

# 14 The Troubles of Erin

## RESOURCES ▶ ▶

### ■ You need to know

Vin Garbutt has been among the busiest and best-loved performers on both the British and the international folk circuits for well over thirty years. Although he's one of the funniest men you'll ever hear talking, virtually all his songs deal with serious subjects, many of them of immediate contemporary relevance. He approaches his themes directly, with honesty and clear-sighted courage, but also with warmth and compassion. His melodies are always strong and appealing.

The last three decades of the 20th century were blighted by ongoing sectarian violence and conflict in Northern Ireland. This song was created in the 1990s, when the peace process offered a genuine sense that the violence might end. This feeling of hope tempered by doubt runs through the chorus of 'The Troubles of Erin', with its lovely image of the bubble of peace—complete, pleasing, and fragile. The verses refer to actual incidents in the recent history of the troubles, such as the Remembrance Day bombing at Enniskillen in November 1987, when a young nurse, Marie Wilson, died holding her injured father's hand. In a radio interview afterwards, Gordon Wilson set an example of forgiveness when he said he couldn't hate his daughter's killers: 'I bear no ill will. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie'.

### ■ Warming up

- Sing some major scales slowly, up and down.
- Try exercise 1 on page 53. Start low and raise the pitch (a semitone at a time) to stretch voices across their range. Try different combinations of hard consonants and vowel sounds; begin with 'nee' for a bright tone.
- Sing exercise 2 as notated; aim for a smooth tone and accurate leaps. Again, change the key to stretch voices.

### ■ Learning

- The melody is very strong but also very simple, with the same basic shape for both verse and chorus. The rhythms vary across the verses according to the words, and they can be left flexible if sung by solo voices. The guiding principle is that the words should sound natural and convey their message clearly. This is really the kind of song which needs singing in without too much planning.

- Begin with the chorus. Sing it over until it feels confident and secure. It will sound effective with a large group of singers as long as everyone moves together and sings with feeling.
- Sing verse 1 then invite the group to join in with the chorus.
- Invite soloists to attempt subsequent verses. Don't stop to analyse the rhythms too much; let individuals interpret the words as they choose. Bring in the chorus after each verse to keep the song flowing.
- Once the rhythms have settled down, try getting small groups to sing the verses; make sure the words sound natural and that everybody moves together.
- The accompaniment is for piano and optional piccolo or flute. It could also be played by guitar.

### ■ Listen out

- The words are the essence of this song, so make sure they're really clear and audible. Check the balance between the piano/piccolo accompaniment and the voices, especially if soloists are performing the verses.
- Really make sure that any groups of voices are singing as one. If necessary, discuss and agree the rhythms of the words, and practise them until everyone is really confident.
- Ensure the pitching is accurate in the chorus, particularly in bars 25–7; make sure the tone is supported right up to the highest notes.

### ■ Creating a performance

- This song works well alternating verse and chorus as written, but you could also try pairing some verses, e.g. 3 and 4, and 5 and 6, with no chorus in between.
- Vary the mood by changing dynamics between verses and alternating small groups and soloists.
- Sing the final verse unaccompanied, bringing the piano/piccolo back in for the final chorus.
- Experiment with ending the song in bar 33, on the dominant/so. This creates a sense of something incomplete and of anticipation, which you may find appropriate for the song's subject matter.

# 14 The Troubles of Erin

Words and melody: Vin Garbutt  
transcribed Peter Hunt

**With a lilt**

Verse

1. Oh, re - mem - ber the ci - vil rights march - ers who were bat - tered with clubs to the ground, and the ve - ry last squad - die to lay down his bo - dy and part with his soul for the crown. May the trou - bles of E - rin be o - ver, may the bub - ble of peace be pre - served. May the white dove in - spire the child - ren of Ire - land; peace is the least they de - serve. (2. And re - ) Peace is the least they de - serve.

- 2 And remember that cold Bloody Sunday, when the troops opened fire on the crowd, and the people of Derry again had to bury their loved ones, and pay for the shroud.
- 3 And the tragedy of Enniskillen, when a bomb broke the heart of the town, and that elderly man, who held out his hand, to the killer who cut his girl down.
- 4 And the boys in the bar room at Poyntz Pass, good friends who could see no divide. A cold heinous crime cut them down in their prime; their blood was as one where they died.

- 5 Oh, the prisons are filled with their number, the angry, the anguished, the shamed; but the wire must come down in each county and town for the ghosts of the past to be laid.
- 6 So let's pray for the day of forgiveness, when the weeping and wailing will cease, and may love reconcile all of Erin's green isle, may the living and dead rest in peace.