

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 (1859-1910, 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 ( $\flat$  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

*f = 52*

*T.*

VOICES (8) *(solo)* HAP-PY

PERC.

KEYBD. *mf* *marc.*

*(10)*

FLUTE *mf*

VOICES (8) (chor.) HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR

PERC.

KEYBD.

*(20)*

FL.

CLAR. (C) *mf*

VOICES (8) JEAN, HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU! (solo) { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR

PERC.

KEYBD.

*T.*

FL.

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

CLAR.

FL.

(30)

CLAR.

B. HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY  
(solo) {HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU, HAPPY  
{BIRTH-DAY TO YOU!

Handwritten musical score for two songs:

**Happy Birthday:**

- Key signature: F major (one sharp)
- Time signature: Common time
- Instrumentation: Four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano.
- Text:
  - Soprano: BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN!
  - Alto: (chor) { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU,
  - Tenor: BIRTH-DAY, HAP-PY
  - Bass: BIRTH-DAY, HAP-PY

**Bon-Ne Fête:**

- Key signature: F major (one sharp)
- Time signature: Common time
- Instrumentation: Four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano.
- Text:
  - Soprano: BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN!
  - Alto: (solo) { BON-NE FÊTE, BON-NE
  - Tenor: BIRTH-DAY, BON-NE
  - Bass: BIRTH-DAY, BON-NE

FL.

{ FÈ - TE, BON-NE FÈ - TE, MA- MAN!

(chor.) { BON-NE FÈ - TE, BON-NE FÈ - TE, BON-NE

CLAR.

(50) { FÈ - TE, MA- MAN!

B. HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY, HAP-PY  
(solo) { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR

Handwritten musical score for two voices (Soprano and Alto) and piano. The score consists of two systems of music. The first system starts with a piano dynamic (f) followed by a vocal entry for Soprano (Happy Birthday to You!). The second system continues with Alto entries and concludes with a piano dynamic (p). The vocal parts include lyrics such as "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HAP-PY JEAN, HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU!" and "HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR". The piano part includes dynamics like f, p, and mf.

BIRTH - DAY, HAPPY BIRTH - DAY TO YOU!

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

HAPPY BIRTH - DAY, HAP - PY

{HAP - PY BIRTH - DAY, DEAR.

Handwritten musical score for two voices (Soprano and Alto) and piano, continuing from the previous page. The score consists of two systems of music. The first system starts with a piano dynamic (mf) followed by a vocal entry for Soprano (Happy Birthday to You!). The second system continues with Alto entries and concludes with a piano dynamic (p). The vocal parts include lyrics such as "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HAP-PY JEAN, HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU!" and "HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR". The piano part includes dynamics like f, p, and mf.

BIRTH - DAY, HAPPY BIRTH - DAY TO YOU!

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

(mf)

⑩

HAPPY BIRTH - DAY, HAP - PY

{HAP - PY BIRTH - DAY TO

BIRTH-DAY,

*uni.s.* b.

{ you, { HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN, { HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO

(70) Poco rit. ... Slower

FL. *p* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

CLAR. *p* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

VOICES (uni.s.) You! *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

PERC. *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p*

KEYBD. *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p*

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO.... HAP-PY

*p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p*

*p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p*

(80)

FL. *d.* *d.* *d.* *d.* *d.* *d.* *d.*

BIRTH-DAY To You!

VOICES (uni.s.) *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

PERC. *d.* *d.* *d.* *d.* *d.* *d.* *d.*

KEYBD. *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp*

*8va* *8va* *8va* *8va* *8va* *8va* *8va*

J.B. / Toronto  
June '03

## VOICES

## ALTERNATIVE GREETING

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[d=52]

Voices      perc.

keybd.      Solo 1      verse 1      (10)      Fl.

{HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU      HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU}

Chor. (all)      Solo 1      verse 2      Fl.

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

Solo 2      (20)      Fl.

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

Chor. 1      Solo 1      verse 3      Fl.

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

Chor. 2      Solo 2      (30)      Solo 3      Fl.

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

Chor. 1      Solo 3      verse 4      Fl.

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

Chor. 2      Solo 4      (40)      Solo 4      Fl.

HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU      HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN      (40)      BONNE FÊTE, BONNE FÊTE, BONNE FÊTE, MA-MAN

Chor. 3

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VOICES  
(2)

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The musical score consists of three staves of handwritten music. The first staff begins with Chor. 2, followed by Chor. 3 and Chor. 4 singing 'BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE FÊ-TE, MA-MAN'. At measure 50, it transitions to Verse 5, featuring Solos 1, 2, 3, and 4 singing 'HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN' and 'HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU'. The second staff starts with Chor. 1 at measure 50, followed by Echo (a), Chor. 4, Chor. 3, Chor. 2, and Chor. 4 again. The third staff begins with Solo 4 at measure 70, followed by a Coda section for Flute, Clarinet, and Bassoon. The score concludes with a final echo at measure 80.

Chor. 2  
Chor. 3, { BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE FÊ-TE, BON-NE FÊ-TE, MA-MAN  
Chor. 4  
50  
Verse 5 Solo 1  
Solo 2, { HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN  
Solo 3 HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
Solo 4 HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN { HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

Chor. 1  
50 (a) Chor. 4  
Chor. 2, { HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN  
Chor. 3, { HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
Chor. 4, { HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN  
Chor. 4, { HAPPY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN & HAPPY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU

(b) Solo 4  
Fl.  
Chor. 3, { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
Chor. 2, { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
Chor. 1, { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY TO YOU  
Chor. 4, { HAP-PY BIRTH-DAY, DEAR JEAN

(c) Solo 4  
70 Poco adagio  
Coda || Hor. (all)  
Fl., Cl., Bassoon  
last echo  
80