

# 22 Skye boat song

**RESOURCES** ▶ CD tracks 29 (performance) and 30 (backing)  
▶ Warm ups: Nos. 7, 11, 19, 26a

## Information

Imagine, if a prescriptive music curriculum ever existed, which songs simply must become known: songs with a good tune, worthy lyrics, and which provide abundant teaching opportunities both in music and across the curriculum. The 'Skye boat song' is one such song. It conjures up powerful images from Scottish history and Bonnie Prince Charlie's flight from battle. It has a marvellous, well-shaped tune, good contrast between verse and chorus, and its pentatonic character is highly evocative of Scottish folk music; it may even be heard in church as a popular modern hymn tune.

## Starting

- Warm up with some scales, reaching at least up to D.
- Chanting the opening words of the chorus in rhythm; aim for clear consonants, especially a good 'b'.

## Teaching and rehearsing

- Teach the melody of the chorus. Perhaps start lower than notated, and work up. Both verse and chorus have short regular rhythmic patterns which makes learning quite easy.
- Take good breaths and sing through each two-bar phrase. Aim for a gentle sound.
- Teach the verse, which, like the chorus, is one four-bar phrase repeated. The words are more dramatic—set the scene of a boat tossed by the waves and get the drama into the singing.
- Sing the opening chorus, verse 1, and then repeat the chorus. Distinguish between the 'sanctuary' of the chorus, in the major key, and the drama of the verse, in the minor key, where the business of the words occurs. Gather the group at the end of the verse and start the chorus cleanly.
- Teach the remaining verses, thinking about suitable dynamics for each.
- Explain the historical background to the song: in 1746 Prince Charles's rebel army was defeated by the Duke of Cumberland at the Battle of Culloden; he went into hiding and was conveyed to Skye by Flora Macdonald, a loyal admirer, braving the elements of weather and war. Show where the isle of Skye is on a map and explain that a claymore is a wide-bladed sword.

## Ideas

- Split the group into four and give them a verse each to work on. Encourage real story-telling and good diction. Sing through, with all joining together for the chorus.
- A simple descant can be added to the verse by sustaining the first note of each bar—listen to the CD in verse 2.
- Add narrated echoes to the verses in the style of a voice-over (ideally amplified); listen to the CD in verse 4.
- Try adding some instruments in the chorus. The melody works well on recorder, or even flute and violin. Or try on chime bars or xylophone.
- The whole song is contained within the notes DEGAB and the D an octave higher; on a keyboard (a semitone lower) this is equivalent to all the black notes. See if children can pick out the tune, by trial and error, on a keyboard.

## Listen out

- Check that the singing has a sense of line. The arched shape of the chorus has a satisfying symmetry which enables the singer to sense the length of the phrase. Always help children to 'see' or 'feel' where the musical line is heading.

## Performing

- Sing with commitment and tell the story, with good contrast between verse and chorus.
- The accompaniment of the verse paints the words while the chorus has a 'jazz waltz feel'. This can be kept quite gentle, and gives a fresh perspective on an old favourite; or it can be simplified down to the basic chords if preferred.
- As an introduction, play the first bar of the accompaniment twice.

# 22 Skye boat song

♩ = 50  
Chorus

Trad. Scottish  
arr. Kevin Stannard

*mp* G Em Am7 D G C G C/D

Speed bon-nie boat like a bird on the wing, 'On-ward' the sai - lors cry.

5 G Em Am7 D G C G *Fine*

Car - ry the lad that's born to be king, Ov - er the sea to Skye.

9 Verse  
Em Am Em B7 Em

1. Loud the winds howl, loud the waves roar, thun-der-claps rend the air;  
2. Though the waves leap, soft shall ye sleep, o-cean's a ro - yal bed.  
3. Ma - ny's the lad fought on that day, well the clay-more could wield.  
4. Burned are our homes, ex - ile and death scat - ter the lo - yal men;

13 Em Am Em B7 Em C D.C.

Baf - fled our foes stand by the shore, fol - low they will not dare.  
Rocked in the deep, Flo - ra will keep watch by your wea - ry head.  
When the night came si - lent-ly lay dead on Cul - lo - den's field.  
Yet 'ere the sword cool in the sheath, Char-lie will come a - gain.

# 26 Mi caballo blanco

Del Campo

arr. Kevin Stannard

♩ = 132

Dm

Gm6

A7

Dm

*Lively*  
*mf*

Verse

5

Dm *mf*

Gm6

A7

Dm

1. You are a fine com - pan - ion\_ a sta - ble friend in - deed.  
 2. You are my guar - dian an - gel\_ and un - der - stand my pain.  
 3. And when the gods in heav - en\_ an - nounce our fi - nal ride,

9

Gm6

Dm

A7

Dm

We'll al - ways be to - geth - er, \_ me and you my tru - sty steed.  
 You'll al - ways lift my spi - rits\_ as we race a - cross the plain.  
 They know that we'll be rea - dy\_ both to - geth - er side by side.

Chorus

13 Gm6 *f* Dm A7 Dm

Mi ca - ba - llo, mi ca - ba - llo ga - lo - pan - do va,

17 Gm6 *mf* Dm A7 Dm F *mp*

Mi ca - ba - llo, mi ca - ba - llo se vay se va. Ah,

22 C Bb7 A7 Dm *p* *pp*

mm.

27 *mp* Gm F/Bb C/D *p* *rit.* G9 BbΔ *dim.* Dm9 *pp*

Ah, mm.