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PEDAGOGUES AND PRODIGIES: A CONDUCTOR'S GUIDE TO SELECTED WORKS OF SWEELINCK, L. MOZART, SCHUMANN, SAINT-SAËNS, THOMPSON, AND LARSEN

Mason Rice
mason.rice@siu.edu

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by

Mason Rice

B.M.M.E., University of Kentucky, 2018

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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School of Music
in the Graduate School
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Approved by:

Dr. Susan Davenport, Chair

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

Mason Rice, for the Master of Music degree in Choral Conducting, presented on April 3, 2024, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: PEDAGOGUES AND PRODIGIES: A CONDUCTOR'S GUIDE TO SELECTED WORKS OF SWEELINCK, L. MOZART, SCHUMANN, SAINT-SAËNS, THOMPSON, AND LARSEN

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Susan Davenport

This research is presented to aid any educators, directors, and conductors who wish to program these composers and the selected pieces for their choral ensembles. The pieces chosen for analysis were presented in a Masters graduate recital on February 16, 2024, and were performed in the order of the paper, except that *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica* and *The Best of Rooms* were switched. Each chapter is laid out in four sections that focus on the selected piece: a brief biography of the composer, a musical analysis, rehearsal considerations, and a review of recordings. The selected pieces included in this research are as follows:

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck: "Gaudete omnes" from *Cantiones Sacrae*, No.32

Leopold Mozart: *Missa in A*, Carlson IA_3

Robert Schumann: "Es ist verrathen" from *Spanisches Liederspiel*, Op.74, No. 5

Camille Saint-Saëns: *Calme des nuits*, Op.68, No. 1

Randall Thompson: *The Best of Rooms*

Libby Larsen: *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica*

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JAN PIETERSZOON SWEELINCK: "GAUDETE OMNES"

Biography

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck was the earliest traceable Dutch composer and educator of merit. Sweelinck was born in Deventer, The Netherlands, in 1562, and shortly after moved to Amsterdam.[1] There, Sweelinck spent his life composing and performing at the *Oude Kerk* (the "Old Church") which still stands as the oldest surviving building in Amsterdam, and is the site of Sweelinck's burial in 1621. Sweelinck's tenure at the Old Church was preceded by his father, Pieter Swybertszoon, and followed by Sweelinck's son, Dirck Janszoon, for a family dynasty that lasted almost a full century (1564-1652).[2] He was financially supported by the local government and from pupils who traveled to study with him.[3] Among his pupils were influential German composers Jacob Praetorious II, Paul Siefert, Samuel Scheidt, Heinrich Scheidemann, and J. A. Reincken, who specifically influenced Johann Sebastian Bach.[4]

Sweelinck's vocal output contains numerous chansons, madrigals, and motets. The pillars of Sweelinck's sacred vocal music are his four-volume setting of the Genevan Psalter, 153 psalms that contain Renaissance characteristics like cantus firmus, polyphony, and madrigalisms, and his *Cantiones Sacrae*, a collection of thirty-seven motets that he dedicated to his friend and

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[1] Frits Noske, *Sweelinck* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5.

[2] Noske, *Sweelinck*, 5-12.

[3] Noske, *Sweelinck*, 10-11.

[4] Randell Tollefsen, "Sweelinck [Swelinck, Zwelinck, Sweeling, Sweelingh, Sweling, Swelingh], Jan Pieterszoon," Grove Music Online (January 20, 2001), https://doi-org.proxy.lib.siu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27206.

pupil, Cornelis Plemp.[5] Sweelinck's work on the Genevan Psalter spanned much of his compositional life, with its first works appearing in 1597, and the final book of psalms being published after his death.[6] This is often considered his magnum opus and a compositional landmark of Dutch music, due in no small part to the virtuosity and scale of Book III of the psalms, which borrows stylistically from madrigals, motets, chansons, and villanelles.[7] The *Cantiones Sacrae* (1619) are liturgical texts for five voices, and are representative of Sweelinck's most mature and free compositional style, as they were published within the final three years of his life. These motets contain evidence of a burgeoning harmonic language and *basso seguente,* an early form of basso continuo which is a scored bass line that is not always identical to, and contains frequent deviations from, the bass voice.[8] The *Cantiones Sacrae* illustrate Sweelinck's position as a transitional figure to the Baroque period, as they contain an increased use of chromaticism, a more grounded harmony, and no trace of cantus firmus. Many of these motets also contain an added coda with the text "alleluia." Demonstrative of all these stylistic traits is "Gaudete omnes," the thirty-second motet in the *Cantiones Sacrae.*

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[5] Noske, *Sweelinck*, 66.

[6] Noske, *Sweelinck*, 49-50.

