



The Tale of the Three Trees

a cantata for
2 part (treble or mixed) voices and piano

*Music by
Allen Pote*

*Lyrics and Narration by
Tom S. Long*

Also available:

Demo CD, code CGCD13
Demo CD 10-Pack, code CGCDP13
Accompaniment CD, code CGCD14
Preview Kit, code CGK17

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FOREWORD

We'll never forget the first time we heard this deeply moving story. Based on an American folk tale, it captures the message of Jesus in a way that is both fresh and timeless. It's our privilege to offer the story in musical form.

The musical is remarkably flexible. The work is easy enough to be performed by children, but is profound enough to appeal to performers and audiences of any age.

At eighteen minutes, it is short enough to fit into a Sunday morning worship service, but is solid enough to stand alone. It can be produced elaborately, or with a minimum of costumes, props, and scenery. In fact, since it retains a "storytelling" character, it could be offered purely as a musical presentation with virtually no staging. Finally, it can accommodate casts from 10 to 100.

We've included the stage directions from the original production in the music, and complete notes for an alternate staging can be found below. Of course, we hope you'll feel free to adapt any of our suggestions to fit your time, space, and creativity.

God bless,

—Tom Long and Allen Pote

Characters:

First tree—a group of actors

Second tree—a group of actors

Third tree—a group of actors

Wealthy lord and servant

King

Mary and Joseph

Jesus

Sailor

Fisher folk

Soldiers

Wood cutters, choppers, sawers

Chorus

(Most roles can be played by either male or female performers. The same small group of actors can play all the roles simply by changing costumes or positions.)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Approximate running time: 18 minutes.

Costumes:

The performers playing the three trees wear brown pants and green long sleeved shirts. The other actors wear a basic unit costume—for example, black pants, solid color T-shirts, and black shoes. If there is a chorus separate from the actors, they should wear a uniform costume in a color that does not draw focus.

Set:

When the presentation begins, the stage is set with three 4 foot brown stepladders. You may want to add additional bracing and steps, so the ladders can be climbed from both front and back. Two chairs or sturdy wooden boxes are placed within easy reach of the playing area.

Staging from the Original Production:

Props:

One ten foot flagpole with Velcro (can be made from 2 inch PVC plumbing tubing)

One five foot square of white or light blue cloth (with Velcro on one edge so that it can be attached to the pole)

One flag stand

Movement:

The stage directions found in the music are from the original production of the work. In that production, three actors played each of the three trees. Six more actors—two for each tree—performed all the other roles associated with their assigned tree. For example, the pair assigned to the first tree played the wealthy lord and his servant, the two woodsmen who chop down the first tree, and Mary and Joseph. All six worked together as the workmen in *Trim the Branches*.

We've outlined an alternate staging below which requires a few more props, but which many groups will find simpler to perform and easier to understand.

Alternate Staging:

Props:

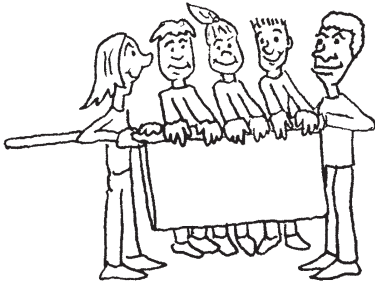
Six flags—Make the flags using four foot squares of material. (Cotton velour works well) Three of the flags are green, and three are white. The poles for the flags should be six or seven feet long, and can be made from wooden dowels or PVC plumbing tubes painted brown.

Two additional four foot squares of white material—Roll one cloth into a bundle to resemble a baby. Jesus wears the other cloth in one of two ways: 1) he can fasten it around his neck as a cape/robe; or 2) he can fold it on the diagonal into a sash and drape it over one shoulder, fastening the ends with Velcro at the opposite hip. These white squares should be the same kind of material as the flags.

