

If We Could Talk With the Animals

By Sherry Crann (www.beanfieldcastle.net)

Overview:

This musical originated from a conversation with my daughter, when we were discussing what to do for the next year's Christmas musical. My kids have sort of formed the habit of thinking that I will write and arrange all the music that we do, and since it's pretty fun stuff, I generally do. We had done a number of re-arrangements on lots of traditional Christmas songs for the past few years, and I wanted to do something *different*.

We homeschool, and so I'm around my kids a lot. That experience has really drilled into me the sense of perspective – that how I see something may not be how everyone else sees the same situation. I started thinking about the animals involved in the nativity story. What might the donkey who carried Mary have thought of this humble couple from Nazareth? He wouldn't have had the prejudices of understanding the situation – he was just a beast of burden doing his job, and looking forward to his feed at the end of the trip. How would the camels and horses have reacted to this trek across the miles? What kind of pet did Herod have? And sheep – these animals are not exactly smart, and they shy at the slightest provocation. What would they have done when the hosts of heaven appeared and blew away the darkness of the night? And what did the animals think when they went to eat dinner one night in the stable, but found a warm little bundle wrapped up in cloths instead? We obviously can't know exactly, but it definitely made for a fun exercise!

This musical takes around half an hour, and can be adapted to low budgets, high budgets, or no budget (you could do it *a cappella*!) We did low budget – we made foam-board masks (on sticks) with holes for the kids' faces, and had them play multiple characters with everyone singing every song. Or you could make costumes and have them actually sing their particular part. It really depends on you, your group, and how big a production you want to make of it. The possibilities are quite broad.

The files that accompany this musical include the following:

.not files – These are files that I composed and arranged, and can be played in Notation Composer or other Notation Software Germany products (www.notation-software.com). I used these with a laptop computer, ran an audio line to our sound system, and an extra screen to face our kids, so that they could see the notes and words highlighting to help them keep in time (we didn't have a lot of rehearsal time). Composer allows you to use any MIDI device on your computer so that you can get some really nice sounds (the default is the GS Wavetable, which isn't so nice, but is usable.) I used Garritan Personal Orchestra, Garritan World Sounds (www.garritan.com), and some free sound fonts that I'd found on the internet for our performance. You can use whatever device (eg. an external keyboard synth works, too) you have to get the sound you want. You may need to tweak levels of the different instruments to get a good blend, depending on the MIDI playback device that you use.

Alternatively, you can print out the different instrument parts from Notation Composer (or Musician or Player) and have real live musicians play them. That would be a lot of fun, and include more than just the kids!

.mid files – I include the exported .mid files in case you want to use a sequencer to work on the sound.

PDF of the vocal parts – I “printed” these from Notation Composer using PDF Creator (from sourceforge.org).

Full Text – This file is provided in the event you want to print up a program that contains the full text of narrative and song lyrics. Also includes the accompanying free clip art that I included in our program.

The narrative – is found following this Overview.

Notes on the Performance:

The Narration segments can be broken up to fit your group if you want multiple narrators, or you can have just a single Narrator.

Masks/costumes needed – these can be multiples if you have a large group, or if you’re using just masks (ala Chinese opera like we did ;)) then you can make as many as you want and have children switch character masks as needed for each song:

(Donkey Song)

Mary's donkey

(Wise Camels and Horses)

Camel(s), Horse(s)

(Herod's Cat)

Herod's Cat, Camel(s), Horse(s)

(Sheep Song)

Timid sheep, Clueless sheep

(Sleepy Little Stranger)

Calf/ves

Cow/s

Sheep

Goat/s

Donkey/s

Horse/s

Cat/s

If you perform this musical:

My prayer is that this musical would help those who hear and/or perform it gain a fresh perspective on an astounding story that sometimes becomes dulled for us due to repetition. It is truly an amazing story, this juxtaposition of the King of Glory come to earth in the meanest of circumstances, all because He loves us enough to want us with Him forever. I don’t ask for any monetary recompense, but an acknowledgement of the source would be appreciated. And let me know if you do perform it – I would love to see pictures or hear a recording of your performance! You can reach me at

crann@echoicemi.com

We Could Talk With the Animals

By Sherry Crann (www.beanfieldcastle.net)

Narration 1:

Well, it's the Christmas season once again, and the lights are all hung downtown, Christmas songs have been playing in the stores since before Thanksgiving, and there are even a few nativity scenes scattered about the landscape.