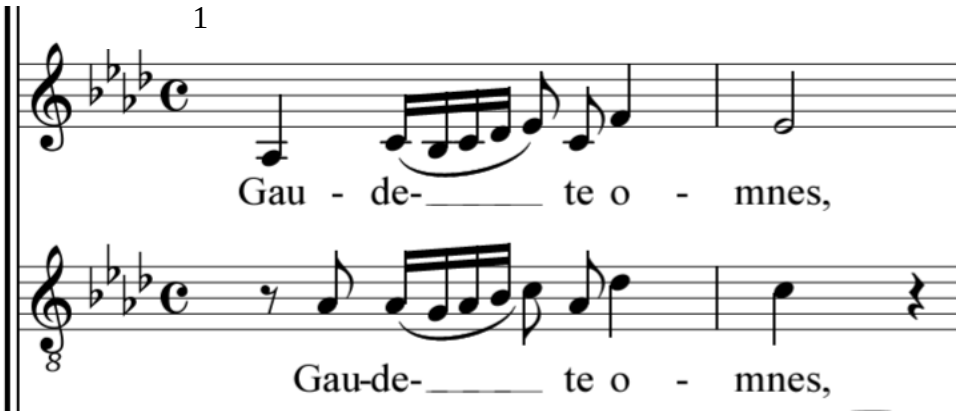
[7] Tollefsen, "Sweelinck," Grove Music Online.

[8] Noske, *Sweelinck*, 67.

Musical Analysis

"Gaudete omnes" is an imitative, polyphonic, sacred motet. Formally, Sweelinck structures this work in fragments that align with phrases of text. Each new phrase contains a new motivic idea that is imitated and developed within its own short musical phrase. For example, the "Gaudete omnes" motive, shown in figure 1, is a quarter-note or eighth-note anacrusis that usually ascends to a string of four stepwise sixteenth-notes that visit a lower neighbor tone before ascending to the third above the first sixteenth-note. This movement is always followed by an eighth-note that descends a third and is followed by two quarter-notes. Each voice enters with this melodic and rhythmic motive in different harmonizations within the first two measures of the piece, with about three beats between entrances. Sweelinck almost exclusively uses this motive, with minimal compositional filler, as the musical material of the first phrase, mm. 1-8, which is then taken over by a new phrase of text and a new accompanying motivic idea. Each phrase of text plays out in this way. As such, the piece is essentially through composed, though Sweelinck did opt to repeat one long phrase of text in mm. 33-44 and mm. 45-50, *scitote quoniam ipse est expectation nostra,* which poetically translates to "know that he is our hope."[9]

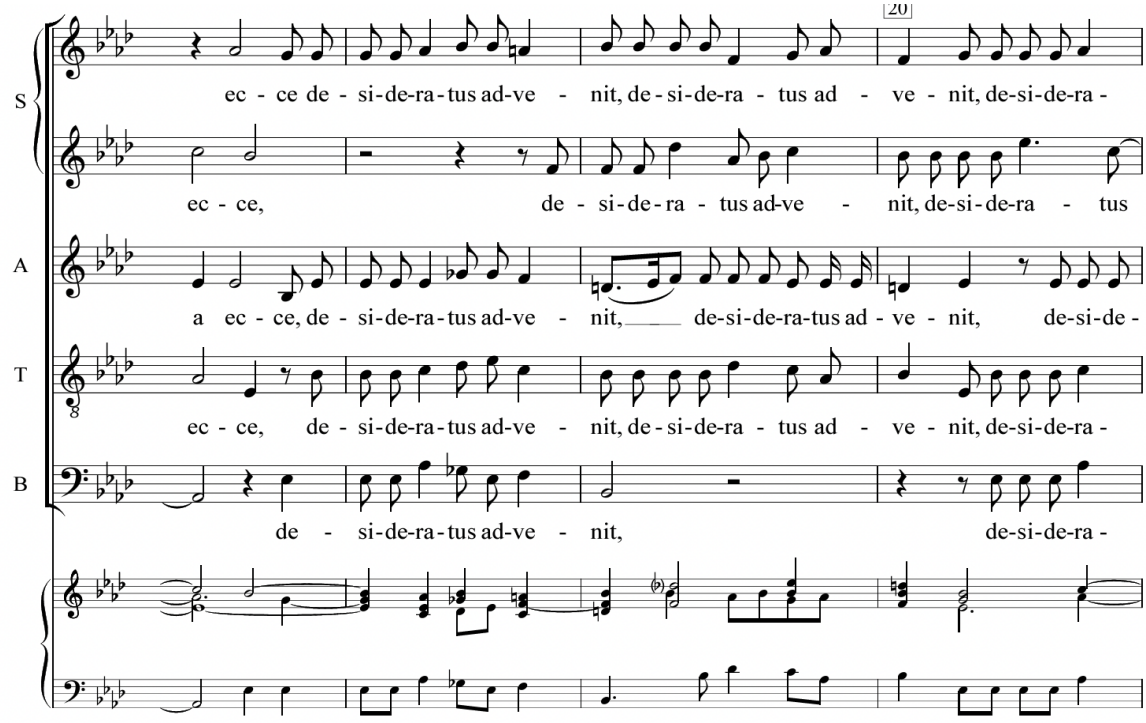
Figure 1. "Gaudete omnes," mm. 1-2



[9] Sweelinck, Jan, "Gaudete Omnes," ed. James Gibb, CPDL, May 15, 2017, https://www.cpdl.org/wiki/images/3/33/Gaudete_omnes_Sweelinck.pdf.

