

Nowel: Owt of your slepe aryse

Nowell, nowell, nowell,
nowell nowell nowell

1 Out of your slepe arise and awaken,
for God has taken human form
from a maid without any equal
of all women she is best.
Nowell!

2 And through a fair and wise maiden
humankind was once brought to its full worth;
now the angels kneel in the service of humanity;
and at Christmas time, all this took place
Nowell!

3. Now man is brighter than the sun;
man shall now dwell on high;
blessed be God that this game is begun,
and his mother the empress of hell
Nowell!

4 He who was once in bondage is now free;
she who was once humble is now great;
now God shall receive both you and me
into his bliss, if we are virtuous
Nowell!

5. Now man may go to heaven;
now heaven and earth bend to him;
he that was foe is now our friend;
there is no denying what I tell you.
Nowell!

6 Now blessed brother [Jesus], grant us
the grace, on Judgment Day, to come into
your presence, and give us a place in your
kingdom, that we may sing there, nowell
Nowell!

Nowel, nowel, nowel,
nowel, nowel, nowel.

1 Owt of 3our slepe arise & wake
for God mankynd now hath ytake
al of a maide without eny make,
of al women she bereth the belle.
Nowel.

2 And forwe a maide faire & wyse
now man is made of ful grete pris.
Now angelys kneelen to manys seruys
& at þis tyme al þis byfel
Nowel.

3. Now man is brizter þan þe sonne,
now man in heuen an hye shal wonne.
Blessyd be God þis game is begonne
& his moder emperesse of helle.
Nowel

4 That euer was thralle now ys he fre,
þat euer was smalle now grete is she
Now shal God deme bothe the & me
into his bylisse, yf we do wel.
Nowel

5. Now man may to heuen wende,
now heuen & erthe to hym they bende.
He þat was foo now is oure frende,
this is no nay þat y 3owe telle.
Nowel

6. Now blessyd brother graunte vs grace
a domesday to se thy face,
and in thy courte to haue a place
þat we mow there synge nowel
Nowel

Note: You will notice that Middle English contains several letters that are now obsolete: the *thorn* [þ], which represents the letters "th," and the *yogh* [ȝ], which represents the letters "y," "y," "gh," or "ch." The letters "u" and "v" were used interchangeably, as were "i" and "j."

no:wel

1 u:t uv ju:r sle:p a:ri:z and wə:k
fə: ɡɒd mɑ:nkɪnd nu hæb itə:k
əl uv ə məið wɪðu:t eni mə:k
uv ə:l wə:mən fe: bə:reθ ðe: be:l
no:wel

2 and θɜ:w ə məiðe fa:ir and wi:z
nu. mɑ:n is meɪd uv ful ɡre:t pri:z
nu: ɑ:ndʒelɪs kne:le:n to: mɑ:nɪs sɜ:rvɪ:s
and ət ðɪs ti:m ə:l ðɪs bɪfel
no:wel

3. nu mɑ:n is brɪ:tɜ: ɔ:n ðe: sʌn
nu mɑ:n in he:vən ən hi: ʃal wɒn
blestɪd be: ɡɒd ðɪs ɡæ:m ɪs bɪɡʌn
and hɪs mɒ:dɜ: ɛmˈpre:s uv hel
no:wel

4 ðæt e:vɜ: wəz θrəl nu ɪs he fre
ðæt e:vɜ: wəz sməl nu ɡre:t ɪs fe
nu ʃal ɡɒd dem: bəθ ðe: and me
ɒntə hɪs blɪs ɪf we do: wel
no:wel

5 nu. mɑ:n məi to he:vən wend
nu he:vən and e:θ to: hɪm ðeɪ: bend
he: ðæt wəz fə: nu ɪs u:r frend
ðɪs ɪs nɑ: nəi ðæt ɪ ju: tel
no:wel

6. nu. blestɪd brə:ðɜ: ɡrɑnt ʊs ɡrɑ:s
ə do:məsdeɪ to: se ði: fe:s
and ɪn ði: kɜ:rt to: hɑv ə plɑ:s
ðæt we mɒu ðɜ:ɜ: sɪŋ no:wel
no:wel

Performance Notes

During the high Middle Ages (the twelfth through fourteenth centuries), poets and musicians of the British Isles produced a vast array of songs, ballads, carols and liturgical works on the topics of the incarnation and the virgin birth. In comparison to continental Europe, the number of these pieces is so large that it sometimes seems as if the British invented the celebration of Christmas. It is from this rich repertoire that *Anonymus 4* has chosen the first works to begin a series of Medieval & Modern Masterworks with *earthsongs*. This piece and others in this series can be heard on our CD *On Yoolis Night* (harmonia mundi usa, hmu 907099).



