# 'Turas the Year <br> Before Christmas 

## 

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Performance Time—Approximately 20 Minutes
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# 'TWAS THE YEAR BEFORE CHRISTMAS <br> A Christmas Musical for Unison Voices 

Written and Arranged by Ruth Elaine Schram and Scott Schram

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## Foreword

Throughout the ages, God has made promises to His faithful people through His Word. Today, we can look back and see how God fulfilled these promises. But, long ago, God's people had only His Word, and the faith to believe that God would do it.

One of His great promises was the coming of the Messiah, who would bring salvation to the world. 'Twas the Year Before Christmas gives us a chance to step back in time. As we travel through history, we can be among the first to hear the glad news. Listen! God's promise of a Messiah is about to be fulfilled.

Appropriate for church children's choirs, Christian schools or Sunday schools, 'Twas the Year Before Christmas features simple narration and dialog, and speaking roles for 10-12 people. Directors are encouraged to add dialog and characters as necessary. The choir may perform all of the songs, or some of the songs may be assigned to soloists or a few voices.

A fully supportive keyboard accompaniment, costuming, prop and staging suggestions are included. Handy 5-packs of Singer's Editions, featuring melody, lyrics, narration and dialog, and an optional fully-orchestrated accompaniment/performance compact disc (CD) recording are available separately.


#### Abstract

About the Authors Ruth Elaine Schram wrote her first song at the age of twelve, and her first octavo was published twenty years later, in 1988. In 1992, she became a full-time composer and arranger. She now has over 1,000 published works. Over ten million copies of her songs have been purchased in their various venues, and she has been a recipient of the ASCAP Special Award each year since 1990. In addition to her choral music for church and school, her songs appear on thirty albums (four of which have been Dove Award Finalists) and on numerous award-winning children's videos.

Scott Schram is a professional software developer who has created search engines, education and banking systems, and arcade games for Broderbund Software. He has been involved in numerous audio and multimedia productions. Scott earned a B.S. degree in mathematics, summa cum laude, from the University of Alabama in Birmingham, where he now lives with his wife, Ruthie.


## Staging Suggestions



The stage may be set with various props to create a temple area, Mary and Joseph's room, and the manger scene. As the Overture begins, choir and characters may process to platform, or they may be in place when the music starts:

Narrator - to the side, at a pulpit or podium
Isaiah (optional) - opposite the Narrator
Clock - center stage
Gabriel, Zechariah and Elizabeth - offstage (or in the choir)
Mary and Joseph - offstage (or in the choir)
Angels and Shepherds - offstage (or in the choir)
Children - in the choir

## Cast of Characters, Props and Costumes

- NARRATOR: An adult or older child, dressed casually; narrations may be divided among several speakers.
- CLOCK: A child with arms outstretched depicting the hands of a clock and the passage of time; and/or wearing a poster board "clock face" atop a poster board "calendar," Optional: Clock may be a large prop with movable hands and the characters/events depicted at the various hours as time progresses. A child may move the hands of the clock to the next event as Narrator speaks.
- ISAIAH: optional, dressed in robes as an Old Testament prophet
- GABRIEL: dressed as an angel
- ZECHARIAH: dressed in robes as an old man, preferably with a white beard
- ELIZABETH: dressed in robes as an old woman, preferably with a head covering
- MARY: dressed in robes as a young woman, preferably with a head covering
- JOSEPH: dressed in robes as a middle-aged man
- ANGELS: preferably younger children
- CHILDREN: dressed in robes as young children in the temple, and/or children from the choir; speaking parts for 2 children are included, but additional children's speaking roles may be added at the director's discretion.
- OPTIONAL: shepherds, worshippers, children delivering newspapers: other miscellaneous Bible characters


## About the Recording

'Twas the Year Before Christmas was recorded at Red Rock Recording Studios, Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania: Kent Heckman, Engineer; Jean Anne Shafferman, Producer; Tom Goeman, Synthesizer and Keyboards; Anne Paynter, Choral Specialist; Alison Crank, Alexa Dickison, Courtney Favini and Emily Wallen, Singers.

