

Mini-Project 104 Unto Us a Boy is Born Tasks

In steps 1 to 4 you're going to think about the patterns the tune makes – the ups and downs and be able to use what you've found out to identify the correct version of the tune in music notation and to do some sight singing. Then you'll be practising writing crotchets and minims, working out the rhythm of “Good King Wenceslas” and using what you've learned to work out the rhythm of a carol you might not know. Finally there are three versions of a carol to listen to.

All three tunes come from “Piae Cantiones” a Finnish publication of 1582 called “Piae Cantiones”. It's the source of several carols we sing today. The words were in Latin, and one of the carols you've got here is still in its Latin version.

In addition to this pdf there are 2 others, both music sheets. You need a hard copy of “Mini-Project 104 Unto Us a Boy is Born” Tasks 7 and 8, but could manage without printing out the others if you use some paper instead.

“Unto Us a Boy is Born” isn't one of the often sung carols, but most people find it's familiar when they hear it. It's an accessible tune to think about because it isn't long and it mainly moves by step. There's a lot of up and down in it – and down and up.

In case you are one of those who isn't sure you know it, here's a recording. The organist plays the first two phrases as an introduction. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7wkg1OY-o>

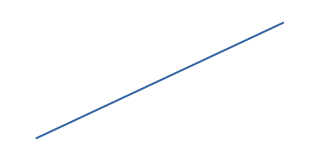

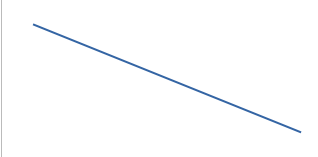
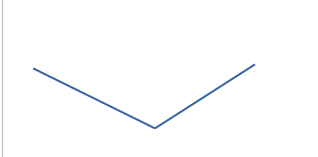
You do need to be familiar with the tune to do the tasks, so sing it until you're secure.

Unto us a boy is born
King of all creation.
Came he to a world forlorn
The Lord of ev'ry nation, the Lord of ev'ry nation.

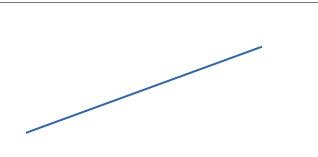
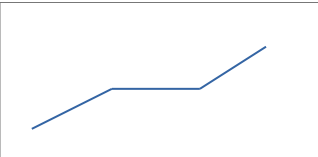
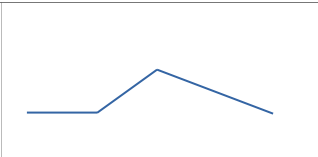
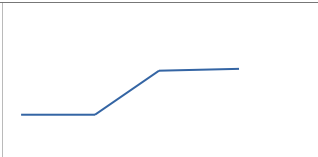
Some people find it easier to sing to “la” when they are wanting to think about what's happening with the notes. If you find the words get in the way, give “la” a go.

1. You're going to focus on the shape of each phrase. Whether the notes go up or down, and whether the ups and downs are smooth or jerky. The answers are on the music sheet headed “Mini-Project 104 Unto Us a boy is Born Task 3”.

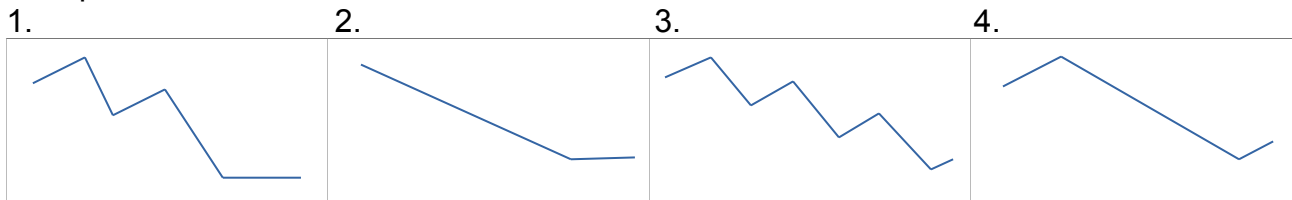
Sing the first line (phrase) of the song. “Unto us a boy is born”. Which diagram represents it?

1.	2.	3.	4.
			

