

ABOUT “EARLY, MY GOD, WITHOUT DELAY”

In 1719, Isaac Watts published a collection of verse which paraphrased the book of Psalms. From this collection, Watts’ version of Psalm 63 begins:

Early my God without delay,
I haste to see thy face;
My thirsty spirit faints away,
Without thy cheering grace.
So pilgrims on the scorching sand,
Beneath a burning sky,
Long for a cooling stream at hand,
And they must drink or die.

Compare this with the first verse of Psalm 63 from the King James Bible:

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee:
my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee
in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is...

Watts treated the other Psalms in a similar fashion setting them all in metrical rhyme. Some of Watts’ Psalm paraphrases have become very popular, for example, the Christmas carol *Joy to the World* which is based on Psalm 98, and *O God, Our Help in Ages Past* which is from Psalm 90. But when Watts first published his verse, it was not immediately accepted by church congregations. In fact, many people rejected his work.

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Justin Morgan lived in Vermont and made his living as a farmer and horse breeder (Horse lovers may know that today’s Morgan horses descend from a famous horse named Figure which was owned by Justin Morgan). Morgan also worked as a singing master, that is, he traveled from town to town teaching people the rudiments of music and how to sing. In addition, Morgan composed many pieces including a setting of Watts’ Psalm 63 (or *Early, My God, Without Delay*).

Early, My God, Without Delay falls under the classification of *fuging tune*—a popular idiom in colonial New England in the late 18th century and used frequently by many early American composers including William Billings. Fuging tunes typically begin with all voices together in a homophonic hymn-like statement (mm. 1–11 in this edition), followed by a section where each voice enters one after the other in an imitative manner similar to a fugue (mm. 12–23).

Another striking characteristic of this genre is the use of open fifths (for example, the cadences in mm. 23 and 28), as well as the nontraditional use of parallel fifths (note the soprano and alto parts in m. 3). These features, in addition to the contrast between homophony and polyphony, give this style of music its unique flavor.

Early, My God, Without Delay

3

For Mixed Voices, SATB

Text: Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Music: MONTGOMERY
by Justin Morgan (1747–1798)
Edited by Ryan D. Neaveill

2 3

S *mp* Ear - *f* ly, my God, with - out de - lay, I

A *mp* Ear - *f* ly, my God, with - out de - lay, I

T *mp* Ear - *f* ly, my God, with - out de - lay, I

B *mp* Ear - *f* ly, my God, with - out de - lay, I

keyboard for rehearsal only

4 5 6 7

haste to see Thy face; My thirst - y spir - it faints a -

haste to see Thy face; My thirst - y spir - it faints a -

haste to see Thy face; My thirst - y spir - it faints a -

haste to see Thy face; My thirst - y spir - it faints a -

8 9 10 11

way, ————— With - out Thy cheer - ing grace;

way, ————— With - out Thy cheer - ing grace;

way, ————— With - out Thy cheer - ing grace;

way, ————— With - out Thy cheer - ing grace; *p* So

12 13 14 15 16

f So pil - grims on the scorch - ing sand, Be - *cresc. . .*

mf So pil - grims on the scorch - ing sand, Be - *cresc. . .*

mp So pil - grims on the scorch - ing sand, So pil - grims on the scorch - ing sand, Be - *cresc. . .*

cresc. . . pil - grims on the scorch - ing sand, So pil - grims on the scorch - ing sand, Be -

17 18 19 20

neath a burn - ing sky, *p* Long for a cool - ing stream at hand

neath a burn - ing sky, *mp* Long for a cool - ing stream *cresc. . .*

neath a burn - ing sky, *mf* Long for a

neath a burn - ing sky,

21 22 23 24

Long for a cool - ing stream at hand, *ff* Long for a

at hand, And - they must - drink or die. *ff* Long for a

cool - ing stream *cresc. . .* and they - must drink or die. *ff* Long for a

f Long for a cool - ing stream *cresc. . .* at hand, *ff* Long for a

25 26 27 28

1.

cool - ing stream — at — hand, And they must drink or die.

cool - ing stream — at — hand, And they must drink or die.

cool - ing stream — at — hand, And they must drink — or die.

cool - ing stream at hand, And they must drink or die. *p* So

29 30 31 32

2.

die. *mp* Not *f* life it - self, with all her — joys, Can

die. *mp* Not *f* life it - self, with all her — joys, Can

die. *mp* Not *f* life it - self, with all — her — joys, Can

die. *mp* Not *f* life it - self, with all her joys, Can

33 34 35 36

my best — pas - sions move, Or raise so high my cheer - ful —

my — best pas - sions move, Or raise so high my cheer — ful —

my best pas - sions move, Or raise so high my cheer - ful —

my best pas - sions move, Or raise so high my cheer - ful

37 38 39 40

voice — As Thy for - giv - ing love.

voice — As Thy for - giv - ing love.

voice — As Thy for - giv - ing love.

voice — As Thy for - giv - ing love. Thus

41 42 43 44 45

f Thus 'till my last ex - pir - ing day, I'll *cresc. . .*

mf Thus 'till my last ex - pir - ing day, I'll *cresc. . .*

mp Thus 'till my last ex - pir - ing day, Thus 'till my last ex - pir - ing day, I'll *cresc. . .*

cresc. . . 'till my last ex - pir - ing day, Thus 'till my last ex - pir - ing day, I'll

46 47 48 49

bless my God — and King; *ff* Thus will I lift — my hands to pray — *dim. . .*

bless my God and King; *f* Thus will I lift my hands *dim. . .*

bless my God and King; *mf* Thus will I

bless my God and King;

50 51 52 53

Thus will I lift my hands to pray, *p* Thus will I
 to pray, And tune my lips to sing. *p* Thus will I
 lift my hands *dim. . .* And tune my lips to sing. *p* Thus will I
mp Thus will I lift my hands to pray, *p* Thus will I

54 55 56 57

lift my hands to pray, *pp* And tune my lips to sing.
 lift my hands to pray, *pp* And tune my lips to sing.
 lift my hands to pray, *pp* And tune my lips to sing.
 lift my hands to pray, *pp* And tune my lips to sing. *p* Thus

58 59 60

2.

pray, *ff* And *rit. ...* tune my lips to sing.

pray, *ff* And *rit. ...* tune my lips to sing.

pray, *ff* And *rit. ...* tune my lips — to sing.

pray, *ff* And *rit. ...* tune my lips to sing.

pray, *ff* And *rit. ...* tune my lips to sing.

Work on a focused tone. Let the “momentum” of the crescendo take you into the next measure.

Ear - ly, my God, Ear - ly, my God, Ear - ly, my God,

Ear - ly, my God, Ear - ly, my God with - out de - lay.

Gently take the melody from the previous voice—as in a relay race—and match each other’s dynamic level to give the illusion that there is one voice and one crescendo. Repeat this exercise starting forte and decreasing the volume to piano.

p *cresc. . .*
Long for a cool - ing stream

mp
Long for a cool - ing stream
cresc. . .

mf *cresc. . .*
Long for a cool - ing stream

Long for a cool - ing stream
f *cresc. . .*