The score selected for analysis and performance is edited by James Gibb, and is found on CPDL.org. In his edition, Gibbs transposed down a major third from the original key of C major, and halved note values for simplicity.[10] A closer harmonic analysis reveals a vertical progression of harmonies that more closely resembles the Baroque era. Sweelinck's *basso seguente* makes the implied changes in harmony evident. The opening measures establish the tonic key of A-flat major with deliberate movements from tonic to the subdominant and tonic to the dominant that quickly return to the tonic. In fact, the first three musical phrases all begin and end within the tonic harmony. Further along in the piece, represented in figure 2, Sweelinck employs secondary dominants with their intended resolutions in beat four of m. 18 into m. 19, and from beat one to beat two of m. 20, which is further evidence of Sweelinck's role as an influential transitionary figure to the ground harmonies of the Baroque era.

Figure 2. "Gaudete omnes," mm. 17-20



[10] Sweelinck, "Gaudete Omnes," ed. Gibb, CPDL.

Some of the most exciting moments of the piece are the unexpected shifts to homophony, as in mm. 18, 34, 36 (see fig. 3), 45, 46, and in portions of the "Alleluia." While duets and trios between parts are common in traditional Renaissance polyphony, Sweelinck brings together four of the five voices in these measures to emphasize the text and to propel the music forward. Four of the measures mentioned above are on the text, *quoniam ipse est* ("since he is"), and the other instance is on the text, *desideratus advenit* ("the desired has arrived"). This text informed compositional emphasis can also be called madrigalism. Another example of this compositional device is found in mm. 30-32, partially pictured in figure 4, where the phrase *in exultatione* ("in exultation"), is accompanied by a change to compound meter, evocative of dancing, and a textural shift to longer note values.