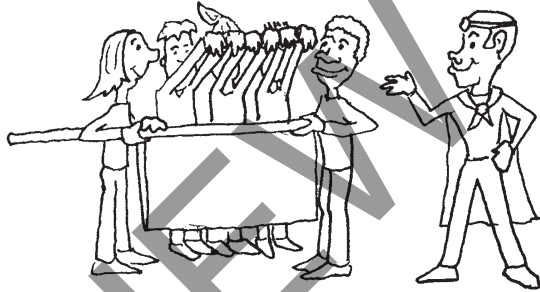
Movement:

A Prayer for Tomorrow: When the presentation begins, the stage is set with the three stepladders—one to the right, one to the left, and one in the center. The chorus is arranged on and around the ladders, facing the audience. You may wish to choreograph hand movements or simple changes of position to enliven the first song.

High on a Hill: During the introduction of this song, the cast separate into three distinct groups—one group around each ladder. The green flags are carried in and held in position, one flag on the top step of each ladder. The flags and ladders now represent the trees themselves, and the actors are not required to act as trees directly.



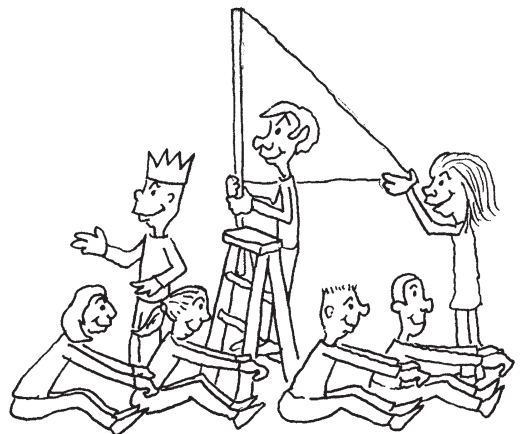
“I’ll be a chest with a silver lock . . .”
(*High On A Hill*)



“He will lift my precious cover to reveal what he has stored . . .”
(*High On A Hill*)

When the first tree dreams of being a treasure chest, Group #1 (the group on the right side of the stage) quickly forms the chest using the flag and their bodies. Two cast members fold the flag in half and hold the flagpole horizontally between them, so the green material makes a rectangle 4 feet wide and 2 feet high. This is displayed to the audience and represents the front side of the box. (One of the two cast members will need to tuck the extra length of flagpole under his/her arm.) Several other cast members form the lid of the chest by standing side by side behind the folded flag, and extending their arms straight forward, palms resting on the pole. When the wealthy lord enters and lifts the lid of the chest, these cast members lift their arms together.

When the second tree dreams of becoming a sailing ship, Group #2 (the group on the left side of the stage) forms the ship using the ladder, the flag, and their bodies. One cast member on the ladder holds the flag high, while another pulls the bottom edge of the green material straight back, horizontally to the floor. The flag should fold naturally along a diagonal from the top of the pole to the opposite corner, making a triangular “sail.” The other cast members arrange themselves as sailors on the boat, facing one direction and rowing. The king can strike a majestic pose, gazing toward the distant shore. At the appropriate moment, he stretches, yawns, and falls asleep—leaning against the ladder.



“The royal flag above my head, the deck
beneath my feet . . .”
(*High On A Hill*)

When the third tree dreams of becoming the tallest tree, several cast members in Group #3 (the center group) should climb higher up the ladder. The one at the top waves the flag gently back and forth. At the appropriate moment, all the members of this group could lift their arms.

When the chorus is sung between each verse of the song, the groups return to their original poses representing three trees.

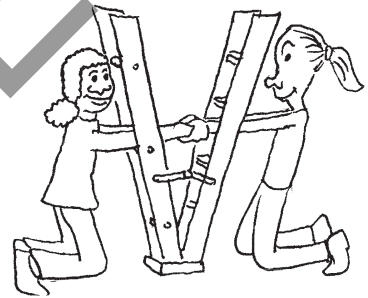
The Chopping Song: As each group begins singing, they surround the appropriate ladder and mime the correct action—chopping, sawing, or cutting. When each tree falls, the ladder is collapsed and lowered to the floor and the flag is dropped with a flourish.