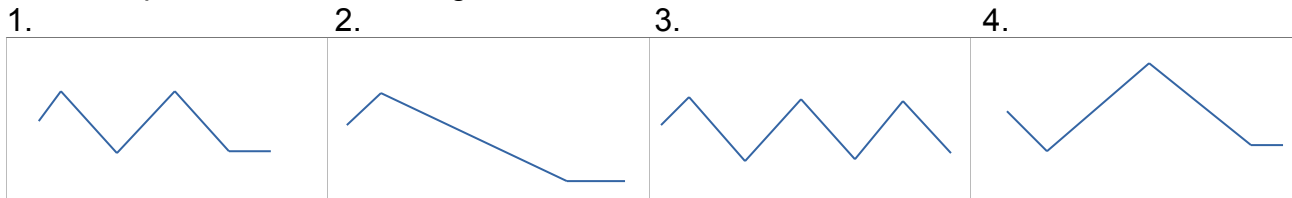
What about the second phrase? Find the diagram below that represents its shape.

1.	2.	3.	4.
			

Now phrase three: "Came he to a world forlorn"



And then phrase 4, which is longer than the others



2. Well done for thinking about the shape of each phrase even if you didn't get them all right. If you got one wrong, or got stuck, do use the answer to check out the patterns again to convince yourself.

The next thing is to think about how the last note in one phrase relates to the first note in the next one. In this 4 phrase tune, there are obviously 3 joins between phrases. There are three possible relationships: same, higher or lower. That's all you've got to decide.

Sing from the beginning of the song as far as the first note in line 2 "King". Repeat "born" and "king". Is "king" the same note, higher or lower?

Start again from the beginning and sing as far as the first note in line 2 "Came". Repeat "tion" and "came" several times to decide how "came" relates to "tion".

One more relationship to sort out. The third phrase ends on "orn" and the fourth one starts on "The". You know the procedure. Same, higher or lower?

3. Tasks 1 and 2 give you the knowledge you need to tackle Task 3. This is on the music sheet headed "Mini-Project 104 Unto Us a Boy is Born Task 3".

The phrases (word lines) are indicated by the horizontal brackets over the notes. There's a right and wrong version of each phrase. One of the 4 tunes has the right version for all of them.

You've thought about the shape of each phrase, and how the phrases fit together so it shouldn't be too difficult to work out, logically, which of the 4 tunes is the right one. Focus on the shapes the note blobs make. You'll find the answer as you do Step 4.

Once you've decided, sing the carol several times looking closely at the notation so you notice how it relates to the patterns you are singing.

4. The wrong versions of the phrases in Task 3 are quite musical and not difficult to work out even if you have done very little music reading.

Look at no.1. The first two phrases are the correct versions, so you know how those go. Phrase 3 starts on the note it should, the same as the previous note, but then goes straight down, rather than zig-zagging. Watch out that "a" and "world" have the same note – don't carry on down. And it all goes by step, with an upside down version of phrase 4. Sing it.

What about no.2? Here it's phrases 1 and 2 that are wrong. 3 and 4 are correct. The first three notes are right but then the tune turns round and goes down too soon. Phrase 2 starts on the same note as the one at the beginning and then goes straight up. You know how phrases 3 and 4 go. Sing this one.

No.3 is the correct version, while no.4 is completely wrong – but very singable. You've already sung all the phrases and they aren't difficult to join together.

5. “Unto Us a Boy is Born” is straightforward rhythmically.

Look at the music sheet for Task 3, and focus on version 3 as that is the correct one. There are two types of note – black blob with a stick and white blob with a stick. You may well know that the black blob ones are called crotchets and the white blob ones are minims.

In this task you are going to draw crotchets and minims on plain paper, not on the 5 lines. On the music paper, some of them have vertical sticks going up and others going down, but when you are just writing a rhythm, the convention is to have the sticks going up.

Practise drawing some minims here. It's very like printing a lower case “d”. Draw an anticlockwise oval and, without taking your pen or pencil off the paper make the stick. You don't come down the stick again.

You draw a crotchet in a single movement too. Start with the oval as if it was going to be a minim, and scribble the centre in then make the stick.

Look at the music. Most of the bars (sections between two vertical lines) have 4 notes in them, all crotchets. Two bars have 2 notes, both minims. All the bars last the same amount of time, so minims last twice as long as crotchets.

“Good King Wenceslas” starts with exactly the same rhythm as “Unto Us a Boy is Born”

Good King Wen—ces-	las looked out	on the feast of	Ste - phen

The next two lines have different words, but the same tune and therefore the same rhythm. Write it out:

Where the snow lay	round a - bout	deep and crisp and	e - ven.

