

ACDA Western Region Conference • Long Beach
Long Beach Convention Center • Promenade 2 • Room 203 A
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Timely, Uplifting, and Super-Practical: Creating Realistic Arrangements for Your Church, Community, or School Choir

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PHILOSOPHY/STRATEGY

Our goal is to learn to produce something respectable and presentable that can either be learned comfortably in one rehearsal by a small, very human church choir with rudimentary understanding of how to read music, or that can be taught to beginners without overwhelming their attention span.

*In this handout, I'm using the word **tune** to mean the song that we're arranging.*

PRINCIPLES OF SIMPLE ARRANGING: NINA'S OPINIONATED OPINIONS

GOOD

Love and respect the original. Can you harmonize it with itself—with its own elements?

- **Rounds/canons/echoes.** If it's clear where a line comes from, glancing dissonances can be forgiven!
- **Drones.** Single notes, or harmonic intervals built from tune.
- **Elements of the tune.** Melodic and rhythmic figures; text for sound and meaning. If you build the arrangement from the elements of the song, your arrangement is more likely to sound authentic, (Or, to put it snarkily: If an original tune is not culturally related to *Edelweiss*, the arrangement shouldn't sound like *Edelweiss*.)
- **If it's a folk song,** you get to tweak the tune.

Unison can be meaningful and expressive and intense. *Is your harmonization worth the time it takes to learn? Consider your quality-to-difficulty ratio.*

Literal repetition. Make something worth the time it takes to learn by giving it extra mileage.

Dialog. Call-and-response, or call-and-commentary.

You can often imply functional harmony with just two notes.

We need time to hear a chord. Touch-and-leave is OK for single notes, but chords need to be on notes that are long enough (or repeated) to register with the listener.

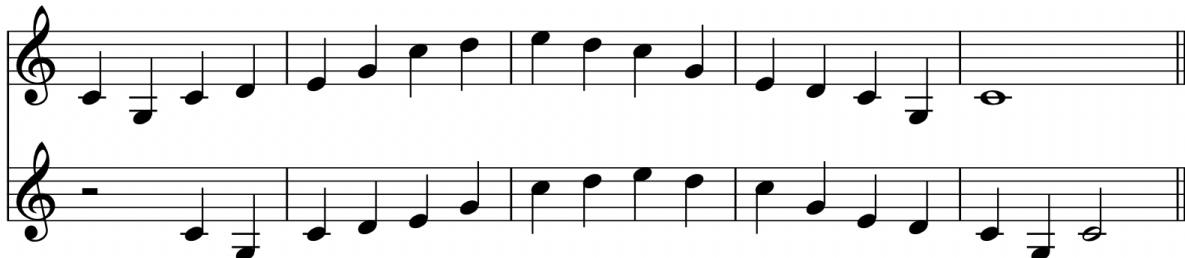
Build harmonies by having voices flow easily to their notes. Write a vocal line that takes someone from the melody to a harmonizing interval.

Local relevance/talent. It's fun to sing—and hear—an arrangement that is clearly designed to showcase your participants.

Audience attention. Are people listening to every note, or are you providing mood/background?

Horn-call voicing is easy to sing, and can be taught canonically. Does it go with the style of your tune?

- Teach as unison/canon:



- Then make this happen:



BAD

Mindless parallel thirds are not harmony. Use some contrary motion! (But not all parallel thirds are mindless. Some can be mindfully cute, for example.)

Making lower voices sing parallel sixths is cruel.

Slight fussy changes on near-repetitions are cruel.

Do not transcribe a piano accompaniment into vocal lines. Do not, for example, write an alto part intended for a pianist's right thumb. (Exception sometimes for collegiate a cappella style.)

Don't mangle the lyrics. Let everyone's words make sense! This helps with expression and phrasing, and gives everyone a sense of ownership.

SOURCES

Species counterpoint: learn excellent part-writing (voice leading) from Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*.

My arranging mentor is Alice Parker.