Most of us have probably heard the story of that first Christmas, perhaps even many times. Today we want to show you a different side of that story, a different point of view. We know that a lot of animals were present during the key events of this story - Mary's donkey, the camels and other animals that travelled with the magi, the sheep on the hills with the shepherds during that wondrous announcement, and the animals that were in the stable when Jesus was born. What if they could talk, and tell us what it was like to be right there? What if the donkey that Mary rode on to Bethlehem could tell you his version of that trip?

(1 Donkey Song)

Narration 2:

We know that Mary's little donkey wasn't the only travelling animal in this story. In the book of Matthew we learn about the Magi coming from the east in search of the new born king. Many nativity scenes show *three* wise men with *three* camels. That's because there are *three* gifts listed in the Biblical account.

But Matthew does not tell us the exact number of magi, nor what exactly they rode. Most such caravans would have had many animals, with camels to bear the main burdens and horses for speed riding and comfort. What if we listened in on their conversation during their journey to find the newborn king?

(2 Wise Camels and Horses)

Narration 3:

The magi rode quite a long way following the star. They went to the place any sane person would expect a new king to be born - they went to the capital city, Jerusalem and to Herod in his resplendent palace. But they didn't find a new baby there. While the magi were busy chatting with wily King Herod, the animals were probably holding their own conversations with the four-legged residents of the palace. For a guy like Herod, a smart-alecky cat seems a very likely palace pet...

(3 Herod's Cat)

Narration 4:

Well the magi didn't find the new baby king at Herod's palace. They had to follow the star again - to Bethlehem. But there were some others who found out where this newborn King was at before the

Magi. There was a group of shepherds - lowly shepherds - out in the fields the night this baby was born. And what do shepherds do? They tend sheep, of course.

Sheep aren't exactly the smartest animals. Just imagine if you were a sheep in the Judean hills, just minding your own business out in the pasture one night, maybe tucking into those last few nibbles before calling it a night and snuggling down to sleep. Even counting all their sheep brothers and sisters was not going to help them sleep this night...

(4 Sheep Song)

Narration 5:

So a few brave sheep hustled off after their shepherds, looking for the Savior of the world. The shepherds followed the directions that came straight from the angels - they went to find a "baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

Where do you find a manger? Since mangers are what cows and other livestock eat from, well, you'd find a manger in a barn or stable somewhere. And since a manger is where the animals find their food, they weren't quite sure what to make of the tiny bundle they found there when they went looking for supper that night...

(5 Sleepy Little Stranger)

Narration 6:

This baby, this tiny, frail little baby.

The baby that Magi travelled many leagues to see and worship.

This tiny infant that the host of heaven proclaimed to shepherds.

Emmanuel.

God with us.

The Promise that had echoed through the scriptures from the time the first man and woman sinned. This paradox of God's love for us - the One who was to save us from our sins and would conquer death and the grave, came as a tiny, fragile baby in a smelly stable. He would grow up in order to die for us, so that we can be the perfected children of God, while He forever retains the scars of that purchase. Sometimes we understand God's ways no better than the animals understand the ways of humans. But just because we may not understand fully doesn't make God's love for us any less. The Bible tells us that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Even though we may not comprehend the vastness of God's love for us, He still loves us. He loves us enough that He came as the baby we celebrate at Christmas. He loves us enough that He died for us as the Passover fulfillment. And He loves us enough to have risen again at Easter to conquer death, so that we can live forever with Him.

This is the meaning of Christmas. May you know the joy and peace of knowing Jesus this season, too.