

## That sure sounds familiar ....

If you ever sing a song in church and think to yourself, "I've heard this one before ... but I know the words were different!" you are not imagining things. Some of our most beautiful, durable hymns were designed specifically to allow for interchangeable words. How smart is that?! It means we can take a melody that we love and sing it for several different occasions, with a text appropriate for each different one. Centuries ago when music books were less accessible and fewer people could read music (or even read at all) it meant that a church could more easily teach a congregation new songs, because they could just use recognizable melodies and teach the new words by rote.

These lovely, well-known melodies are called "hymn tunes" and they are most often set up like poetry; that is, with a certain logical number of syllables that repeats, so that as long as your new text has the same syllabic pattern, you can slip it right into place. And as a musician, this probably means you know more songs than you realize.

Let's take a really well-known example. Most of us would recognize the memorable old sound of Cat Stevens singing "Morning Has Broken," a song that back in the 1980's reached number six on the Billboard charts. However, that tune goes back much further, to a traditional Scottish melody. The first known words for the tune were composed in Gaelic sometime in the early 1800's in the town of Buinessan, on an island off Scotland. The melody, or hymn tune, is now called Buinessan in honor of those origins.

In the Newman Hymnal, you will find three separate songs using the Buinessan hymn tune: "Baptized in Water," #104; "This Day God Gives Me," #387; and finally, "Morning Has Broken," #389, where credit is given to the original author of the words, Eleanor Farjeon, who wrote them in 1931.

How can this help you in your music planning? Let's stick with the Buinessan example for a moment. You will notice, at the bottom of any of those three songs, the notation, "Music: BUNESSAN, 55 54 D; Scots Gaelic melody." The notation tells you the hymn tune and the number of repeating syllables (and often its origin). For example, in this tune, the phrases have five syllables, five again, five again, then four. (The "D" refers to the fact that each of the phrases end with longer notes – so the syllables that land on those notes are held longer.) Unless you're composing a new text yourself, you really don't need to worry about the 55 54 D part. But turn to the back of the Newman Hymnal to #833, "Hymn Tunes" and you will see a list of every hymn tune used in the book and all the places you can find that tune. And if you look up BUNESSAN, you will see 104, 387, 389 listed next to it. So whenever you're singing a hymn you like, look at the bottom for the hymn tune name, go to #833, and see where else you can find it in the book. You might find new words that are perfect for another occasion.

(Side note: this is not unique to the Newman Hymnal, but is a great resource for any church musician. If you're ever in the Basilica, for example, take a look in the back of the Worship hymnal – it has the exact same resource for all the hymns in Worship.)

It probably wouldn't hurt to mention that not every *song* is a *hymn*. The hymn form is a particular one in music, just as the sonnet is in poetry. **Hymns** generally have a simple, accessible melody with clear rhythms. They usually don't (but sometimes do) have a refrain, and they are generally arranged to be sung in four-part harmony when the musicians are able. Examples of **songs** would be music like "Gather Us In," or "One Bread, One Body." Therefore, if you want to find every song in the Newman Hymnal, it's the index you want, not the hymn tune page!

Finally, please always know that if you have questions about hymn tunes or anything else regarding your residence hall music and liturgies, you are most welcome to contact Kate Barrett ([kbarrett@nd.edu](mailto:kbarrett@nd.edu); 1-4746). Enjoy your music and may God richly bless your ministry!