EXAMPLES

Clips:

Let There Be Peace on Earth

In this arrangement (mine; permission granted via jan-leemusic.com), this (next page) is the only fully harmonized line, and I deliberately use parallel 6/3 voicing:

S. 34 37 38 39 40

In per - fect har - mo - ny.

A.

T.

B.

In per - fect har - mo - ny.

In per - fect har - mo - ny.

Gm⁷ C⁷ F⁷

Walking into easy harmony from unison (no pun intended, lyric-wise):

mf

S. 34 33 35 36

Let us walk with each oth-er

A.

T.

B.

Let us walk with each oth-er

Let us walk with each oth-er

Let us walk with each oth-er

Gm⁷ C⁷ F

More walking-into-harmony, plus horn-call voicing:

S. With ev - 'ry step I take, Let this be my sol - emn vow:
A. With ev - 'ry step I take, Let this be my sol - emn vow:
T. With ev - 'ry step I take, Let this be my sol - emn vow:
B. With ev - 'ry step I take, Let this be my sol - emn vow:

Bb A⁷ Dm A⁷ F⁹

Easy texture:

S. To take each mo-ment and live In peace
A. To take each mo-ment and live In peace
T. To take and live each mo-ment In peace
B. To take and live each mo-ment In peace

Bb Bb+ Eb

COMPLETE EXAMPLES

You are welcome to copy/adapt/use these examples with your choir if you'd like! Let me know if you use something—I'll grant free permission to use/adapt anything in this handout, and trust you not to sell it as your own. See contact details below.

| | |
|---|----|
| Now the Green Blade Rises | 6 |
| Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit..... | 10 |
| Fum fum fum..... | 13 |
| (I'll Build a) Stairway to Paradise | 15 |
| Mama Don' 'Low (worksheet)..... | 24 |

CONTACT

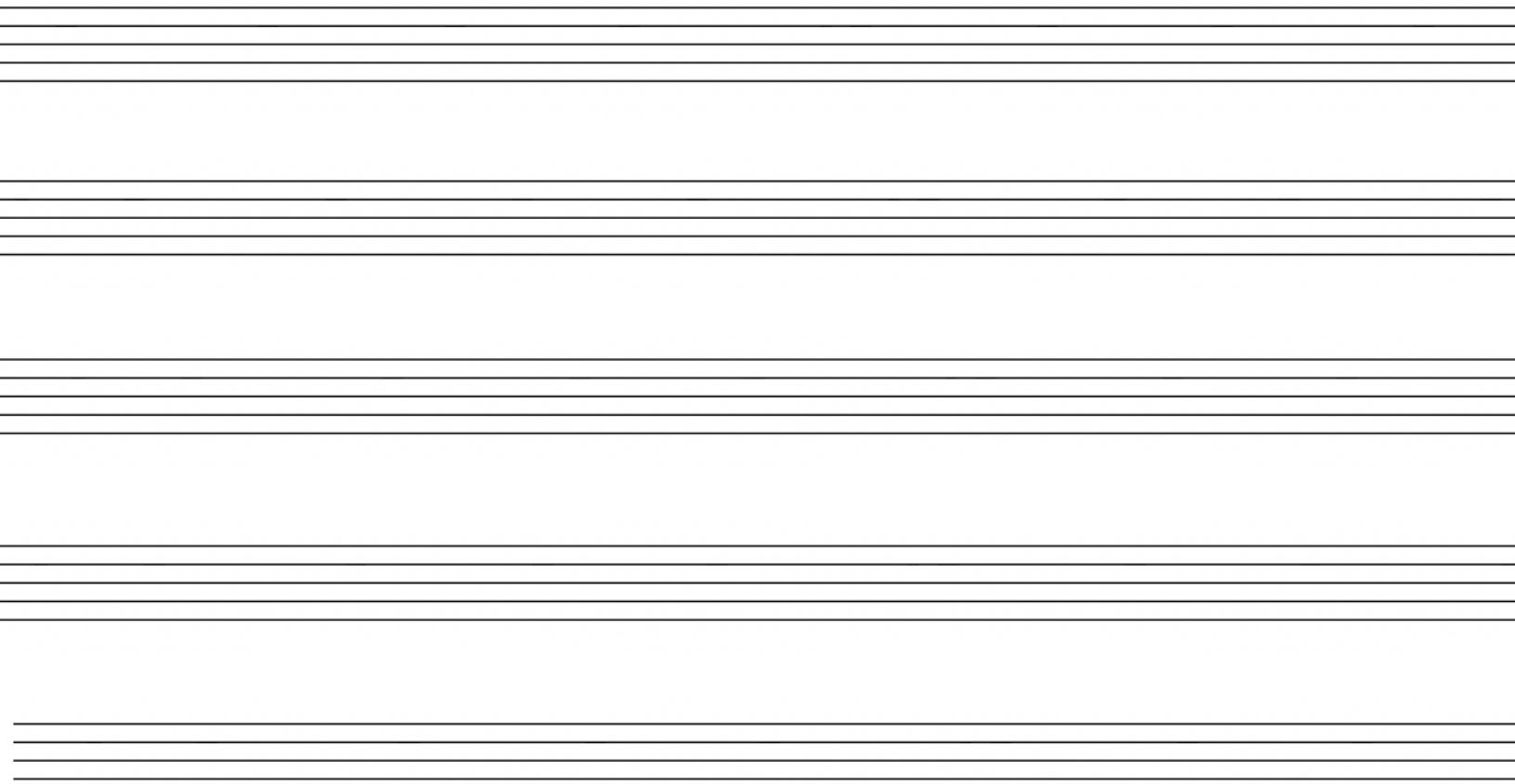
Can we just give up and commission you? Yes.

