The Great “O” Antiphons

Seven Icons of Christ for SSAATTBB Choir

(with optional Gregorian Chants)

by

John Muehleisen
(1996)
The Great ‘O’ Antiphons

Latin and English Texts

O Sapientia (antiphon for December 17)
O Sapientia, quae exore Altissimi prodisti, attingens e fine usque ad finem, fortiter suaviter disponesque omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

O Wisdom
O Wisdom, you came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and reach from one end of the earth to the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

O Adonai (antiphon for December 18)
O Adonai, et Dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et ei in Sina legem dedisti: veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.

O Adonai
O Adonai, ruler of the house of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush; on Mount Sinai you gave him your law: With outstretched arm, come and redeem us.

O Radix Jesse (antiphon for December 19)
O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, super quem continebunt reges os suum, quem gentes deprecabuntur: veni ad liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.

O Root of Jesse
O Root of Jesse, you stand as an ensign to the peoples; before you kings shall keep silence, all nations bow in worship: Come and save us, and do not delay.

O Clavis David (antiphon for December 20)
O Clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel: qui a peris, et nemo claudit; claudis, et meo aperit: veni, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O Key of David
O Key of David and scepter of the house of Israel, what you open no one can close; what you close no one can open. O come, deliver us from the chains of prison; we who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Oriens (antiphon for December 21)
O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol justitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O Rising Dawn
O Rising Dawn, brightness of the light eternal, and sun of righteousness: Come and shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Rex gentium (antiphon for December 22)
O Rex gentium, et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum: veni, et salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.

O King of Nations
O King of nations, and their desire, you are the cornerstone that binds two into one. Come and save the creature whom you have fashioned from clay.

O Emmanuel (antiphon for December 23)
O Emmanuel, Rex et legifer noster, exspectatio gentium, et Salvator earum: veni ad salvandum nos Domine Deus noster.

O Emmanuel
O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the desire of all nations and their Salvation: Come and save us, O Lord our God.

Veni, veni Emmanuel, Captivum solve Israel, Qui gemit in exilio, Privatus Dei Filio

Veni, veni Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear.

Gaude, gaude! Emmanuel nascetur pro te, Israel.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
Composer’s Notes

The Great “O” Antiphons—later subtitled Seven Icons of Christ—were commissioned in 1996 by Opus 7 Vocal Ensemble, Loren Pontén, conductor, and were premiered at St. James Cathedral in Seattle, Washington on December 15, 1996. They were recorded by Opus 7 in January/February 1998 for a CD release in late 1998.

In the original performances, each of the English settings was preceded by the original ancient Latin Gregorian chant settings of the texts. For those choral ensembles wishing to include the chants as part of the performance, they are reproduced with this score in modern notation. If choral ensembles would prefer to read the original neumatic notation, the antiphons can be found in this form in the Liber Usualis of the Roman Catholic Church. The antiphons are appointed to be sung before the Magnificat during Vespers services in Advent from December 17 through December 23.

The seven Great O Antiphons can be performed as a complete set, in part, or individually. The order in which they appear in this score and in which they were originally performed is based on the order in which they are used during Advent as described above, each one assigned to a particular day from December 17 through December 23. If the Antiphons are performed in other than the original order, the composer respectfully requests the following.

- If the setting of O Emmanuel is included in a performance, end the set with O Emmanuel—regardless of the order of the other antiphons—as that setting is intended by the composer as the finale to the whole set and is the most extensive musical treatment of any of the texts in the set.
- If O Emmanuel is not included, but O Root of Jesse is; end the set with O Root of Jesse.
- If neither O Emmanuel nor O Root of Jesse is included, conductors should use their own judgment in the ordering of the pieces.

Program Notes

The texts for the seven Great “O” Antiphons are found in the Liber Usualis of the Roman Catholic Church. The antiphons are sung before the Magnificat during Vespers services in Advent, one per night from December 17 through December 23. The texts and music are quite ancient—c. ninth century—and were originally set to Gregorian chant. Muehleisen’s setting joins other late 20th-century treatments of these ancient Advent texts by Seattle composer Peter Hallock (1986) and Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (1988/rev. 1991). Muehleisen’s settings were commissioned by Opus 7 in 1996 and were given their premiere during Advent of the same year. They were written to showcase the extraordinary acoustics of St. James Cathedral and the wide variety of vocal textures and colors available from a small vocal ensemble, letting individual voices, textures, and timbres emerge from the ensemble to illustrate the texts. In the original performances, the antiphons were each preceded by their Latin Gregorian chant counterparts, whose consistent melodic theme acts as a ritornello or refrain that unites the highly varied treatments of the English texts. The juxtaposition of the ancient and the modern settings in itself sets up an antiphonal relationship between the settings.

