

for the NSO “Symphony Goes to School” Program

JOHN BARLEYCORN

for Voice(s) and Piano Accompaniment
(Grades One and Two)

Traditional English Folk Song

arr. by Timothy Brennan



ca. 2:10

Programme Notes

“John Barleycorn” is an old English folk song. It is so old that no one is quite sure who wrote the original lyrics or what the original melody sounded like. The song was passed down through oral tradition for hundreds of years before finally being transcribed by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

In the song, John Barleycorn is not a person, but rather a personification (representation) of the various stages of barley harvesting. Therefore, when the song states that “John Barleycorn must die,” it is referring to the reaping process (cutting the barley) as opposed to an actual murder.

Students may notice the English nonsense syllables in the refrain (eg. “Sing right fol lol, the diddle al dee”). Syllables such as these often appear in traditional Newfoundland folk songs as well, such as “Lukey’s Boat,” and “A Great Big Sea Hove in Long Beach.” English and Irish explorers were among the first Europeans to settle in Newfoundland and Labrador, bringing with them their singing traditions. Folk songs native to Newfoundland and Labrador are linked to English and Irish folk songs.

“John Barleycorn” and “Lukey’s Boat” have been arranged for numerous types of musical ensembles. Some are listed below:

Ensemble	Versions of “John Barleycorn”	Versions of “Lukey’s Boat”
Voice and Piano	arr. by Timothy Brennan for NSO’s <i>Symphony Goes to School</i> <i>Program</i>	Multiple arrangements
Folk Rock Band	arr. by Traffic (folk rock band from England)	arr. by Great Big Sea (folk rock band from St. John’s)
Wind Band	arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams	arr. by Aiden Hartery
Choir	arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams	arr. by D.F. Cook

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John Barleycorn

English Folk Song
arr. by Timothy Brennan

Moderato ♩ = 84

Voice

Piano

mf

1. There
2. They
3. There

4

V.

Pno.

came three men from out the west, their vic - tor - y — to try! But
took a plough and ploughed him in, laid clods u - pon his head! And
he re-mained till mid - sum - mer and looked both pale and wan! For

8

V.

Pno.

they had ta - ken a sol - emn vow, John Bar - ley - corn must die! — Sing
they have ta - ken a sol - emn oath, John Bar - ley - corn is dead! — Sing
all he had was a spi - ky beard, to shew he was a man! — Sing

f

12

V.

right fol - lol the did-dle al_ dee, right fol lee rol
right fol - lol the did-dle al_ dee, right fol lee rol
right fol - lol the did - dle al_ dee,

Pno.

f

15

V.

1.2. 3.
dee! right fol lee rol dee!
dee!

Pno.

1.2. 3.