What about the next line? The tune is different, but what about the rhythm? If it is different, it is still made out of crotchets and minims. Write out the rhythm.

Bright -ly shone the	moon that night,	though the frost was	cru - el

As in “Unto Us a Boy is Born”, the last phrase is longer than the previous ones, so there are 5 bars to fill in this time.

The first 3 bars are straightforward. “Fuel” takes up 2 bars. The first syllable alone has 2 notes, each lasting for half a bar (so you know what those are). The final note, for “el” takes up the whole bar. It is called a semibreve and you write it as an oval – no colouring in and no stick.

When a poor man	came in sight	gath – 'ring win - ter	fu -

el.

6. Clap the rhythm of “Unto Us a Boy is Born” while you count the beats. If you are used to doing this sort of thing it's quite easy. If you find it difficult, it's worth persisting and it will help your music skills.

On the sheet for “Mini-Project 104 Unto Us a Boy is Born Task 3” you can see at the start of the piece the two numbers 4 over 4. This is the **time signature** and it gives musicians information about how many beats there are in each of the bars and what type of beats they are. The top number says how many – 4, and the lower one indicates the type of beat. 4 represents crotchets. Four crotchet beats in a bar, which is pretty obvious when you look at the music.

You have to count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 steadily over and over again while you clap the rhythm. This is easy when you are clapping crotchets. But when you get to a minim, you have to be able to avoid clapping on the count where the note is carrying on. There are only 3 bars where you have to watch out for this.

(This is harder than singing the song and clapping the beat. That's because when you are singing you are doing it on automatic pilot if you know the song and your hands keep doing the same thing all the time. It's worth trying it to see if you do find it easier.)

Once you can clap the rhythm of “Unto Us a Boy is Born”, try clapping “Good King Wenceslas”.

7. Write out the tune of “Good King Wenceslas”. You need the sheet headed “Mini-Project 104 Unto Us a Boy is Born Tasks 7 and 8”. You know how the rhythm goes. A few notes have been written in for you. That’s when the notes don’t go by step, or to give you some reassurance as there isn’t an answer to refer to.

It isn’t only the rhythm that often repeats. As you sing the song, compare “though the frost was cruel” with “on the feast of Stephen” and “deep and crisp and even”. And what about “Brightly shone the” and “gath’ring win-ter”?

8. “Personent Hodie” is another minim and crotchet tune from Piae Cantiones. You are less likely to know it. Not knowing it makes this step more worthwhile. You’ll find the song on the sheet you’ve just used for Task 7.

You can see that the rhythms look very like the ones you’ve been dealing with in “Unto Us a Boy is Born” and “Good King Wenceslas”. This time you are reading rather than writing.

Count yourself in a steady 1 2 3 4. Each count is one crotchet. Then clap the rhythm of the tune. Once you feel confident that you can clap it accurately all the way through, listen to it being sung to check you have got it right.

9. Different versions of Personent Hodie

Here it is sung by King’s College Cambridge <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R3-sBzc3fY> Gustav Holst made up the organ accompaniment. In “Piae Cantiones”, the tunes were published without any accompaniment. If you are conscientiously counting, you need to know that the organ starts its scale going down on the second beat of the bar – it can sound like the first beat. The singers are in unison (singing the same notes as each other) for all four verses, and organ part stays the same, although the organist can vary the sound and the volume.

Often arrangers want to vary the sounds for each iteration of the tune.

Here’s a very different version that doesn’t have any singing in it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUaynQTOjh4> Listen through. Notice how the first time you hear the tune you only get the first 10 bars. Thereafter, you hear the tune in full. How many times? Between each go through of the tune there’s a bit more music – filling in stuff. How many bars is each of these filling in bits?

Unfortunately the video doesn’t say which instruments are playing. I reckon I can hear one or two plucked string instruments, like a harp, a bowed string instrument – like a violin, a wind instrument like a recorder and – at the end, something like a triangle.

Many people love John Rutter’s carol compositions and arrangements. Here’s his version. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NIBIWkgGDY>

Like Holst he has made up an organ accompaniment. Each of the four verses is different musically.

What does he do for the introduction?

Do the singers sing in unison (all the same notes) or in harmony in verse 1? And in verse 2?

How does he make verse 3 different, for both the singers and the organ?

How does he make the ending into a climax?