The Great “O” Antiphons are filled with rich musical symbols and text painting. In the first piece, O Wisdom, a single note is gradually transformed into a bright shimmering harmony, like light piercing a dark cloud, eventually yielding to a simple, unison melodic statement (based on the corresponding Gregorian chant) on the words “come and teach us the way of prudence.” In O Adonai, the strong rhythmic setting of the opening text yields to a plaintive, legato embrace as the voices sing “with outstretched arm, come and redeem us.”
Root of Jesse rises from the depths of the choir to a dramatic pause on “before you kings shall keep silence,” followed by a reverent musical gesture that culminates in the dramatic cry of “Save us!”

In *O Key of David*, the men and women echo each other with a gently rolling melody that leads to a vivid musical image underlying the text “what you open no one can close; what you close no one can open.” After two variations of the opening music, the voices rise to a climax as they painfully cry “deliver us from the chains of prison,” and the setting ends with the lament of those “who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” The opening of *O Rising Dawn* paints a picture of light coming into the world in the person of the Rising Dawn and the Sun of Righteousness. The text “those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” is based on the same music as the parallel text in *O Key of David*, this time transformed by the “brightness of the light eternal.” *O King of Nations* begins antiphonally with the women and men echoing one another with increasingly elaborate, mirrored variations of the opening theme until they join together at the text, “you are the cornerstone that binds two into one,” followed by a tender plea for salvation.

The setting of *O Emmanuel* repeats the text three times, each time revealing more and more of the familiar advent hymn *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, upon which the entire setting is based. In the third statement of the text, the hymn melody with original Latin text is used as a cantus firmus in the men’s voices over which the women sing an elaborate free counterpoint. The work culminates with the confident, triumphant cry, “Come and save us.” Other musical devices used throughout the “O”Antiphons, such as the use of bass pedal point, cascading entrances and shimmering harmonies illuminate the themes that dominate these sacred texts of the Advent season—themes of darkness and light, of watching and waiting, of hope and salvation.
O Wisdom
Antiphon for Dec. 17

Ancient Liturgical Texts

Andante misterioso  \( \frac{4}{4} \) = 66

John Muehleisen
1996, rev. 2011

Soprano

Soprano 2

Alto

Alto 2

Tenor

Tenor 2

Bass

Bass 2

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O Wisdom

Sop

dom O Wisdom, you came forth from the

Sop 2

dom O Wisdom, you came forth from

Alto

O Wisdom, you came from the

Alto 2

O Wisdom, you came

Ten

O Wisdom

Bass

O Wisdom

mouth of the Most High, reach from one

Sop

the mouth of the Most High, reach from one end

Sop 2

mouth of the Most High, reach from one end

Alto

from the mouth of the Most High, reach from one end

Alto 2

and reach from

Ten

Bass

and reach from
NOTE: In mm. 13–16, bring out the Soprano 2 voices, which sing the primary melodic lines of this passage.
O Wisdom

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

mf

sempre al fine

Come and teach us

the way of prudence.

Wisdom.
O Adonai
Antiphon for Dec. 18

Ancient Liturgical Texts
John Muehleisen
1996, rev. 2011

Allegro energico \( \text{\textit{marcato}} \) \( \text{\textit{f}} \) \( \text{\textit{q} = 120} \)

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

O Adonai, ruler of the house of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush;

O Adonai, ruler of the house of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush;

O Adonai, ruler of the house of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush;

O Adonai, ruler of the house of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush;

pear'd to Moses in the fire of the burning bush;

pear'd to Moses in the fire of the burning bush;

pear'd to Moses in the fire of the burning bush;

pear'd to Moses in the fire of the burning bush;

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Ancient Liturgical Texts

DO NOT COPY

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MONS. AMBROSE MAHONEY, S.V.D., 1871-1945
O Adonai

Sop

A-do-na-i! on Mount Si-nai

Alto

A-do-nai! on Mount Si-nai

Ten.


Bass


you gave him your law; with Slower \( \text{q = 66} \)

you gave him your law; with

you gave him your law; with

you gave him your law; with

out stretch'd arm, come and redeem us.
O Root of Jesse
Antiphon for Dec. 19

Ancient Liturgical Texts

John Muehleisen
1996, rev. 2011

Andante $\dot{=} 80$

Soprano

\begin{music}
\begin{staff}
\stavespace{0}
\notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4}
\end{staff}
\end{music}

Alto

\begin{music}
\begin{staff}
\stavespace{0}
\notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4}
\end{staff}
\end{music}

Tenor

\begin{music}
\begin{staff}
\stavespace{0}
\notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4}
\end{staff}
\end{music}

Bass

\begin{music}
\begin{staff}
\stavespace{0}
\notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4} \notate{4}
\end{staff}
\end{music}

The 2nd syllable of “en-sign” is pronounced with a long “i”, as in mile.

