

# O HOW HAPPY A THING IT IS

a Verse Anthem for SA soli, SAATB chorus and organ

JOHN HOLMES (d.1629)

Reconstructed and Edited by

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Psalm 133

(Metrical: Sternhold and Hopkins)

VERSE

Organ

The organ introduction is written for a three-part organ (right hand, left hand, and pedals) in a 2/4 time signature. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody starts on a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5. The accompaniment consists of chords and single notes in the left hand and pedals.

\*NB: copies may be purchased from Severinus Press, Hereford, England ([www.severinus.co.uk](http://www.severinus.co.uk))

3 VERSE

S. O how hap-py a thing it is, and joy - ful for to see,

Org.

The first system of the vocal and organ parts. The vocal line (Soprano) starts with a quarter rest, followed by a half note G4, and then a series of quarter notes: A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4. The organ accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines in both hands.

8

S. Bre - thren to - ge - ther fast to hold the band of a - mi - ty.

Org.

The second system of the vocal and organ parts. The vocal line (Soprano) starts with a quarter rest, followed by a half note G4, and then a series of quarter notes: A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4. The organ accompaniment continues with harmonic support.

12

S. It calls to mind that sweet per - fume, and that cost -

Org.

The third system of the vocal and organ parts. The vocal line (Soprano) starts with a quarter rest, followed by a half note G4, and then a series of quarter notes: A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4. The organ accompaniment continues with harmonic support.

17

S. ly oint - ment, Which on the sa - cri - fi - cer's head

Org.

The fourth system of the vocal and organ parts. The vocal line (Soprano) starts with a quarter rest, followed by a half note G4, and then a series of quarter notes: A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4. The organ accompaniment continues with harmonic support.

22 CHORUS

S. by God's pre-cept, by God's pre - cept was \_\_\_\_\_ spent. Which on \_\_\_\_\_ the sa - cri - fi -

A.1 Which on \_\_\_\_\_ the sa - cri -

A.2 Which on \_\_\_\_\_ the sa - cri -

T. Which on \_\_\_\_\_ the sa - cri -

B. Which on \_\_\_\_\_ the sa - cri -

Org. CHORUS

28

S. - cer's head, the sa - cri - fi - cer's head, by God's pre-cept was \_\_\_\_\_

A.1 fi - cer's head, \_\_\_\_\_ by God's pre-cept was

A.2 fi - cer's head, by God's pre - cept was spent, \_\_\_\_\_ pre - cept was

T. fi - cer's head, by \_\_\_\_\_ God's pre - cept was spent, by God's pre-cept was

B. fi - cer's head, by God's pre-cept was spent, \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_

Org.

## NOTE

John Holmes (d.1629) was respectively organist (c.1599-1621) at Winchester Cathedral and master of the choristers (1621-29) at Salisbury Cathedral, and one of the earliest and most important provincial composers of verse anthems. All, however, are fragmentary: no vocal parts exist, and the sole surviving text is preserved in the so-called Batten Organ Book (St Michael's College, Tenbury MS 791), an organ score now held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, to whose Music Librarian the editor is grateful for permission to publish this edition. According to a note in the manuscript (fol. 400r) 'all these songs [i.e. sacred pieces] of Mr John Holmes was [*sic*] pric[k]t [i.e. copied] from his owne hand prickinge [i.e. autograph manuscripts] in ye yeare 1635 by Adrian Batten, one of ye vickers [choral] of St Paules [Cathedral] in London, who some times [i.e. once] was his scoller [i.e. pupil]'. It preserves the organ accompaniments to all Holmes's extant verse anthems. The amount of vocal material transmitted in the organ score varies enormously, however, even within the same piece; and substantial recomposition of missing vocal strands is required to supplement the reconstruction of such fragmentary vocal lines as can be recovered. The text, a metrical version of Psalm 133 published by Sternhold and Hopkins, differs between editions; but that published in the 1653 edition agrees with Holmes's incipit exactly so has been selected for the editorial underlay.

Since no definitive edition of such fragmentary music is possible, the present version does not attempt a critical edition of the organ score. Rather, it offers as accurate a transcription as possible as a basis for the editorial reconstruction and recomposition of the voice parts. Standard editorial conventions are used: all additions in square brackets, small notes and symbols, and crossed ties (which are added sparingly) are editorial, but obvious copying errors are corrected without comment. Pitches indicated as directs are tacitly altered to an appropriate note value. Wherever possible, the division of the music between the two staves follows the original. Original verse and chorus indications (and the spelling of the verbal text) are modernized. All voice parts and underlay are entirely editorial. To bring the choral parts within performable range, the music is transposed up a fourth to choir pitch, in accordance with both the original organ-score clefs and the method described by Peter le Huray (*Music and the Reformation*, pp. 114-15).

Source: Tenbury MS 791, fols 383r-384r. At head: 'O how happie a thing it is: Jo: Holmes'. At end: 'made ye 25 of October 1602 Jo: Holmes'

13 Organ tenor c' d' are notated an 8ve lower in the MS, having probably been transposed when the score was prepared, for ease of playing. (Octave transposition was a common technique among keyboard transcribers of instrumental and vocal music, though there is relatively little evidence for the practice in the verse-anthem accompaniments in Batten's organ book.) / 57-64 A.1: these three phrases must be regarded as optional because Holmes may have intended the two soloists to join together only in the third and final section.

### Bibliography

Ralph T. Daniel and Peter le Huray: *The Sources of English Church Music 1549-1660* (London 1972), p. 110.

Peter le Huray: *Music and the Reformation in England 1549-1660* (London 1967; 2nd edn, Cambridge 1978), pp. 216-26, 268. Also *New Grove* article 'Holmes, John' (1980 edn).

Ian Payne: 'The Will and Probate Inventory of John Holmes (d.1629): Instrumental Music at Salisbury and Winchester Cathedrals Revisited', *Antiquaries Journal*, 83 (2003), 369-96.

Watkins Shaw: *The Succession of Organists of the Chapel Royal and the Cathedrals of England and Wales from c.1538* (Oxford 1991), pp. 294-5.

*The Whole Book of Psalms: Collected into English Meeter by Thomas Sternhold, John Hopkins, and others* (London 1653), p.77.

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