Can we send you our work for advice? Yes. Contact me first!

Will you come do a workshop with our organization? Yes.

If you prefer gmail to yahoo, you can reach me at ninagilbert@gmail.com. Or call or text 610-704-3677.

Want some staff lines?



Now the Green Blade Rises

Words by John Macleod Campbell Crum Tune: NOËL NOUVELET, 15th-century French
in *The Oxford Book of Carols*, 1928

Arr. Nina Gilbert

J = 84

Soprano Alto Tenor Bass

1. Now, now, now,
2. green,

1. Now, now, now,
2. green,

1. Now, now, now the green blade rises - es from the bur-ied grain.
2. In the grave they laid him, love by hat-red slain.

1. Now, now, Now the green blade rises - es from the bur-ied grain.
2. In the grave they laid him, love by hat-red slain.

mf

S A T B

Wheat that in dark earth man-y_ days has lain.
Think - ing that he would nev-er_wake a - gain.

Wheat that in dark earth man-y_ days has lain.
Think - ing that he would nev-er_wake a - gain.

Now, Love,

Now, Love,

Love lives a - gain, that Laid in the earth like
mf

Love lives a - gain, that Laid in the earth like
mf

Love lives a - gain, that Laid in the earth like
mf

Love lives a - gain, that Laid in the earth like
mf

2 13

S with the dead has been; Love is come a - gain like wheat a - ris- ing
 grain that sleeps un seen,

A with the dead has been; Love is come a - gain like
 grain that sleeps un seen,

T 8 with the dead has been; Love is come a - gain like wheat a - ris-ing
 grain that sleeps un seen,

B with the dead has been; Love is come a - gain like
 grain that sleeps un seen,

18

S green. 2. Green,green,3. Forth he came, 3. Forth he

A wheat a - ris-ing green. 2. Green,green,3. Forth he came, 3. Forth he

T 8 green, green. 3. Forth he came, Forth he came at

B wheat a - ris-ing green. 3. Forth he came, Forth he came at

26

S f came, He that for three days in the grave had lain.

A f came, He that for three days in the grave had lain.

T 8 mp Eas-ter like the ris-en grain. Forth, forth,

B mp Eas-ter like the ris-en grain. Forth, forth,

3

33

Soprano (S) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *mf*, *mf*, *mf*, *f*.

