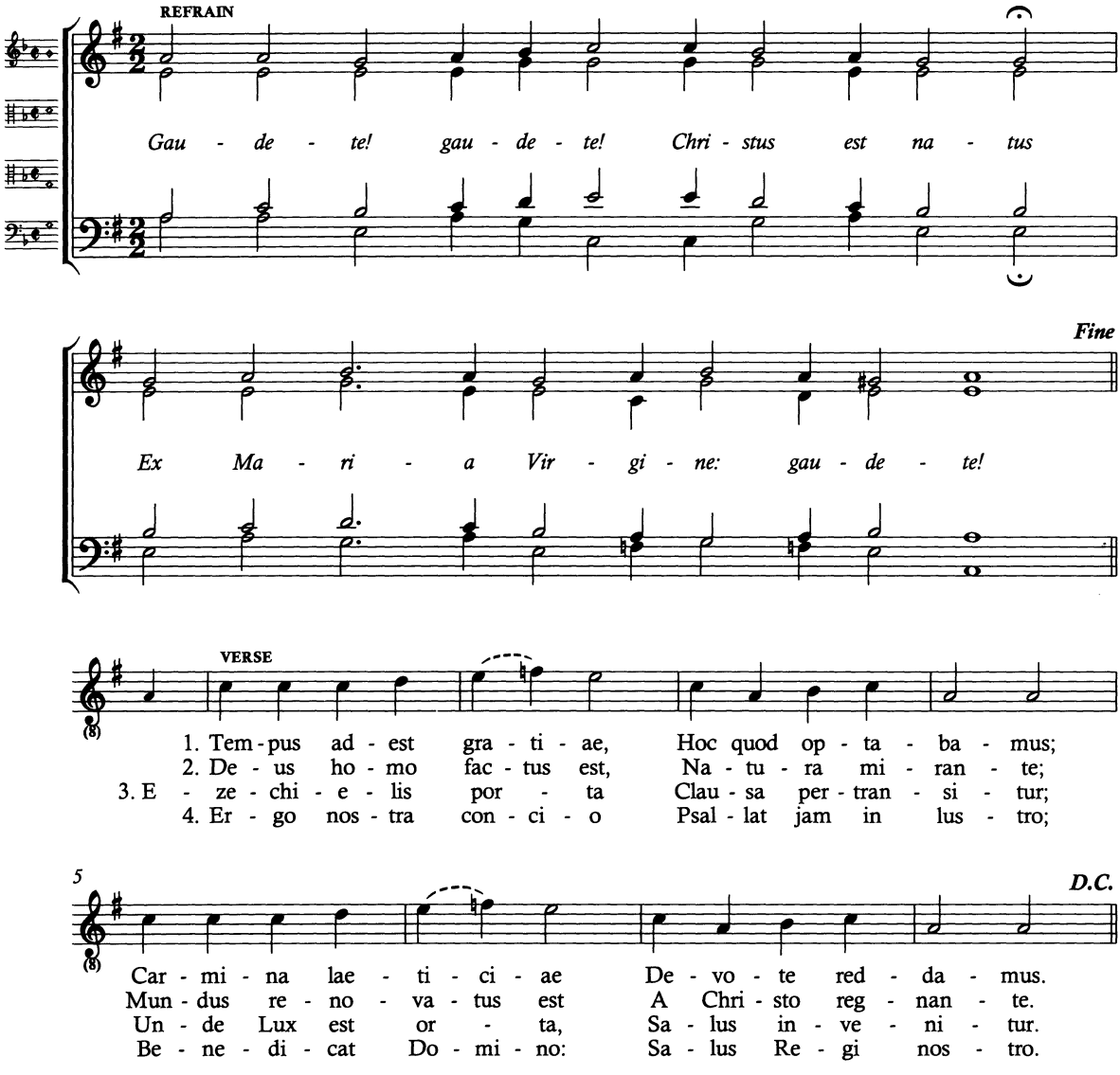
Gaudete!

(*Christmas*)

(*Piae Cantiones, 1582;*
Jistebnice Cantional, 1420)



Fourteenth century
(*Piae Cantiones, 1582*)

TRANSLATION Rejoice! rejoice! Christ is born of the Virgin Mary; rejoice!

