's philosophy of hymns and song, model a manner in which hymn melodies can be used for musical instruction. A deeply moving melody, ANGEL'S STORY provides a plethora of pedagogical concepts for teaching singers. As demonstrated in the analysis, music educators may discover that a much-neglected element of music—melody—provides an abundance of educational material. Music educators can teach this melody in a whole-part-whole fashion, as prescribed by music learning theory. By beginning with introducing the entire work, students better understand the context of later concepts. Thereafter, music educators may wish to teach historical information, melodic patterns, and introduce intervals later. The phrasing is one of the most important aspects of this hymn, for it is with phrasing that diction, articulation, dynamics, and mood may be explored. Parker suggested learning the melody by exploring the text (e.g., tone of voice, tone color, meaning, form, and literary devices) and dynamics (including mood, sonority, and articulation).[62] The emotional aspect of the melody should not be underrated or casually dismissed, as melody provides a practical way for students to explore their emotions. Moreover, "The Heart" provides another opportunity to discuss emotional concepts that may be connected to the formal concepts within the melody.

The following are suggested outcomes for teaching "O Jesus, I have promised":

Skill Outcomes:

- Students will recognize intervallic patterns within the hymn.
- Students will identify the key of G major.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to sing recurring melodic patterns using solfège and Curwen hand signs.

[62] Parker, *The Anatomy of Melody*, 136–7.

- Students will demonstrate the ability to count recurring rhythm patterns.

Knowledge Outcomes:

- Students will define the hymn meter 7.6.7.6.
- Students will analyze the form of the hymn tune (ABAB).
- Students will describe the melodic contour.
- Students will define and label cadences at the end of each melodic phrase.

Affective Outcomes:

- Students will critique the hymn tune (ANGEL'S STORY) as used with text ("O Jesus, I have promised").
- Students will describe their emotional reaction using varied dynamics for each melodic phrase.
- Students will create their own dynamic interpretation based on the relationship of the melody and text.

Music education is in dire need of what Parker describes as "Melody Studies," where expressive singing and intent listening is illuminated by the melody. [63] Ultimately, the music educator must exercise professional discernment regarding the appropriateness of using hymns for teaching music in their setting. A recent study found that Christianity was the dominant religion represented in a school choral catalog, reinforcing Christian music as a prominent source for teaching choral music.[64] Indeed, a well-rounded choral music education would be incomplete without a survey of sacred repertoire containing timeless melodies of great hymns. There is so much worth discovering within a melody, especially the tunes of great hymns. Like melody, hymns are often ignored by well-meaning music educators so they can emphasize other elements of music. These great treasures, melody and hymns, are part of a well-rounded comprehensive music education. As demonstrated by this study, hymn melodies provide a wealth of musical knowledge and a treasure trove of pedagogical concepts. Furthermore, the element of melody is a basic means of human communication within the musical sphere. As such, music educators are the custodians of melody, with the responsibility of instilling the gift of song into the hearts and minds of the next generation. Hymn melodies are a powerful conduit for achieving this significant endeavor.

[63] Parker, *The Gift of Song*, 11.
[64] Andrew Trites, "Sacred Concert and Spirituals Selections in a 2021–2022 School Choral Catalog," *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 13 (2025).

Bibliography

Blake, Jody. "Hymns: An Old/New Resource for Teaching Choral Music." *ChorTeach* 9, no. 2 (Winter 2017), 8-18.

Blake, Jody N. "The Current Usage and Applications of Traditional Christian Hymns for Teaching Choral Music in the Secondary Setting." PhD diss., Auburn University, 2019. https://etd.auburn.edu/handle/10415/7082.

Brandon, George. "The Enigma of Mason Hymn-Tunes." *Visions of Research in Music Education* 16, no. 28 (2021), 48-53. https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol16/iss3/28.

Bluestine, Eric. *The Ways Children Learn Music: An Introduction and Practical Guide to Music Learning Theory*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2000.

Choksy, Lois. *The Kodály Method: Comprehensive Music Education from Infant to Adult*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

Colwell, Cynthia M., and George N. Heller. "Lowell Mason's The Song Garden (1864–66): Its Background, Content, and Comparison to a Twentieth-Century Series." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 51, no. 3 (2003), 231-244. doi:10.2307/3345376.

de la Ossa, Sergio. *A Basic Guide to Folk Song Analysis*. Budapest: Liszt Academy of Music, 2019.

"Fellows of the Society." The Hymn Society. Last modified January 23, 2024. https://thehymnsociety.org/fellows-of-the-society/.