Trim the Branches: When the Narrator says, “The first tree was carried to a carpenter’s shop,” the first ladder is carried to a new position. Group #1 surrounds it (or stands in front of it) and hides it, with each member miming a different woodworking task—sawing, stripping, carving, planing, nailing, and sanding. The green flag is carried offstage. When the work is done, the group members step back to reveal the finished product—a feed box for animals. The feed box is formed by two actors and the ladder: the ladder is opened and turned upside down, and the actors kneel on either side of it with their arms linked through the middle of it.

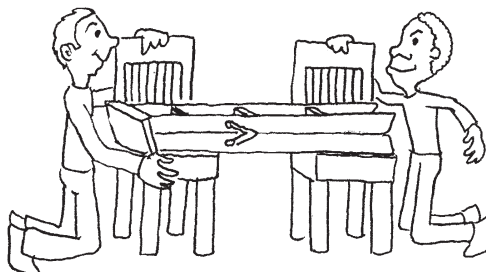
In the same manner, when the Narrator says, “The second tree was carried to a dock-yard,” the second ladder is carried to a new position. Group #2 performs woodworking tasks around it, the flag is carried offstage, and at the appropriate moment the group members step back to reveal the bench of a fishing boat. The bench in the boat is formed by the ladder, two actors, and two chairs: The collapsed ladder is laid across the two chairs to form the bench itself. The two actors station themselves, one on each end of the ladder to form the sides of the boat.



“I will rise above them all . . .”
(*High On A Hill*)

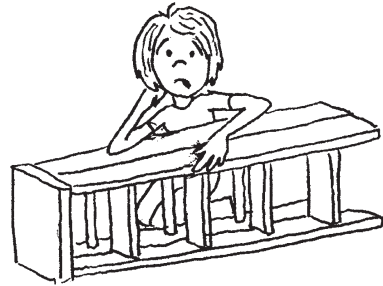


“. . . a box for feeding animals . . .”
(*Trim the Branches*)



“. . . the bench of a rugged fishing boat . . .”
(*Trim the Branches*)

When the Narrator says, “As for the third tree,” the third ladder is moved into position center stage. Group #3 works on it—in time with the slower music—and the flag is taken offstage. When the actors step back, the audience can see the collapsed ladder lying on its side. A single actor sits on the floor behind it, resting his/her elbows on the ladder dejectedly.



“ . . . scrap laid aside in a lumber yard . . . ”
(*Trim the Branches*)

The Dream of the Tree Came True: During the introduction, Mary and Joseph enter with the white material rolled in the shape of a baby. At the correct time, they place the “baby” in the manger. The arms of the manger actors support the baby and keep it from falling to the floor. Mary and Joseph stand behind the ladder/manger and look in lovingly.

At the end of the first verse, Mary and Joseph exit and, if necessary, the manger is moved away. During the narration introducing the second verse, several actors from Group 2 arrange themselves around the bench in the boat, taking positions as fisher folk. Jesus enters wearing his white sash or robe, reclines on the bench/ladder, and falls asleep. When the storm begins, the fisher folk row and the chorus animate the waves, thunder, and lightning with hand gestures. At the appropriate moment, Jesus wakes up and stands. He lifts his arms to calm the storm, and the chorus grows still.

At the end of the second verse, the fisher folk move the bench away if necessary. As the crucifixion scene begins, the cast members playing soldiers enter in formation and pull Jesus down front and center. One rips the white sash/robe from him and takes it offstage, as others lift the third ladder and place it over one of his shoulders and across his back. Jesus carries it slowly down the center aisle and exits as the rest of the cast watch. On the line “One day to rise above them all,” the cast all lift their eyes to focus on a spot high on the back wall behind the audience, as though watching the cross in the distance.

When the reprise of “Dreams, we all have dreams” begins, the cast all drift forward and settle into a single group formation. When the descant begins, three cast members bring out the white flags and stand in the formation, waving them with large sweeping motions. To the audience, it appears that the original flags have been transformed from green to white.