1 The time of grace has come for which we have prayed; let us devoutly sing songs of joy.

2 God is made man, while nature wonders; the world is renewed by Christ the King.

3 The closed gate of Ezekiel has been passed through; from where the Light has risen [the East] salvation is found.

4 Therefore let our assembly sing praises now at this time of purification; let it bless the Lord: greetings to our King.

This superb song is one of the most popular of the Christmas pieces in *Piae Cantiones* (1582), and has even crossed the great divide to the world of 'folk rock' in an admirable recording by Steeleye Span in 1973.

The basis of 'Gaudete!' is a medieval *cantio* (song) which is found in several forms, with and without a refrain, with a variety of verses, and sometimes (as here) in the form of a *Benedicamus* substitute (see notes, 9). We have not found the *Piae Cantiones* verses elsewhere, and the song may have been one of those revised for publication by the editor, Finno: it is notably less Marian than his likely sources. (Since Finno did not print the music of the verses it is impossible to know whether he intended a carol—refrain, verse, refrain —or a refrain song—verse, refrain, verse.)

Verse 3 refers to the eastern gate of the city in Ezekiel's vision: 'Then the Lord said unto me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered by it, therefore shall it be shut' (Ezekiel 44:2). The gate is a traditional symbol of Mary as perpetual virgin: the entry of the God of Israel is interpreted as Christ's birth into the world, which supposedly did not impair her physical virginity, and after this she did not conceive again.

The *Piae Cantiones* verses derive from the Bohemian song 'Ezechielis porta'. Seven verses are found in two manuscripts in the Národní Muzeum, Prague, which reflect much of the very conservative *Piae Cantiones* repertory: the Jistebnice Gradual (*c.*1450, XII F 14) and Cantional (1420, II C 7).

The Gradual has the verse tune only, very roughly notated. There is no music with the Cantional text, but a note indicates that it is to be sung to that of the vernacular Christmas song 'Za ciesaře Augusta panna porodila', given on page 74 of the manuscript. (The song survives as the Czech folk carol 'Za ciesaře Augusta Panna velestkvouci'.) The Cantional version is more developed (or more accurately notated) than the one in the Gradual, and has its own refrain melody. The verse tune is very close to that which is sung today, and includes the rather surprising opening upbeat. (See *Old French and Czecho-Slovakian Carols*, arr. Richard Donovan, 1931.) It is also found as a chorale tune in some German books, including Praetorius's *Musae Sioniae* (V, 1607), set to the Christmas text 'Eia, mea anima'.

The *Piae Cantiones* refrain text does not occur elsewhere, and may be Finno's adaptation of the medieval refrain. Its stresses barbarously mis-match those of the setting, the melody of which was widely sung in Germany to Luther's grace before meat, 'Danket dem Herren, denn er ist so freundlich', which matches it perfectly. This tune had developed out of one of the simple four-part tenor-tune settings written for the performance of classical Latin verse and of the modern imitations that featured in many school dramas. (Classical versification depends on length of syllable and not on stress, but the long and short notes of the settings could as easily correspond to stressed and unstressed syllables as to the long and short syllables for which they were intended.) Several composers produced sample settings in the important metres, to which any other verses in that metre could equally well be sung. One by Ludwig Senfl, printed with Martial's 'Vitam quae faciunt beatiorum' and Catullus's 'Vivamus mea Lesbia atque amemus' (Senfl, *Varia Carmina Genera*, 1534), was included in many subsequent didactic collections. In Johann Spangenberg's *Grammaticae Latinae Partes* (1546) Senfl's melody appears in the tenor, set to Luther's grace, with a new melody in the soprano. It was this soprano tune to which the grace became generally sung and which would appear in 1582 in *Piae Cantiones* as the refrain melody of 'Gaudete!'.

Earlier settings lack accidentals; this need not imply uninflected performance, but the careful keyboard intabulations of 'Danket dem Herren' by Ammerbach (1571 and 1583) sharpen only the final leading note.

PERFORMANCE Refrain, choir or four voices, with instruments *ad lib.* (see notes, 54); verse, solo voice(s).