Figure 3. "Gaudete omnes," mm. 34-35

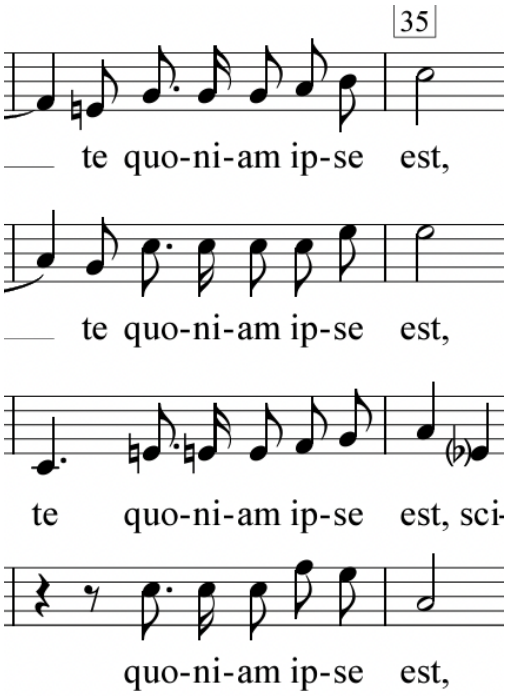


Figure 4. "Gaudete omnes," mm. 29-31

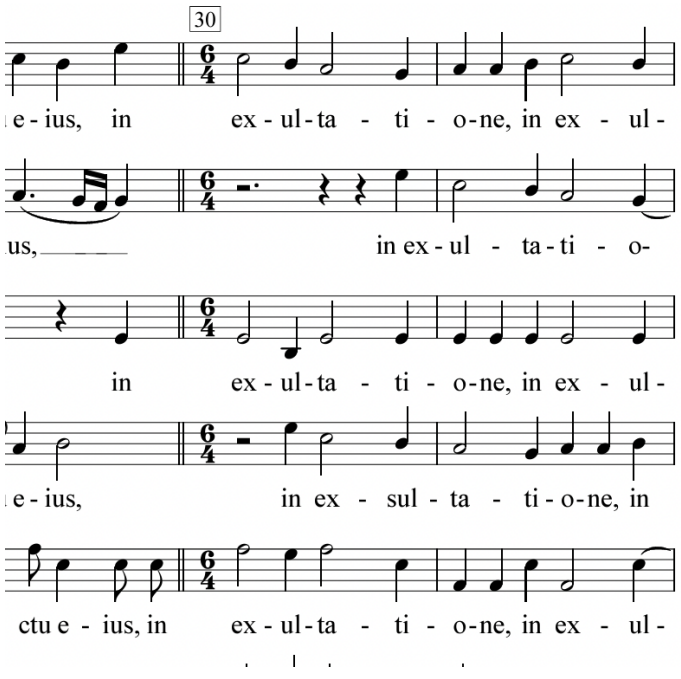
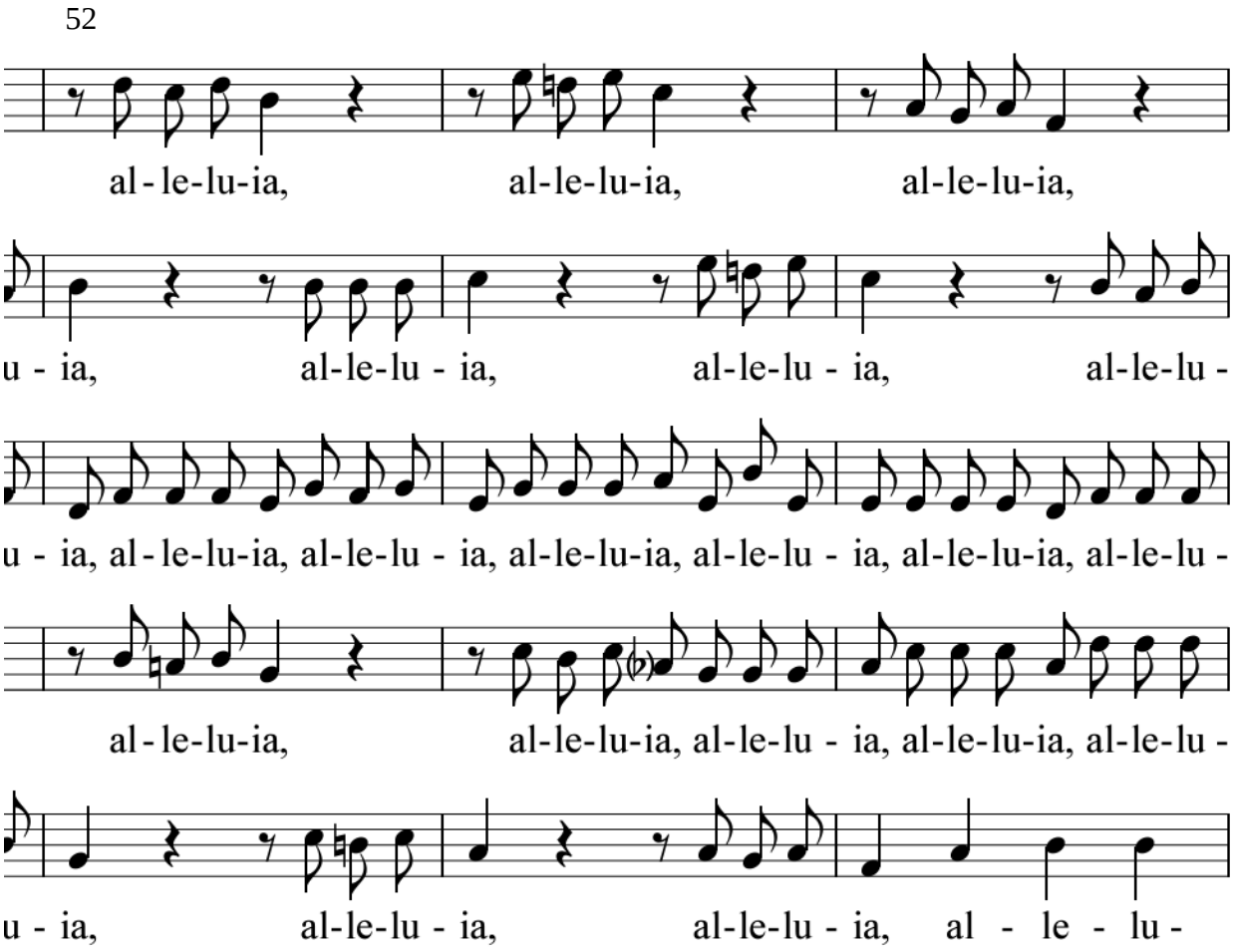


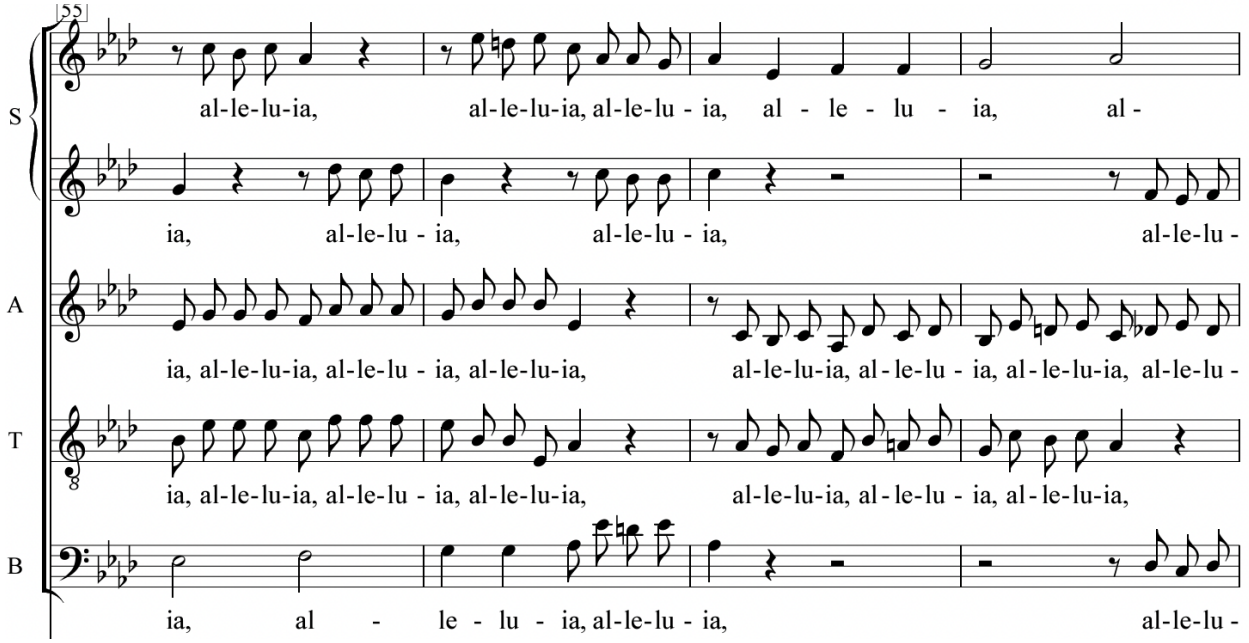
Figure 3. “Gaudete omnes,” mm. 52-54.