A Prayer for Tomorrow

For two part (treble or mixed) voices and piano

Tom S. Long

Allen Pote

The stage is set with three stepladders, one to the right, one to the left, and one in the center, with the steps facing away from the audience. The center ladder is slightly upstage from the other two. The chorus is arranged on and around the ladders, facing the audience.

Moderately (♩ = c. 92) All voices unison *mp*

Voices: Dreams, we all have

Piano: *mf* *mp*

During the first number, a cast member enters down the center aisle with a long pole. A five foot square of cloth is attached to the pole with velcro like a flag. The "flag" is placed in a flagstand behind the center ladder.

4 3 3 3

dreams, what we can be, what we can do. Lord, with all we

G/D A/D D Bmin

8 *mf*

are, we pray that our dreams will lead us, will

F#min/A G F#min7 Bmin Emin7

12 *mp*

lead us to you. 1. See our
2. In our

Emin/A A D

mp

15

hands, _____ what will they make, Lord? See our feet, _____ where will they
eyes _____ you see to - mor - row. On that day _____ one thing we

Emin7/D D Emin7/D

18 *mf*

run? See our hearts, _____ who will they love, Lord? See our
know: there's a dream _____ from one who loves us that is

D E/D A/C# F#min

mf

21 *f*

lives, we've just be - gun! _____
great - er than our own. _____

G D/F# Emin7 A Emin7 A

f

High on a Hill

Tom S. Long

Allen Pote

The chorus moves upstage to stand on risers. Nine performers enter and stand, facing the audience, three on each ladder forming "trees." In each group of three, one actor stands on the upstage side of the ladder, two or three steps high. The other two stand on the downstage side of the ladder, sharing a lower support strut, one leaning left, one leaning right. The center actor of each group has both arms lifted. The other two actors of the group each have one arm lifted, holding on to the ladder with their other arm.

NARRATOR: Once there were three young trees, growing
on a hilltop, dreaming of what they might become.

36 **Brightly** (♩ = c. 66)

Voices

Piano

mf

rit.

40 *unison*
mf a tempo

Two cast members take the "flag" from the stand and lay it down behind the ladders, removing the blue cloth from the pole.

Three trees, high on a hill, stand a - bove the hum - ble clay,

F Amin B \flat F/A Gmin Amin7 B \flat C

a tempo

44

Three trees, high on a hill, dream - ing what they'll be one

Amin Dmin7 Gmin C F/A B \flat Gmin7/C C7

The musical score is written for a narrator and a piano accompaniment. It begins at measure 36 with the tempo marking 'Brightly' and a quarter note equal to approximately 66 beats per minute. The narrator's part is on a single treble clef staff, and the piano accompaniment is on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *rit.* (ritardando). At measure 40, the tempo changes to 'unison' and 'mf a tempo'. The piano part includes chord symbols: F, Amin, B \flat , F/A, Gmin, Amin7, B \flat , and C. At measure 44, the piano part includes chord symbols: Amin, Dmin7, Gmin, C, F/A, B \flat , Gmin7/C, and C7. The lyrics are: 'Three trees, high on a hill, stand a - bove the hum - ble clay,' and 'Three trees, high on a hill, dream - ing what they'll be one'. A large 'PREVIEW' watermark is overlaid on the score.

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*The actors in the stage
right tree form a "box"*

NARRATOR: And the first tree said:

A la Minuet (♩ = c. 56)

48

day. _____

F Dmin7 Asus4 A

with their arms and bodies. Wealthy lord enters wearing the cloth like a cape. A servant holds the train of the

All voices unison

52 *mf*

I'll be a chest with a sil - ver lock in the house of a

D D/A G D Amin7

sim.

cape off the ground.

57

weal - thy lord. He will lift my

D D/A D D/A

62

pre - cious cov - er to re - veal what he has

G D Emin7 D/F# G

Lord mimes lifting lid of chest, pouring jewels from hand to hand, and then placing a ring on his finger and posing.

67 *mp*

stored. Dia - monds, ru - bies, daz - zling gems,

A Bmin A GMaj7 A

72 *mf*

pearls and gold and all things good. I will

GMaj7 D/F# Emin7 A D

77

hold a price - less trea - sure, in my arms of

C/E D/F# C/E D D/F#

82 *mp* **Tempo I** *The first tree returns to its place as the wealthy lord exits.*

pol - ished wood.