# 'TWAS THE YEAR BEFORE CHRISTMAS 

A Christmas Musical for Unison Voices
$\begin{gathered}\text { Written and Arranged by } \\ \text { Ruth Elaine Schram and Scott Schram }\end{gathered}$

## OVERTURE

KEYBOARD

ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH (Trad. French Carol) (d = ca 112)


13 O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL (by John F. Wade, 1751)



O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL (15th c. French Carol)


LARGO, from NEW WORLD SYMPHONY (by Antonin Dvorâk)



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After the Overture, a ticking clock sound is heard (optional: high octaves on the piano). Clock stands at Center Stage with arms outstretched, depicting the moving hands of a clock ticking forward (clockwise) in time. As Narrator begins, the ficks slow to a stop, then begin to move backwards (counter-clockwise).

Narrator: Welcome, dear friends; come one and come all, as we turn back the clock here in this hall.
(Clock hands move backwards.)
Together we'll watch the events unfold;
see the promise fulfilled that the prophets foretold.
(Clock may join choir or move to side of stage.)
Our story begins many, many years ago. (pause)
'Twas centuries before the very first Christmas, long before the world had ever heard the name "Jesus."

These were times of great hardship. Some people lost hope and turned away from God. But many faithful people served the Lord and prayed for salvation. (pause) The Lord revealed to the prophet Isaiah that a Savior would come. Isaiah said:

Isaiah:
(or Narrator)
Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

## I BELIEVE/HE WILL COME

## ISAIAH/CHOIR



5 I BELIEVE (Largo - Dvorâk)


poco rall.




As the quickly ticking clock sound is heard, Clock returns to Center Stage, indicates the passing of many years by swiftly rotating hands clock-wise (forward) several times as Narrator resumes.

NARRATOR:
Hundreds of years went by, but it was still many, many years ago. (pause)
'Twas a year before the very first Christmas, a year before the world had ever heard the name "Jesus." (Pause - Clock stops as Gabriel and Zechariah move to the temple area; Clock returns to choir or side of stage.)

It was during the time of King Herod. In those days there lived a very old couple, Zechariah and
Elizabeth, who were faithful servants of God. They had been married for many years but had no children. Zechariah was a priest, and one day while he was in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared before him. Gabriel said:

Gabriel:

NARRATOR:
God has sent me with great news. You and your wife will be blessed with a baby, and you will name him John. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit and prepare the way for the Lord. (Luke 1: 13-17)

Zechariah was so surprised that at first he did not believe Gabriel. Then Gabriel told Zechariah he would not be able to speak until the baby was born.

Child 1: What is taking him so long? (Zechariah turns to face the people, pantomimes flapping his arms, making charade-like gestures.)

Child 2: $\quad$ He must have seen something inside the temple!
Child 1: A bird! (Zechariah shakes his head no and holds up one finger to indicate one word.)
Child[REN]: One word!
Child 2: A plane! (Zechariah shakes his head no, continues flapping with larger motions, and taps two fingers on his wrist to indicate two syllables.)

Child[REN]: Two syllables!
Child 1: An angel! (Zechariah nods)
Child[ren]: That's it! An angel! He saw an angel!

# OH, TELL US, ZECHARIAH! 

## CHOIR/TEMPLE WORSHIPPERS

Words by RUTH ELAINE SCHRAM and SCOTT SCHRAM

GO, TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN (African-American Spiritual)
Swing! $(d=$ ca. 120-132 $)\left(\cdot \downarrow=d^{3}\right)$



* Optional alto.


As the moderately ticking clock sound is heard, Clock returns to Center Stage, indicates the passing of months by rotating hands clock-wise (forward) several times, slowing to a stop as Narrator resumes.

Narrator: $\quad$ Six months later, still many, many years ago, (pause)
'twas months before the very first Christmas, months before the world had ever heard the name "Jesus." (pause) (Gabriel and Mary move to the room area; Clock returns to choir or side of stage.)

Gabriel was sent by God to visit a young woman named Mary. Mary was engaged to Joseph of Nazareth, who was a descendant of King David. Gabriel said:

Gabriel: $\quad$ Rejoice, Mary, you are blessed among women! Do not be afraid! You will have a baby boy, and He will be the Son of God.

Mary: I believe God has chosen me to be the mother of the Savior, the promised Messiah. (Luke 1:26-38)

# SING WE NOW OF CHRISTMAS 

## MARY/CHOIR

## SING WE NOW OF CHRISTMAS (Trad. French Carol)

( $d=$ ca. 108-112)


soon $\mathrm{He}_{-}$will ap-pear.
God's on - ly Son, Em - man-u - el will come.