The most harmonically adventurous portion of the work lies at the very end, the “Alleluia.” In this imitative finale, Sweelinck takes a simple rhythmic motive, three eighth notes and a final eighth or quarter note, and develops it through neighbor tones and sequencing. Most iterations of the motive feature a lower neighbor tone on the syllable ‘le,’ which Sweelinck occasionally elects to enhance with an accidental, as shown in figure 5. These lower neighbors are often half-steps, and occasionally whole-steps. Further, Sweelinck reveals an ascending sequence in mm. 54-56, and again in mm. 57-61, that elevates the piece to its climactic end. The sequences are made explicit by the rising quarter notes and half notes sung by the basses and then the sopranos in mm. 54-59, shown in figure 6. Sweelinck is freer with his use of accidentals

in these sequences, which generates a modal series of chords that anticipates the Baroque harmonic motion, but confirms this piece's place in the late Renaissance. These shifting harmonies also pose interesting challenges for singers and directors preparing to perform this piece.

Figure 4. "Gaudete omnes," mm. 55-59

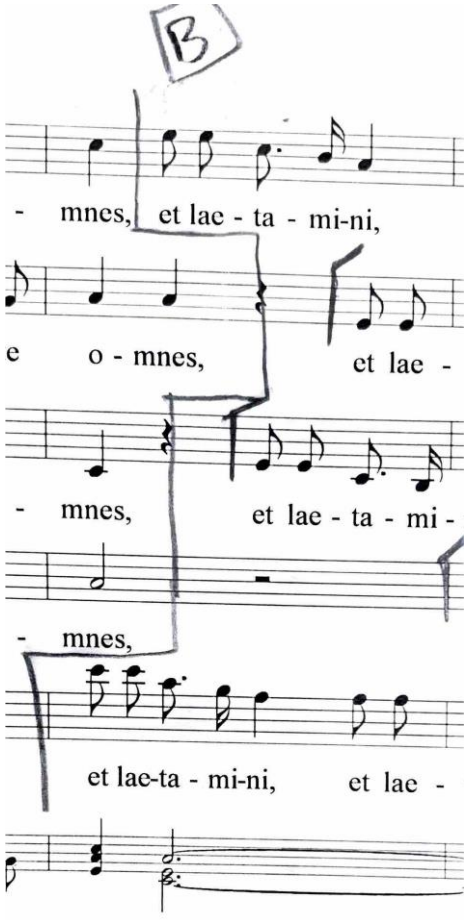


Rehearsal Considerations

The information gathered in the preceding musical analysis gives the ensemble director plenty of considerations to bring to their rehearsals of this piece. Perhaps the most important detail to decide is where the choir will start and stop singing during rehearsals. Polyphonic music is notoriously difficult to rehearse because the lack of full-chorus cadences. In this piece, the first communal cadence happens in m. 21, four full phrases into the music. To remedy this issue, directors should use the changes in text to identify the beginning and ending of each musical phrase and demarcate them with a solid or dotted line. These lines will almost never cut straight from the top to the bottom of the score, but they establish clear starting and ending positions to

ensure a more efficient rehearsal. For example, the phrase that begins on m. 8 overlaps with the previous phrase, and when rehearsing, the basses should begin on the downbeat of m. 8, followed by the top soprano on beat two, alto on beat three, low soprano on beat four, and the tenors on the next downbeat. The divisions made in the singers' scores before the first rehearsal should also be given rehearsal letters, or marks that make it clear where the singers are expected to start. As in the previous example, all the information on when to start is as simple as, "Start at Letter 'B,'" which is represented in figure 7.

Figure 5. "Gaudete omnes," m. 8

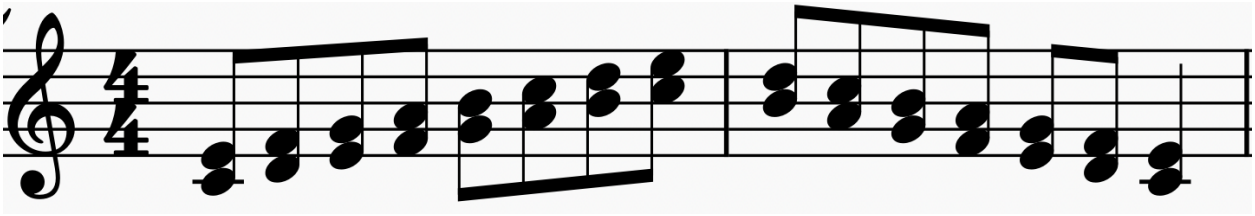


When wading through new phrases of "Gaudete omnes," it is wise to identify the part that has the first complete statement of the motivic idea, and have every other part sing along. Often, the first or highest part works fine for this purpose. Ideally, singers can transfer that task to their

own part. The rhythm of these motivic ideas is often the same, which gives the ensemble a significant advantage toward staying together, even if the pitches are incorrect at first.