Amin7 D D/A Gmin7 C7

The Chopping Song

Tom S. Long

Allen Pote

NARRATOR: Years passed. Seasons came and went.

Moderately (♩ = c. 100)

159

Piano

Gmin

mf

Then one day, a group of people came up the hill carrying axes and saws. They cut down

163

Cmin Fmin Cmin Fmin Cmin Fmin Cmin Fmin G

the first tree.

Cutters enter and mime chopping the first tree in rhythm with the song.

166

I

Group I

mf

With a swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a

Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7

168

I

swing and a chop and a yell! With a swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a

Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7

NARRATOR: They cut down the second tree.

170 *(shouted) ff* *mf*

I swing and a chop Come on! With a

Ab Gmin7 G *ff*

Sawers enter and mime sawing the second tree with a large cross cut blade in rhythm with the song, as cutters continue to chop the first tree.

173 *mf*

I swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a yell! With a

II Group II *mf*

Back forth, back forth, back forth, stop and yell!

Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7 Cmin *mf*

175 *(shouted) ff*

I swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a swing and a chop Stand clear!

II *(shouted) ff*

back forth, back forth, back forth Stand clear!

Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7 AbMaj7 Gmin7

NARRATOR: And sadly, they cut down the third tree as well.

Choppers enter and mime chopping the third tree in rhythm, as sawers and cutters continue their actions.

177

mf

I With a swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a

mf

II Back forth, back forth,

Group III *mf*

III Chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop

G Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7

mf

180

I swing and a chop and a yell! With a swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a

II back forth, stop and yell! back forth, back forth,

III chop chop chop chop yell! chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop

Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7

The actors in the first tree begin to climb down from the ladder.

182

(shouted) **ff**

I swing and a chop Look out! With a

(shouted) **ff**

II back forth. Look out!

(shouted) **ff**

III chop chop chop Look out!

A \flat Maj7 Gmin7 G

ff

185

I swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a swing and a chop and a yell! With a

mf

II Back forth, back forth, back forth, stop and yell!

mf

III Chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop chop yell!

Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7 Cmin Gmin7 Cmin

mf

Trim the Branches

Tom S. Long

Allen Pote

NARRATOR: The first tree was carried to a carpenter's shop.

Ladder 1 is carried to a new position. Workers enter, gather around the ladder,

198 **Brightly** (♩ = c. 84)

Voices

Piano

n.c. C Gmin7

f

and mime trimming branches, stripping bark, etc.

202 All voices unison *mf*

Trim the branch - es, strip the bark, —

C F F/A B♭ C

mf

205

Cut and shave and nail and sand, — Build - ing with the

F F/A B♭7 C9 F F/A

208

best tree in the land, — Trim the branch - es,

B \flat sus4 B \flat C F F/A

212

strip the bark, — Cut and shave and nail and sand, —

B \flat C F F/A B \flat 7 C9

215 *Workers step back to reveal finished manger.*

Till at last the work is done, — it must be

F F/A B \flat C Gmin7

The first tree actors create the manger box using their arms and bodies and the ladder, now turned upside down.

219 *f* *slowing* *mp* **With resignation** (♩ = c. 50)

grand! — But it's not a chest with a

C Dmin7/C Cdim C Fmin7 B \flat

f *slowing* *mp*

222

sil - ver lock with - in a pal - ace hall, — It's a box for feed - ing

Gmin7 Cmin7 D \flat /F C/E A \flat B \flat

226

an - i - mals — in a barn by a sim - ple stall. —

C B \flat min7 C Fmin F Gm7 F/A

230

SOLO *mp*

I al - ways hoped I'd be some - thing great, shaped by a mas - ter's

B \flat min/D \flat C Fmin Fmin/A \flat B \flat min6 C

p

233

CHORUS *mf*

hand, — Now you can on - ly pray and wait, to

Fmin F B \flat min E \flat A \flat Fmin

mf

361 *p*

Ah dia - mond

mp *p*

*E*_b *A*_b/*E*_b *B*_b/*E*_b

365

bright. Glo - ry glo - ry, glo - ry.