Ferris, Jean, and Larry Worster. *Music: The Art of Listening*, 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010.

Gealy, Fred D., Austin C. Lovelace, and Carlton R. Young. *Companion to the Hymnal: A Handbook to the 1964 Methodist Hymnal*. Edited by Emory S. Bucke. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970.

Gordon Institute for Music Learning. "About Music Learning Theory." Last modified 2025. https://giml.org/mlt/about/.

Hall, Harry H. "Moravian Music Education in America, ca. 1750 to ca. 1830." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 29, no. 3 (1981), 225-234. doi:10.2307/3344996.

Hamm, Marilyn H. "Exploring Communal Song and Memory Through Historical Hymnody." *Choral Journal* 53, no. 9 (April 2013), 41-51.

Hash, Phillip M. "Music Instruction at Selected State Normal Schools during the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 67, no. 4 (2019), 413-439. doi:10.1177/0022429419888740.

Heil, Leila. "Teaching Improvisation through Melody and Blues-Based Harmony: A Comprehensive and Sequential Approach." *Music Educators Journal* 104, no. 1 (September 2017), 40-46. doi:10.1177/0027432117711484.

Howe, Sondra W. "Music Teaching in the Boston Public Schools, 1864-1879." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 40, no. 4 (1992), 316-328. doi:10.2307/3345839.

Kamien, Roger. *Music: An Appreciation*, 12th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2015.

Kee, Lydia. "Medieval Methods: Guido D'Arezzo's Innovative Approaches to Music Education." *Musical Offerings* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2022), 59-71. doi:10.15385/jmo.2022.13.2.1.

Klinger, Rita, Patricia S. Campbell, and Thomas Goolsby. "Approaches to Children's Song Acquisition: Immersion and Phrase-by-Phrase." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 24-34. doi:10.2307/3345757.

Kodály, Zoltan. "Folk Song in Pedagogy." *Music Educators Journal* 53, no. 7 (March 1967), 59-61. doi:10.2307/3391025.

Lau, Wai-Tong. "Teaching Chinese Folk Songs with an Authentic Approach." *Music Educators Journal* 94, no. 2 (November 2007), 22-27. doi:10.1177/002743210709400206.

Leaver, Robin A. "Bay Psalm Book." In *Worship Music: A Concise Dictionary*, edited by Edward Foley, 31. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000.

Mark, Michael L. *A Concise History of American Music Education*. Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2008.

McKim, LindaJo H. *The Presbyterian Hymnal Companion*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.

Mercer-Taylor, Peter. "Mendelssohn in Nineteenth-Century American Hymnody." *19th-Century Music* 32, no. 3 (2009), 235-283. doi:10.1525/ncm.2009.32.3.235.

Merritt, Susan. "Text and Tune: Back to Basics with Alice Parker." *Choral Journal 25*, no. 1 (September 1984), 5-9. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23546731.

Murphy, Brian. "Alice Parker, choral composer who celebrated beauty and unity, dies at 98." *Washington Post*, December 29, 2023.

"O Jesus, I Have Promised." Hymnary.org. Accessed February 3, 2026. https://hymnary.org/text/o_jesus_i_have_promised

O'Toole, Patricia A. *Shaping Sound Musicians: An Innovative Approach to Teaching Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2003.

Palkki, Joshua. "'Becoming the song': Alice Parker, community singing and unlearning choral strictures." *International Journal of Community Music* 15, no. 1 (2022), 31-48. doi:10.1386/ijcm_00033_1.

Parker, Alice. *Melodious Accord: Good Singing in Church*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2013.

Parker, Alice. *The Gift of Song*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2020.

Parker, Alice. *The Anatomy of Melody: Exploring the Single Line of Song*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2006.

Parker, Alice. "'Three Times Holy' Observations About the Relationship of Text to Tune in Hymnody and the Story of the Creation of a New Hymn." *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 72, no. 3 (Summer 2021), 44-46.

Persellin, Diane, and Laura Bateman. "A comparative study on the effectiveness of two song-teaching methods: holistic vs. phrase-by-phrase." *Early Child Development and Care* 179, no. 6 (2009), 799-806. doi:10.1080/03004430902944841.

Routley, Erik. *Christian Hymns Observed: When in Our Music God is Glorified*. New Jersey: Prestige Publications, 1982.

Routley, Erik. *Hymns and Human Life*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1959.

Trites, Andrew. "Sacred Concert and Spirituals Selections in a 2021-2022 School Choral Catalog." *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 13 (2025), 31-53.