Incorporating canonic warmups into daily practice will also subtly prepare singers for the imitations that take place in this piece. Adapting these exercises with harmonized duets in canon is also beneficial, as there are plenty of instances in “Gaudete omnes,” where two parts must listen and tune across the ensemble. For example, each section sings a solfege scale in canon two beats apart. Then, harmonize the scale with two parts paired together, one part sings “Do” up to “Do” and the other part sings “Mi” up to “Mi,” while the remaining two parts repeat the exercise two beats later. The harmonization is represented in figure 8.

Figure 6. Warmup for harmonized canons



“Gaudete omnes” is a difficult work to perform. Even experienced choirs can get lost in the modal harmonies and misleading bar lines that have been added to the score. One of the most difficult challenges for the conductor is the very first phrase, mm. 1-8. The first note feels like a pickup but is placed on beat one of the piece with the following imitative entrances happening every three beats. For a piece in four, this can be disorienting and confusing to lead through, and the choir may feel that what they sing isn’t matching up with the strong beats that are marked, or with the gesture of the conductor. Other than re-barring the first measures of the score, a conductor may find success in abandoning a traditional four-pattern for a three-pattern until the

downbeat of m. 8, or by utilizing a circular pattern that prioritizes the thematic entrances of each part.

Generally, each seam between sections will prove challenging for singers, but none more so than the seam from mm. 32-33, which involves shifting from compound meter back to simple. Instructing the singers to watch the conductor carefully in these measures is crucial, and the transition will likely require drilling. Melodically, the "Alleluia" provides interesting academic challenges to singers, as the imitative rhythmic motive does not always include the same intervals. Sweelinck is inconsistent with his use of half-steps or whole-steps in this section, so each part may need to heavily mark their scores to indicate intervals that are unexpected. Further, the alto part in this finale is relentless, and the section will need to plan staggered breaths, or be given explicit places to breathe.

Review of Recordings

When selecting to perform Sweelinck's "Gaudete omnes," the following recordings can serve as informative examples: the Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam, Choir of Clare College Cambridge, and Clovis North [High School] Chamber Choir in Fresno, California. The eight-voice professional ensemble Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam is conducted by Harry van der Kamp and demonstrates the highest level of stylistic and musical artistry.[11] Their recording is an excellent example of the lighter, straighter tone and dance-like quality of Renaissance music. They can achieve this lightness and accuracy because of the limited number of singers, which is

[11] Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam – Topic, "Cantiones sacrae : Gaudete omnes et laetamini, SwWV 182," YouTube, Feb 8, 2015, https://www.youtube.com /watch?v =mlDIFVw70zg&ab_channel=GesualdoConsortAmsterdam-Topic.

also why care should be taken not to set this recording as a tonal model for school and community groups that often have more members with less experience.

Timothy Brown's conducting of the Choir of Clare College Cambridge is the first recording listed on both YouTube and Spotify, and for good reason. [12] This chamber ensemble of about thirty voices does an excellent job demonstrating the textural shifts and bringing out melodic motives that are passed around the voices. The intricate passagework at the beginning of the piece is executed cleanly by adding a tiny aspiration to the onset of each pitch. While the dynamic spectrum achieved by this group is exciting and musical, it borders on Romantic in range. This recording is a wonderful example that will infuse excitement and vitality to the rehearsing of this piece.

The final recording is an impressive performance by Clovis North Chamber Choir led by Heather Bishop.[13] Considering the lackluster quality of the recording equipment, the forty-to-fifty voice high school choir aptly sings with pitch accuracy and vitality. Dynamic changes are subtle and deliberate, often aligning with changes in text and texture. The tone of the ensemble is bright and authentic though their vowel production is slightly too lateral in the lower three parts. This tone is appropriate and expected of a young ensemble, and the opportunity for more unified vowels makes this recording an excellent gauge of choral tone.

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[12] Various Artists – Topic, "Gaudete omnes," YouTube, Oct 14, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-oyLD4jYqs&ab_channel=VariousArtists-Topic.

[13] Maddie Nelson, "Gaudete Omnes – Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck," YouTube, Apr 18, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rHmC29O2eU&ab_channel=MaddieNelson.

CHAPTER 2

LEOPOLD MOZART: *MISSA IN A*

Biography

Leopold Mozart was a significant Austrian composer of the early eighteenth century, whose career is all but eclipsed by his most famous student and son, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Leopold Mozart was an impressive composer in his own right whose magnum opus, *Versuch diner gründlichen Violinschule*, secured his contemporary fame and his position as the Vice-Kapellmeister to the Archbishop of Salzburg from 1757 until his death in 1787.[14] The year of his appointment to the court, Mozart spared no words in notating his own achievements in a report on the state of music in the court of Salzburg, which has been translated into English by Neal Zaslaw:

> Mr Leopold Mozart [1719-87], from the imperial city of Augsburg, is violinist and leader of the orchestra. He composes both church and chamber music. He was born on 14th November 1719, and entered the archiepiscopal service in the year 1743 soon after completing his studies in philosophy and law. He has made himself known in every branch of composition, without, however, issuing anything in print except for the "sonata sei a tre [per chiesa e da camera] that he himself engraved in copper in the year 1740 (principally in order to gain experience in the art of engraving).[15]

The biography goes on to describe Mozart's many other compositions and his diverse use of instruments. The length of his biography far surpasses that of the other staff members included in the report.[16]

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[14] Daniel Heartz, Haydn, Mozart, and the Viennese School: 1740-1780, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995), 489.