*E*_b *A*_b/*E*_b *B*_b/*E*_b

370 *mp* *mf*

Ah pre - cious light, the child who was

*E*_b *A*_b/*E*_b *G* *C*min *F*min

mp *mf*

375 *mp* *p*

born, the child who was born, the trea - sure be - yond all

*G*min7 *F*min *G*min7 *F*min *B*_b7

mp *p*

NARRATOR: More years passed.

And then one day,

Moderately

380

price. _____

p colla voce

into the boat where the second tree was now a wooden bench, there stepped a young teacher.

And late in the heat of a summer's day, in the back of a boat where the

The cloth is passed to Jesus, who drapes it over one shoulder like a sash.

384

p colla voce

A \flat /D \flat D \flat D \flat G \flat /D \flat A \flat /D \flat D \flat F Amin B \flat F/A

second tree lay, on a lake where the waves rolled cold and deep, the man on the bench fell fast asleep.

Jesus lies down on the "bench" and sleeps.

389

p colla voce

Gmin F/A B \flat Maj7 C Amin Dmin7 Gmin7 C F/A B \flat Maj7

Fisher folk mime rowing.

Agitated (♩ = c. 112)

394 Gmin7/C C7 Dmin/A

396 CHORUS: Whssssh! Oooooooooo!

398 FISHER FOLK 1: Look out, it's blowin' in! FISHER FOLK 2: Pull in the nets!

400 FISHER FOLK 3: Bring down the sails! FISHER FOLK 4: Head into the wind!

Chorus makes appropriate hand gestures to go with the storm.

402 unison *f*

Oo_____ wind and wave, light-ning flash, thun-der,

A Dmin Dmin7/C G/B B♭M7 Aaug

405

Oo_____ stor - my lake, still the man does not a - wake.

Dmin Dmin7/C G/B B♭Maj7 A

407

Oo_____ wind and wave light - ning flash, thun - der,

Dmin Dmin7/C G/B B♭M7 Aaug

409

Oo_____ can't you see the boat is go - ing un - der._____

Dmin Dmin7/C G/B B♭Maj7 A Dmin

419 (shouted)

SAVE US! or we will die!

Dmin Dmin/C Dmin/B Dmin/B \flat

421

f Jesus stands, faces the audience and lifts his hands.

And the man a rose and he

Dmin/A Dmin/G Dmin/F Dmin/E Dmin

423

mf slowing greatly

raised his hand, and the wind died down at

C B \flat Em7(\flat 5)/G

mf slowing greatly

425

mp Calmly and freely

his com - mand, and the dream of the tree came true, and the

Em7(\flat 5) A B \flat C F

mp

428

Jesus sits once again.

dream of the tree came true. On a bed as soft as an - gel wings, it

B \flat /D C/E F Bm7(\flat 5) F/C Dmin

NARRATOR: And what of the third tree?

432

car - ried the King of kings.

Gmin7 C F

Well one day soldiers found that tree ... and laid it across the back of an innocent man ... who struggled to the top of a tall hill.

Jesus stands and moves to center. One soldier removes the cloth as two others lift ladder 3 and place it on Jesus' back.

Somber (♩ = c. 69)

Bmin Bmin/F# Bmin Bmin/F# Bmin Bmin/F#

mf

439

unison mf

Jesus, holding the ladder on his back and over one shoulder, exits slowly down the center aisle. Wait - ing, wait - ing for the plan,

Bmin Bmin/F# Bmin Bmin7/A

442

can it be this wound-ed man? Wait - ing,

G Maj7 F# Bmin

445

wait-ing for the call, One day to rise a-bove them

Bmin7/A G Maj7 F#

f

448

all. There on a hill those

Bmin Bmin7/A G A

mp *mf* slightly faster

slightly faster *mf*

451

an-gry men plant the third tree once a-gain and the

Bmin G A Bmin