Sing we now of Christ-mas,
No-el_ sing we here!



Sing we now of Christ-mas, No-el sing we here!


* Optional soprano.

Narrator: When Joseph learned that Mary was going to have a baby, (pause)
'twas still months before Christmas, months before the world had ever heard the name "Jesus."
(Pause - Gabriel and Joseph move to room area.)
Joseph was confused. He did not know what to do. Then Gabriel appeared to him and said:

Gabriel:

Joseph:

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She will bear God's Son, and you will name Him Jesus.

I believe God has chosen me to take care of Mary and the baby. (Matthew 1: 18-25)

## COME, EMMANUEL/HOLY IS THE LORD

GABRIEL/CHOIR/JOSEPH/MARY
Words by RUTH ELAINE SCHRAM and SCOTT SCHRAM
O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL (15th c. French Carol)


HOLY, HOLY, HOLY from DEUTSCHE MESSE





As the moderately ticking clock sound is heard, Clock returns to Center Stage, indicates the passing of weeks by rotating hands clock-wise (forward) a couple of times, slowing to a stop as Narrator resumes.

Narrator: 'Twas only a few months before Christmas, and the time came for Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, to give birth. (Luke 1: 57-59)
(Zechariah and Elizabeth with the baby go to the temple area; Clock returns to choir or side of stage.)

Child I: Can you believe Zechariah and Elizabeth have a baby? They're old enough to be my grandparents!
Child 2: Surely they're going to name him Zechariah Junior. Maybe they'll call him Zach for short.
(Zechariah shakes his head no and pantomimes asking for something to write on.)
Elizabeth: His name will be John.
Child 1: (confused) Was Zechariah's dad also called Zechariah? Then the baby will be Zechariah the Third! Maybe they'll call the baby Trey.
(Zechariah again shakes his head no and feverishly writes on tablet or scroll.)
Elizabeth: No, his name will be John.
Child 2: (very confused) Don't you want to give him a family name?
(Zechariah holds up his tablet, on which is written in large, bold letters: JOHN.)
Child[ren]: (in amazement) John! His name is John!
Child 1: THAT'S an unusual name!
Zechariah: Friends!
Child[ren]: (in awe) He speaks!
Zechariah: The angel told me that my son should be named John, and that John would be a great preacher. He will prepare the way for the Lord! (Luke 1: 67-79)

Child[ren]: OH! Why didn't you just say so?

## HE WILL PREPARE THE WAY zechariah/choir



PEOPLE, LOOK EAST (Trad. French Carol)



* Optional soprano.


Clock moves to Center Stage, holding a poster board "calendar" on which is written DECEMBER 24 in large lettering.
Narrator: 'Twas the day before that very first Christmas. Mary and Joseph had traveled to Bethlehem to be counted in the census. Joseph looked for a hotel room, because Mary was about to have her baby. Since all the hotels were full, a kind innkeeper told them they could spend the night in his stable. (Mary and Joseph go to the manger; Clock returns to choir or side of stage.)

And while they were there, Mary brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger. (Luke 2: 1-7) (Mary places Baby in the manger; angels and shepherds move to Center Stage.)

In the countryside, shepherds were tending their flocks. Suddenly the heavens were filled with the sound of angel voices singing the news of the Messiah's birth.

Clock turns over "DECEMBER 24" to reveal "DECEMBER 25.
Angel(s):
(or Children) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to all!
Shepherd 1: God has kept His promise! Our Messiah is born!
Shepherd 2: Let's all go to Bethlehem and see Him! (Luke 2: 7-14)
As shepherds exit stage, children take scrolls or newspapers into the audience and "spread" the news.
Children: Extra! Extra! Read all about it! (repeat as needed)
Special Christmas Edition! Jesus is born in Bethlehem! (repeat as needed)

## 'TWAS CHRISTMAS DAY!



I SAW THREE SHIPS (Trad. English Carol)


Christ-mas day in the morn
ing.




NARRATOR: Welcome, dear friends; come one and come all, see the Child who is born in the manger stall.
Together we sing to God's only Son:
Alleluia! At last our Emmanuel has come!

# FINALE <br> ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH <br> O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL <br> INFANT HOLY, INFANT LOWLY <br> I BELIEVE 

Words by RUTH ELAINE SCHRAM and SCOTT SCHRAM


5 ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH (Trad. French Carol)




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* Optional alto.