[15] Neal Zaslaw, *Mozart's Symphonies: Context, Performance Practice, Reception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 551.

[16] Zaslaw, *Mozart's Symphonies,* 551.

Leopold Mozart's *Violinschule* was widely considered the foremost instructional violin method of its time and was consistently used across Europe until at least 1817.[17] Mozart's prolific output also included a number of German Passion cantatas in the early 1740s which anticipate, and perhaps influence, his appointment as violinist to the court of Leopold Anton Freiherr von Firmian of Salzburg.[18] Among his many sacred works, including his *Missa solemnis* and Litanies in D major and E-flat major, Mozart demonstrates his position as a modern composer of his time, fusing Palestrina's polyphonic *stile antico,* with arias reflective of the contemporary Italian opera scene.[19] Mozart's work was revered by his peers, and as scholar Cliff Eisen aptly writes, "It speaks for itself that several of his works were at one time thought to be compositions by Wolfgang."[20] Mozart could perhaps have occupied a much greater position in the canon of great classical composers, but much of his artistic and entrepreneurial energy was redirected with the birth of his son.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart possessed a prodigious talent for music, but his meteoric rise to fame is due in large part to his father, who tutored the young Wolfgang in music and composition and travelled Europe showing off his son's talents. One piece that directly links the two composers is Leopold Mozart's *Missa in A*, which Wolfgang used as a model for his very

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[17] Cliff Eisen, "Mozart, (Johann Georg) Leopold," Grove Music Online, January 20, 2001, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.siu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.6002278234.

[18] Eisen, "Mozart, Leopold," Grove Music Online.

[19] Eisen, "Mozart, Leopold," Grove Music Online.

[20] Eisen, "Mozart, Leopold," Grove Music Online.

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first mass, *Missa Brevis in G major*, K. 49.[21] The only modern engraving of Leopold Mozart's *Missa in A* is published by Carus-Verlag, and contains a detailed foreword by Armin Kircher, translated by John Coombs, that suggests the work was composed around 1765.[22] The Mozarts were deep into their European tour at this time, finishing up their stint in London, and making a detour to Holland to perform at The Hague, which has long been a seat of Dutch government and diplomacy. [23] This period of their tour was plagued by illness, with Leopold Mozart falling so ill in the summer of 1764 that he requested twenty-two masses to be said for him.[24] Additionally, Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart were detained in Lille for four weeks in August 1765 due to severe head colds.[25] Nannerl Mozart fell deathly ill of chest catarrh, an excess of thick phlegm in the airway, in The Hague in September, 1765.[26] Wolfgang Mozart was bedridden with illness in November, 1765.[27] While a meager amount of performing was done in these several months, Leopold Mozart was most certainly stuck at home caring for himself and his ailing children; therefore, it stands to reason that he may have had time to compose his *Missa in A*, perhaps to

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[21] Leopold Mozart, *Missa in A: Carlson IA$_3$*, ed. Armin Kircher (Stuttgart, Carus-Verlag, 2008), 6.

[22] Leopold Mozart, *Missa in A*, ed. Kircher, 6.

[23] Ruth Halliwell, *The Mozart Family: Four Lives in a Social Context* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 77-98.

[24] Halliwell, *Mozart Family*, 82.

[25] Halliwell, *Mozart Family*, 96.

[26] Halliwell, *Mozart Family*, 97.

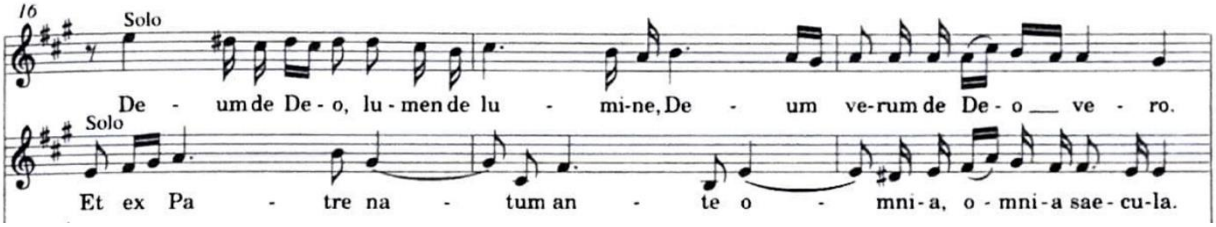
[27] Halliwell, *Mozart Family*, 97.

appease the court of Salzburg, of which his absence was becoming increasingly tense, or perhaps as a personal prayer for the speedy recovery of his family.

Musical Analysis

Leopold Mozart's *Missa in A* contains the essential texts of the Latin Mass Ordinary: *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*. Formally, Mozart's music is laid out in the same order, but is further split into fifteen musical numbers that reflect the mood of the text that is being sung. Though labeled plainly as a *missa*, or mass, Mozart's composition exhibits several characteristics that reinforce its identity as a *missa brevis*, or shorter mass. Though all the texts required in the Latin Mass Ordinary are included, Mozart shortens the longest text by avoiding text repetitions and by having soloists sing unique texts simultaneously in "Credo in unum Deum," seen in figure 9. Further, Mozart wrote 404 measures that generally last less than twenty minutes and employ a limited orchestration of two violins and continuo with optional trombones.