Alto (A) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps.

Tenor (T) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps.

Bass (B) Bass clef, key signature of two sharps.

Raised from the dead, my liv-ing Lord is seen, Love is come a - gain like
Raised from the dead, my liv-ing Lord is seen, Love is come a - gain like
Raised from the dead, my liv-ing Lord is seen, Love is come a - gain like
Raised from the dead, my liv-ing Lord is seen, Love is come a - gain like

39

Soprano (S) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *p*, *p*, *p*.

Alto (A) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *p*, *p*.

Tenor (T) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *p*, *mf*.

Bass (B) Bass clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *p*, *mf*.

wheat a - ris-ing green. 4. Green,green, green,
wheat a - ris-ing green. 4. Green,green, green,
wheat a - ris-ing green. 4. Green, green, When our hearts are
wheat a - ris-ing green. 4. Green, green, When our hearts are

46

Soprano (S) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *mf*, *mf*.

Alto (A) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *mf*.

Tenor (T) Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *mf*.

Bass (B) Bass clef, key signature of two sharps. Dynamics: *mf*.

Your touch cancell us back to life a-gain.FIELDS of our
Your touch cancell us back to life a-gain.FIELDS of our
win-try,griev - ing, or in pain. Fields of our
win-try,griev - ing, or in pain. Fields of our

53

S hearts, that dead and bare have been: Love is come a -
 A hearts, that dead and bare have been: Love is come a -
 T hearts, that dead and bare have been: Love is come a - gain like
 B hearts, that dead and bare have been: Love _____

poco cresc. al fine

poco cresc. al fine

poco cresc. al fine

poco cresc. al fine

58

S gain like wheat a - ris - ing green. _____

A gain like wheat a - ris - ing green. _____

T f
wheat a - ris - ing green. _____

B f
is come a - gain like wheat a - ris - ing green. _____

Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit

Traditional Spiritual

Tune PENTECOST
Arr. Nina Gilbert, 5/23/2019

1 2 3 4

S+A Ev'-ry time I feel the spir-it mov-ing in my heart I will pray. Yes, ev'-ry

T+B Ev'-ry time I feel the spir-it mov-ing in my heart I will pray. Yes, ev'-ry

5 6 7 8

time I feel the spir-it mov-ing in my heart I will pray. 1.Up - on the

time I feel the spir-it mov-ing in my heart I will pray.

9 10 11

moun - tain My Lord spoke: out of God's mouth came fire and

1.Up - on the moun-tain My Lord spoke: out of God's mouth came

12 13 14

smoke. There is but one train on this track:

fire and smoke. There is but one train on this track: It runs to

2

15 16 17 18

It runs to heav-en and right back. Ev'-ry time I feel the spir-it mov-ing

heav-en and right back. Ev'-ry time I feel the spir-it mov-ing

19 20 21 22

in my heart I will pray. Yes ev'-ry time I feel the spir-it mov-ing

in my heart I will pray. Yes ev'-ry time I feel the spir-it mov-ing

23 24 25

in my heart I will pray. 2.Jor-dan Riv-er is chilly and

in my heart I will pray. 2.Jor-dan Riv-er

26 27

cold: It chills the bod-y but not the

is chilly and cold: It chills the bod-y

28

soul.

29

Looked all a-round me,
but not the soul. Looked all a - round me, it looked so

30

it looked so fine,

31

Till I asked my Lord if all was mine: Ev'-ry

fine,

32

Till I asked my Lord if all was mine: Ev'-ry

33

time I feel the spir-it mov-ing in my heart I will pray. Yes ev'-ry

34

35

36

time I feel the spir-it mov-ing in my heart I will pray. Yes ev'-ry

37

time I feel the spir-it mov-ing in my heart I will pray.

38

39

40

41

time I feel the spir-it mov-ing in my heart I will pray.