Carol: Nowel: Owt of your slepe aryse

Source: MS Selden B 26, f. 14v (British, 15th century)

This jolly carol inspired us to elaborate on the *burden* (refrain), which is printed in its original form at the beginning of this edition. The *alternate burden*, in three voices, is our own invention. It is based on the original monophonic *burden*, but expands it into a voice-exchange canon, with an added line of harmony. For a third, shorter variation, the *alternate burden* can be sung only as far as the dotted bar lines. We've provided all the verses as they exist in the manuscript, but some of the verses may be omitted in performance.

Significantly missing from medieval musical manuscripts (with a few exceptions) are indications of tempo, dynamics and expression. These are elements that we work out ourselves, based on the text, the texture, and the intent of the original, as best we can determine it. In choral performance, the size and skill of the ensemble will have a bearing on tempo as well. We strive to connect dynamic variation to changes in texture and (mainly) the text. Expression takes its cue from these elements as well.

In the Middle Ages, music was written down in a way that best suited the mode or tone (of which there were many more than just our major and minor). Thus a piece in "mode I" would usually be written with D as the tonic, or home note. The actual acoustical starting pitch was set by the lead singer, and might be any pitch that suited the ensemble. In this edition, for ease of use in choral situations, we have transposed some of the music to appropriate keys.

Voice distribution in medieval music is a tricky business. There is a lot of voice crossing, and ranges can be fairly wide within a single voice part. Judicious mixing of first and second sopranos, or even of sopranos and altos, will often yield good results. Transposing the piece up a major second and singing it an octave lower should allow it to be sung by a male chorus. A suitable key can also be found for use by a group of male and female voices, with low-to-medium female voices singing the top line, and male voices on the lower parts. In terms of rehearsal methods, it should be borne in mind that medieval music is essentially linear, not harmonic, and the less keyboard accompaniment used during rehearsal, the better chance singers have of developing their "melodic" ears.

In all of these works, the text underlay is fairly clear in the manuscript sources. When the exact placement of a syllable is doubtful, we have chosen a placement that enhances the musical line, and that, where possible, obeys the early-Renaissance dictum that syllables should fall on longer rather than shorter note values. Texts have been edited by the members of Anonymous 4. Translations have been prepared by the members of Anonymous 4 and by Lawrence Rosenwald.

Discovering and learning the pronunciation of an old language is one of the fascinating aspects of performing music from earlier times, and in our experience can greatly enhance the character and flavor of the music. In their detective work, modern linguistic scholars use a variety of resources including poetic rhymes, spelling variants, and puns, as well as the writings of early orthoepists (Renaissance scholars of pronunciation). For the pronunciation of these Middle English and Latin texts, we have consulted several sources, in particular the volume *Singing Early Music*, ed. Timothy J. McGee, with A.G. Rigg and David N. Klausner (Indiana University Press, 1996). As there are no definitive rules, however, the choices we have made are our own interpretations of these scholars' guidelines. We provide here our version of the texts in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Anonymous 4



Marsha Genesky Johanna Maria Rose Susan Hellauer Jacqueline Horner

Renowned for their astonishing vocal blend and virtuosic ensemble singing, the four women who comprise Anonymous 4 came together in 1986 to experiment with the sound of medieval chant and polyphony as sung by higher voices. The group's members combine musical, literary, and historical scholarship with contemporary performance intuition as they create innovative programs interweaving music with poetry and narrative. Based in New York City, Anonymous 4 perform to critical acclaim on music series throughout North America and abroad, and are celebrated regulars at major international festivals such as the BBC Proms, Tanglewood, and Belgium's Flanders Festival. Anonymous 4 have been featured on radio and television programs worldwide, including A&E's "Breakfast with the Arts," "CBS Sunday Morning," and "A Prairie Home Companion." Anonymous 4's award-winning recordings of medieval music have attained unprecedented popularity, rising to the top of Billboard's classical chart and reaching over a million listeners. For more information, visit Anonymous 4's website: <www.anonymous4.com>

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