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O Root of Jesse

Sop

Before you kings shall keep silence,

Alto

Jes - se,

Tenor

Jes - se,

Bass

Jes - se,

18

Bow in worship: Come and save us, and do not de - lay.

25

Come and save us! save us! save us!

2 O Root of Jesse

DO NOT COPY
O Key of David
Antiphon for Dec. 20

Ancient Liturgical Texts

Andante fluente $\frac{3}{8} = 88$

Soprano
mf
O Key of Da-vid and scepter of the house of Is-ra-el,

Alto
mf
O Key of Da-vid and scepter of the house of Is-ra-el,

Tenor
mf
O Key of Da-vid and scepter of the house of Is-ra-el,

Bass
mf
O Key of Da-vid and scepter of the house of Is-ra-el,

what you open no one can close; what you close no one can

non dim.

what you open no one can close; what you close no one can
non dim.

what you open no one can close; what you close no one can
non dim.

what you open no one can close; what you close no one can
non dim.

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O Key of David

Adagio tenebroso $\frac{3}{4}$ = 72

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sop</th>
<th>Alto</th>
<th>Ten</th>
<th>Bass</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mf</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>mf</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

O Key of David and scepter of the house of Israel.

O come, deliver us from the chains of prison;

we who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.
O Rising Dawn
Antiphon for Dec. 21

Ancient Liturgical Texts

John Muehleisen
1996, rev. 2011

Largo \( \frac{d}{= 56} \)

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

O Rising Dawn, brightness of the light eternal, and sun of

Andante \( \frac{d}{= 76} \)

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

righteousness: O Rising Dawn, brightness of the light eternal, and sun of

righteousness: O Rising Dawn, brightness of the light eternal, and sun of

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O Rising Dawn

Come, O come and shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, of death.

Come, O come and shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, of death.
O King of Nations
Antiphon for Dec. 22

Soprano:
O King of nations, and their desire,

Alto:
O King of nations, and their desire,

Tenor:
O King of nations, and their desire,

Bass:
O King of nations, and their desire,

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O King of Nations

nations, and their desire,

nations, and their desire,

nations, and their desire,

nations, and their desire,

you are the cornerstone that binds

you are the cornerstone that binds

you are the cornerstone that binds

you are the cornerstone that binds
O King of Nations

Come and save the creature whom you have fashion'd from clay.

Come and save the creature whom you have fashion'd from clay.

Come and save the creature whom you have fashion'd from clay.

Come and save the creature whom you have fashion'd from clay.
O Emmanuel

Antiphon for Dec. 23

Largo espansivo \( \frac{d}{d} = 62 \) mf legato

Soprano

Em - man - u - el, our King and Law - giv - er,

Alto

Em - man - u - el, our King and Law - giv - er,

Tenor

O Em - man - u - el,

Bass

O Em - man - u - el,

Soprano

the de - sire of all na - tions

Alto

the de - sire of all na - tions

Tenor

O Em - man - u - el,

Bass

O Em - man - u - el,

Soprano

man - u - el,

Alto

man - u - el,

Tenor

Em - man - u - el,

Bass

Em - man - u - el,

Soprano

va - tion:

Alto

va - tion:

Tenor

Em - man - u - el,

Bass

Em - man - u - el,

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Ancient Liturgical Texts

John Muehleisen

1996, rev. 2011
O Emmanuel

Faster \( \dot{=} \) 68

Moderato energico \( \dot{=} \) 96

NOTE: In mm. 21–22, bring out Alto 1 and Bass 1
Lord our God. O Come and save us, O

Lord our God. O Come and save us, O

Lord our God. O Come and save us, O

Lord our God. O come and save, Emmanuel.

Lord our God. O come and save, Emmanuel.

Lord our God. O come and save, Emmanuel.

Lord our God. O come and save, Emmanuel.

O Emmanuel, our King and our Lawgiver, the desire of all

O Emmanuel, our King and our Lawgiver, the desire of all

Ve - ni, ve - ni Em-man - u - el, Cap - tiv - um sol - ve

Ve - ni, ve - ni Em-man - u - el, Cap - tiv - um sol - ve
O Emmanuel

Sop

joice! Em - man - u - el.

Alto

joice! Em - man - u - el.

Ten

e! Em - man - u - el

Bass

e! Em - man - u - el nas -

Sop

Come save us, O Lord our God.

Sop 2

Come save us, O Lord our God.

Alto

Come save us, O Lord our God.

Alto 2

Come save

Ten

Come Lord

Ten 2

Come

Bass

ce - tur pro te, Is - - - ra - el.
O Emmanuel

Molto maestoso $q = 80$

Come and save us! Save us!

Come and save us! Save us!

Emmanuel! Emmanuel!

Emmanuel! Emmanuel!

Emmanuel! Emmanuel!