Choreography

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Dancing Advent

The Old Testament lectionary readings for Advent A, B and C all include the prophecies and expectancy of Isaiah, and “Lo, How Rose” is intended to portray these. “A Day for Dancing,” a set of nine Medieval carols beautifully arranged and scored by Lloyd Pfautsch, is intended as a 20-minute danced presentation suitable for use within a worship service. While I choreographed the entire piece a number of years ago, most of the choreography was never written down. However, I would be happy to share what I remember with anyone interested in staging the work.

The liturgies of Hanging of the Greens, Advent Lessons and Carols, and Los Posadas, all found in The United Methodist Book of Worship, Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming

In memory of Lloyd Pfautsch, 1921-2003, friend, teacher and mentor

- Dance of Prophecy from “A Day for Dancing” by Lloyd Pfautsch, 1969; and Hymn #216, United Methodist Hymnal, verses 1 and 2. Words: 15th century German, Isaiah 11:1; Music: Trad. 1599, harm., Michael Praetorius, 1609.

- Choreography by Rosalie Branigan, commissioned for “Visions 1981,” Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts

This is a dance for four dancers who represent the four candles in the Advent Wreath. They may be dressed in purple or blue and could have one dancer in pink. Since the carol is Medieval, the costumes and demeanor should be stately and dignified. The dancers will be “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D.”

I am using the text from the UM Hymnal; the words in “A Day for Dancing” are slightly different. The dancers should follow the soprano line in “A Day for Dancing.” Each dancer carries a votive candle in a 5 ounce, clear plastic cup. The candle is held in place by florist clay. The candle is always carried in the dancer’s right hand except for the candle passing between verses. Care must be taken to always keep the candles level so as not to spill hot wax. While walking on the introduction the candle is held in front of the ribs slightly away from the body with the left hand cupped under the right. Fig. 1

INTRODUCTION/ENTRANCE PROCESSION:

The introduction is the length of one verse and the dancers should think the words to the first verse to coordinate their movements. The dancers enter in pairs and the pattern may be adapted to each aisle and chancel situation. Fig. 2

Lo, how a rose e’er blooming

The first 2 dancers walk in and on the word “blooming” curtsy or bow, very slightly.

from tender stem hath sprung!

They walk forward again and on the word “sprung” they turn and face the other 2 dancers and, circling their arms over head, “greet” the...
second couple as if inviting them to join the dance. **Fig. 3**

**Of Jesse’s lineage coming,** All 4 dancers continue walking and repeat curtsy/bow on “coming.”

as those of old have sung. They walk again and turn to face each other and again “greet” each other on “sung.”

**It came a floweret bright,** Repeat the walk as above with the curtsy/bow on “bright.”

**amid the cold of winter,** Repeat the walk with the dancers moving into a circle facing in, in the chancel. On “winter” the dancers bow or nod to each other. **Fig. 4**

when half spent was the night. The dancers walk toward each other and kneel on one knee. Their candles are stretched in front of them with their left hands cupped to protect the flame. **Fig. 5**

**VERSE 1**

Lo, how a rose e’er booming, from tender stem has sprung!

The image here is a flower opening. Dancers A and D come up very slowly to standing on the first line. Their candles are extended in front and rise at the same time. On the second line the candles continue up and the left arm opens up and over to the back. Care should be taken to see that the dancers rise smoothly. **Fig. 6 and Fig. 7**

**Of Jesse’s lineage coming, as those of old have sung.** Dancers B and C repeat the same sequence as above. When they finish, the 4 candles should be on the same level over the dancer’s heads and the left arms out in back on the same level. **Fig. 8**

**It came a floweret bright,** Bringing their candles down in front, as in the introduction, all four dancers do a soutenu turn to the left on “came.” In this turn, the right foot crosses over the left and the dancers turn 1 1/2 times to end facing out. They then walk 3 steps to their “corners” and, still facing out, raise both arms on “bright.” **Fig. 9 and Fig. 10**

amid the cold of winter. A and C, and B and D face each other and moving forward link right elbows, to steady the candles over head, and go around in a circle once. Carefully unlinking arms the dancers return to their corners on “winter.” This movement happens rather fast as in a swirl of snow. **Fig. 11 and Fig. 12**

when half spent was the night. The dancers move back into their original circle and kneel slowly. As they go down with their candles extended, their left arms fold back over and in as if the flower is closing for the night. **Fig. 13**

**BRIDGE BETWEEN VERSES**

“A Day for Dancing” has an instrumental bridge between the two verses. If using the hymn, the second half of the verse, starting with “It came a floweret,” may be used or the bridge may be eliminated.

The dancers stand quickly and take one step backwards to enlarge the circle. They then pass the candles around the circle: each dancer lifts both hands straight up in front with her candle in her right hand. She then opens her arms to the side. Looking to her right she puts her candle in the next dancer’s left hand. The dancers bring their hands together, waist high, and transfer the “new” candle to their right hands. They lift the candles overhead and repeat the movement.
VERSE 2

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind;
The dancers, staying in the circle, turn and face clockwise. Their left arms are straight overhead, palm facing forward, and their candles and right arms stretched out in front. They walk around the circle, with a step on each beat. The image is that of a prophet making a pronouncement. Fig. 15

with Mary we behold it

Moving in a quick, smooth walk the dancers move to a diagonal line, in size order, from upstage right to down stage left. No. 1 is the tallest and no. 4 the shortest dancer. Dancers 1, 2 and 3 face downstage left and Dancer 4 kneels, facing them. Dancer 4 represents Mary and the candle is held as if it is the Baby Jesus. The other dancers are the Three Kings. They extend their candles as their “gifts” to the baby. Dancer 1 stands and Dancer 2 lunges slightly and Dancer 3 kneels. The pose should happen on the word “behold.” Fig. 16 and Fig. 17

The Virgin Mother kind.

Holding the candles waist high and moving again in a quick, smooth walk, the dancers weave between each other in a double figure-8. Dancers 1, 2, and 3 move toward 4 as she moves up the line toward them. As a dancer gets to 4’s position, they turn and start back up the line. Fig. 18

To show God’s love aright

Doing a soutenu turn to the left on “show” as in verse 1, the dancers walk into a diamond facing upstage with 1 in front, 4 in back and 2 and 3 on the sides. On “aright” they raise both arms as in verse 1. Fig. 19 and Fig. 20

she bore to us a Savior,

In a stately fashion, all dancers walk 4 steps upstage. Their arms are still up. On “Savior” all turn to the right to face forward. Dancer 4 kneels and again cradles her candle as the Baby Jesus. The other three dancers open their arms to the side as the three crosses of the crucifixion. Fig. 21 and Fig. 22

when half spent was the night.

Dancer 4 swivels on her knees to face in. The other dancers face in to form a circle and kneel. Their arms come up and over and the flower closes as in verse 1. Fig. 23

In “A Day for Dancing” there are four instrumental measures at the end. The dancers may remain in place or rise and exit.