

John Beckwith

# Alternative greeting

for

four equal voice parts

keyboard

percussion

flute, or violin (*optional*)

clarinet, or alto saxophone (*optional*)

## ALTERNATIVE GREETING

The song "Happy Birthday" was published in Chicago in 1893 as "Good Morning to All" (it was first published with its better-known text in 1935). The authors were Mildred J. Hill (1859-1918, music) and Patty S. Hill (1868-1946, words). It is among the most often sung songs in the Western world. Its universality is based on two things – 1, the banality of its musical structure, a symmetrical eight-bar phrase using only the three most common tonal chords, and 2, the utter simplicity and instant memorability of its lyrics.

An important birthday for my sister Jean, I decided, called for a new tune for those same simple lyrics. I thought of Jean's long association with, and love of, group singing. I recalled also from our childhood, seventy-odd years ago, campfire singalongs directed with immense enthusiasm by our Dad. I was pretty sure she would remember them too.

"Alternative Greeting" uses a call-and-response pattern, as in "Minnie the Moocher," to use one of many familiar examples. The tune occurs five times with different variants, but the lyrics remain (more or less) the same throughout. A leading singer introduces the tune and each variant, and others repeat these after her/him. Eight bars establish the beat and the pitch, and then we hear:

- 4 bars "call" (solo) / 1 bar wait / 4 bars "response" (chorus) / 2 bars wait

This sequence of 11 bars is performed 5 times (the fifth time the final wait is 1 bar, not 2).

The ending consists of 3 short echoes, a funny coda, and a final echo:

- echoes: 2 bars (chorus) / 1 bar wait (this is performed 3 times, getting softer each time);
- "funny coda": 1 bar quote from "Happy Birthday," 1 bar loud interruption, held;
- final echo: sustaining the last word "you ----."

The instruments play during the "waits," overlapping a bit each time. The two melody lines are meant for 1) flute or violin, 2) clarinet or alto sax. The rhythm background is meant for 1) percussion (sticks, a small drum, or clapping – anything that will give a good beat) and 2) keyboard. The melody-line parts are optional, but the rhythm-background parts are probably essential. The former will need a bit of practice; the latter are easy.

The borrowed lyrics are in English, but, for this occasion it's appropriate that one of the variant verses be sung in French: *Bonne fête, bonne fête, / Bonne fête, Maman*. (Don't forget that when sung the "silent" e's are sounded.) Maybe these lyrics need to be rehearsed in advance. The rest of the lyrics are easy, well known, and repetitive.

The basic "Alternative Greeting" tune is simpler than "Happy Birthday": it uses two chords (b VII, I), whereas "Happy Birthday" uses three (IV, V, I). Though simple, and in many respects flexible, "Alternative Greeting" has a definite shape (consisting, by the way, of 80 bars!). Therefore I consider it preferable to *rehearse it* in advance rather than performing it completely impromptu. Amateurs should be able to pick it up quickly by rote, as long as a few leading singers know it.

J.B.

for Jean

# ALTERNATIVE GREETING

John Beckwith

♩ = 52

VOICES  
PERC.  
KEYBD.

*mf marc.*

(Solo) HAP- PY

FLUTE  
VOICES  
PERC.  
KEYBD.

10

*mf*

(chor.) HAP- PY BIRTH- DAY, DEAR

BIRTH- DAY, DEAR JEAN, HAP- PY BIRTH- DAY TO YOU!

FL.  
CLAR. (C)  
VOICES  
PERC.  
KEYBD.

20

*mf*

JEAN, HAP- PY BIRTH- DAY TO YOU!

(Solo) { HAP- PY BIRTH- DAY, DEAR

FL.

JEAN, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU! (chor.) HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN, HAPPY

FL.

CLAR.

30

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU! (solo) HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU, HAPPY

{ BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN!
 (chor.)
 { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU, HAP-PY
 HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY, HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY, HAP-PY

(40)
 f.
 { BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN!
 (solo)
 { BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE

FL.

{ FÊ - TE, BON-NE FÊ - TE, MA- MAN! (chor.) { BON-NE FÊ - TE, BON-NE FÊ - TE, BON-NE

FL.

CLAR.

50

{ FÊ - TE, MA- MAN! 15. HAP- PY BIRTH- DAY, HAP- PY (solo) { HAP- PY BIRTH- DAY, DEAR

BIRTH - DAY, HAPPY BIRTH - DAY TO YOU! HAPPY BIRTH - DAY, HAPPY BIRTH - DAY, DEAR.

{ JEAN, HAPPY BIRTH - DAY TO YOU! } { CHORUS } { HAPPY BIRTH - DAY, DEAR. }

BIRTH - DAY, HAPPY BIRTH - DAY TO YOU! HAPPY BIRTH - DAY, HAPPY BIRTH - DAY TO YOU!

{ JEAN, HAPPY BIRTH - DAY TO YOU! } { CHORUS } { HAPPY BIRTH - DAY TO YOU! }

BIRTH-DAY,  
 { YOU, } { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN, } { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO

*unis.* *b.* *f.*

70 Poco rit. --- Slower

FL. *p.* Flutter Tempo

CLAR. *ff* Flutter *p.*

VOICES (unis.) You! HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO.... HAP-PY

PERC. *ff* roll *p.*

KEYB'D. *fff* trem.

88a-1

80

FL. BIRTH-DAY To You!

VOICES (unis.)

PERC.

KEYB'D. *pp*

88a-1

J.O. Toronto  
 June '03



# ALTERNATIVE GREETING

John Beckwith

[d=52]

Voices

perc.

keybd.

Solo 1

verse 1

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

10

Fi.

Chor. (all)

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

Solo 1

verse 2

20

Fi.

Chor. 1

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

Chor. 2

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

Solo 1

verse 3

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN

Solo 2

Solo 3

30

Fi.

Chor. 1

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN

Chor. 2

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN

Chor. 3

Solo 3

verse 4

BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE FÊ-TE, MA-MAN

Solo 4

40

Fi.

Chor. 2  
Chor. 3  
Chor. 4

BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE FÊ-TE, MA- MAN

verse 5  
Solo 1  
Solo 2  
Solo 3  
Solo 4

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

(50)

Chor. 1  
Chor. 2  
Chor. 3  
Chor. 4

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

Echo (a)  
Chor. 4  
Solo 4  
Solo 3

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN

(60)

Solo 4  
Coda  
hor. call  
Fl. Cl.  
last echo

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

(70) (80)

This is for personal use only