EXAMPLE FOR Timely, Uplifting, and Super-Practical:
Creating Realistic Arrangements
for Your Church, Community, or School Choir

Fum, Fum, Fum!

Traditional Spanish/Catalan Carol:

25th of December, strum! strum! strum!

Like the sun was born Jesus, radiating light.

He was the son of Mary, a stable was his birthplace: strum! strum! strum!

Arranged by Nina Gilbert

Soprano $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 108$

Vein - ti - cin - co de Di - ciem - bre, fum, fum, fum!
mf

Vein - ti - cin - co de Di - ciem - bre,
mp

Vein - ti - cin - co de Di - ciem - bre, fum, fum, fum! fum, fum,

Alto

7 8 9 10 11

fum, fum, fum! Co-mo un sol na - ció Je - sús, ra-dian-do luz, ra-dian-do
p

A *p poco cresc.* fum! Co-mo un sol na - ció Je - sús, fum, fum, fum, fum, fum, ra -

12 13 14 *f* 15 16 17

luz. De Ma - ri - a e - ra hi - jo, ah! ah! fum, fum, fum!
mf *piu cresc.* *f*

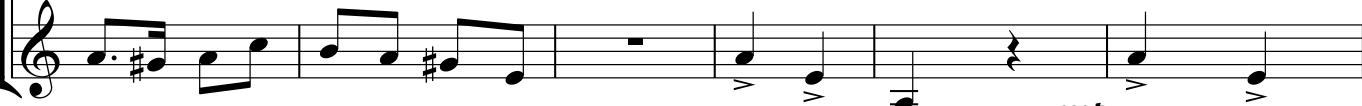
dian - do luz: fum, fum, fum, un es - ta - blo fue su cu - na fum, fum, fum!

2

18 19 20 21 22 23

S 

Twen-ty-fifth of dark De-cem-ber, fum, fum, fum!
mf

A 

Twen-ty-fifth of dark De-cem-ber,
fum, fum, fum!
mp

24 25 26 27 28

S 

fum, fum, fum! Born a boy, just like the sun, he shines so bright, he shines so
p

A 

fum! Born a boy, just like the sun, fum, fum, fum, fum, fum, He

29 30

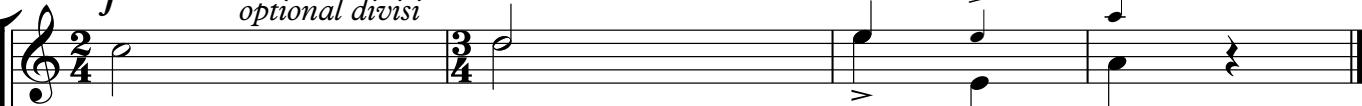
S 

bright! Son of Ma - ry, child of heav - en,
mf

A 

shines so bright!

31 optional divisi 32 33 34

S 

ah!, ah!, ah!
f

A 

optional divisi

And a sta - ble was his cra - dle, fum, fum, fum!

For the Museum of Making Music Summer Chorus, August 2018

Updated for the Vi Chorus, February 2022

Example for Realistic Arrangements session, WACDA

I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise

Words by B. G. De Sylva and

Arthur Francis (Ira Gershwin's pseudonym)

No dynamics marked in this arrangement yet—yours to decide!

Music by George Gershwin, 1922

Arranged by Nina Gilbert, July 2018

$\text{♩} = \text{c.} 100$

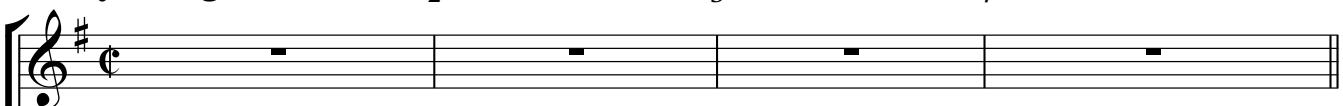
Easy swing

2

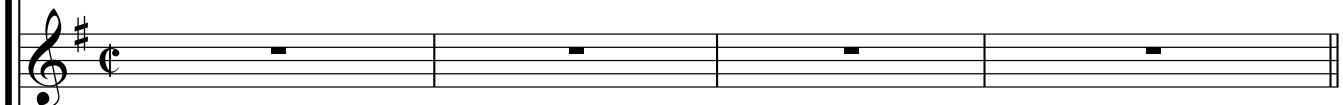
3

4

Soprano



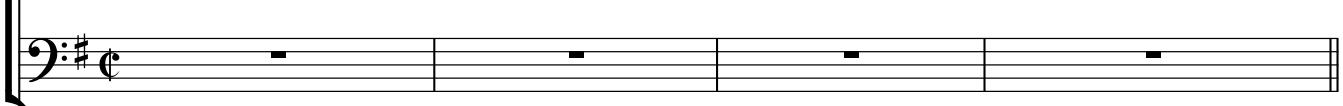
Alto



Tenor



Bass



$\text{♩} = \text{c.} 100$

Easy swing

*This is Gershwin's original piano accompaniment.
Yours to adapt or improvise.*

G

D⁷/C

G⁷

G[#]o⁷

A⁹

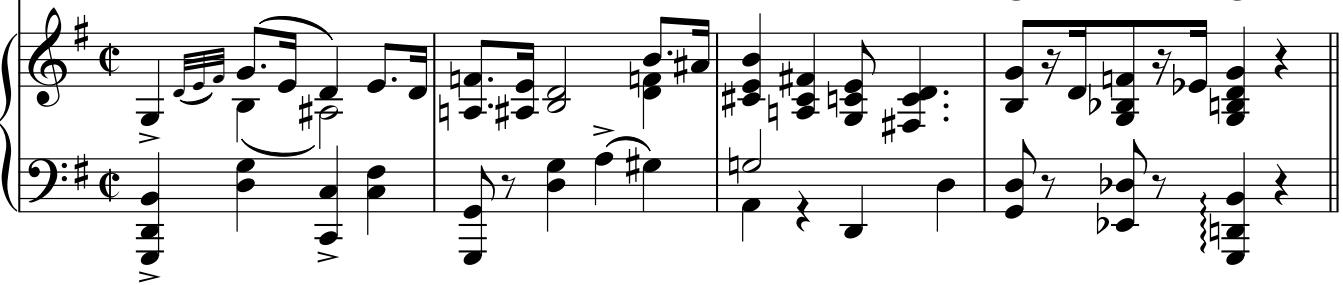
D⁷

G

E^b9

G

Piano



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2

5 **MELODY S**

6

7

s All you preach-ers who de-light in pan-ning the danc-ing teach-ers:
MELODY S-A 3

A Ooh, in pan-ning the danc-ing teach-ers:

T Ooh, in pan-ning the danc-ing teach-ers:

B Ooh, in pan-ning the danc-ing teach-ers: 3

s 8 Ooh, there are a lot of fea-tures of the dance that car-ry you
MELODY A-T 3
MELODY S-A 3

A Let me tell you there are a lot of fea-tures of the dance that car-ry you
MELODY A-T 3

T Let me tell you there are a lot of fea-tures: Ooh,

B Ooh, there are a lot of fea-tures: Ooh, 3

16

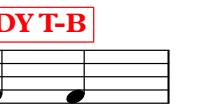
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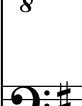
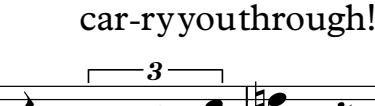
11 12 13

S 
through the gates of heav-en!

A 
through the gates of heav-en!

T 
car-ry you through 



B 
car-ry you through 



MELODY T-B

MELODY T-B

car-ry you through! It's mad-ness

car-ry you through! It's mad-ness

14 15 16

S 
Ooh,

A 
Ooh,

T 
Ooh,

B 
to be al-ways sit-ting a round in sad- ness, when you could be learn-ing the

3

T 


B 


3

to be al-ways sit-ting a round in sad- ness, when you could be learn-ing the

3

3

4

17 18 19

MELODY UNISON

You'll be hap-py when you can do just
steps of glad-ness, You'll be hap-py when you can do just
steps of glad-ness, You'll be hap-py when you can do just

20 21 22

MELODY A-B

six or sev-en! Be-gin to - day, you'll find it
six or sev-en! Be-gin to-day, you'll find it nice,
six or sev-en! Be-gin to - day, you'll find it
six or sev-en! Be-gin to-day, you'll find it nice,

MELODY A-B

23

Soprano (S) vocal line:

A (Alto) vocal line:

Tenor (T) vocal line:

Bass (B) vocal line:

24

The quick - est way to Par-a - dise:

The quick-est way to Par - a - dise,

When you prac-tice,

nice, The quick - est way to Par-a - dise:

The quick-est way to Par - a - dise,

When you prac-tice,

5

26

Soprano (S) vocal line:

Alto (A) vocal line:

Tenor (T) vocal line:

Bass (B) vocal line:

27

MELODY S-A

When you prac - tice, Sim ply say as you go:

Here's the thing to do! Sim ply say as you go:

28

MELODY S-A

When you prac - tice: Ooh, Sim ply say as you

Here's the thing to do: Ooh, Sim ply say as you

MELODY S-T

29 **MELODY S**

30 (Second time faster)

31

I'll build a stair - way to Par - a-dise With a new step ev'ry day!

A

T

B

go: I'll build a stair-way to Par - a-dise With a

I'll build a stair-way to Par - a-dise With a

D⁷/C G⁷ (Second time faster) G^{#7}

32

33

34

I'm going to get there at an - y price, Stand a -

A

T

B

new step ev -'ry day! I'm going to get there!

I'm going to get there at an - y price, Stand a -

new step ev -'ry day! I'm going to get there!

20

35

s side, I'm on my way, I've got the blues.

A

T side, I'm on my way, I've got the blues and up a-

B

I'm on my way! I've got the blues and up a-

36

37

7

MELODY T-B

MELODY T-B

38

s Shoes! Go on and car-ry me there!

A

T bove it's so fair.

B

bove it's so fair.

39 **MELODY S**

40

I want my shoes! Go on and car-ry me there!

21

MELODY S

8

MELODY S-B

41 I'll build a stair-way to Par - a-dise, With a new step ev'-ry day.

MELODY S-A

42 I'll build a stair, With a new step ev'-ry day.

MELODY S-A

43 I'll build a stair, With a new step! With a

MELODY S-B

44 I'll build a stair-way to Par - a-dise, With a new step! With a

D⁺⁷/C G⁷ G^{#07}

Second time faster ♩ = 112 Rit. Grand slow ending ♩ = 96

44

45 **MELODY S**

I'll build a stair-way to new step ev'-ry day! With a

46 **MELODY S-B**

new step ev'-ry day, With a

47

new step ev'-ry day. With a

new step ev'-ry day, With a

new step ev'-ry day. With a

MELODY S-B

new step ev'-ry day! With a

Second time faster ♩ = 112

Rit. Grand slow ending ♩ = 96

48 49 50 51

S new step ev - 'ry day.
A new step ev - 'ry day.
T new step ev - 'ry day.
B new step ev - 'ry day.

3

Mama Don' 'Low

Arranging worksheet

2 3 4 Traditional

TUNE

The musical score consists of four staves of music in G major (two sharps) and common time. The first staff is labeled 'TUNE' and 'Traditional'. The second staff is labeled '(ideas)'. The lyrics are:

Ma-ma don' 'low no gui-tar play - in' round here.
Ma-ma don'"low no gui-tar play-in' round here. Well, I don't care what
Ma-ma don' 'low, Gon-na play my gui - tar an - y - how..
Ma-ma don' 'low no gui - tar play - in' round here.

Numbered measure markers are provided above each staff: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.