Figure 7. *Missa in A*, "Credo in unum Deum," mm. 16-18



The *Missa in A* also exhibits many Baroque characteristics that reveal its place in time. The first four measures of "Kyrie eleison" are a slow introduction typical of Baroque major works, of the kind you'd see in such landmark works as Bach's Mass in B Minor and Handel's *Messiah*. Mozart displays his counterpoint and fugal techniques in movements four and nine, "Cum Sancto Spiritu" and "Et vitam venturi saeculi." While Mozart's use of continuo and polyphony are more instantly recognizable characteristics of Baroque music, his treatment of rhythm is inherently Baroque as well. Mozart often has the musicians enter on weak beats that

drive to the following downbeat throughout the work. This infuses the music with vitality and forward motion, and is a common compositional tool of Baroque composers. The downbeat was a new phenomenon in Baroque music; its strength is paramount to Baroque style.

Melodically, the pitches in the work almost always move stepwise or as an arpeggiation of the underlying harmony. Angularity and large leaps are present when moving by perfect interval, octave, or as connection between statements of a sequence. One of the most agile movements for choir is the "Osanna in excelsis," where the imitative entrances contain several leaps, and highlight the jubilation of the text being sung, as in figure 10. Other instances of text painting in the melody occur, particularly in the "Crucifixus," where the melodic arc of the entire movement angles downward, and the following "Et resurrexit," which features faster rhythms and more ascending lines, like on the words *Et ascendit*, shown in figure 11.

Figure 8. *Missa in A*, "Osanna in excelsis," mm. 36/26-39/29

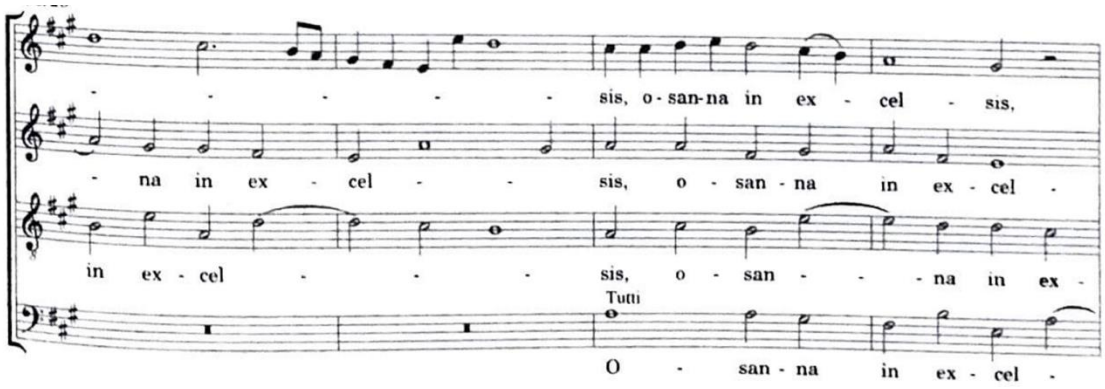
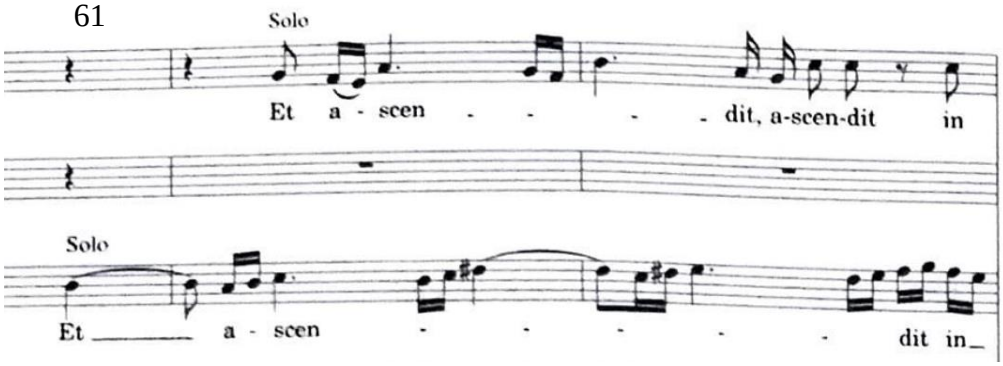


Figure 9. *Missa in A*, "Et resurrexit," mm. 61-63



Harmonically, this piece is profoundly stable, spending nearly three-quarters of the measures in the tonic and dominant keys. Every movement has the same key signature and is based in A major, except the “Benedictus,” which is in the parallel minor, and “Et incarnatus est,” which is in the relative minor. Most of the interesting harmonic and melodic material is found in sequences, a common Baroque compositional tactic of taking a small motive and repeating it at different pitches. The first melodic and harmonic sequence in the work is in the “Kyrie eleison,” seen in figure 12, which shows a different melodic sequence in each of the four voices, and a string of seventh chords in the orchestra that descend by step until resolving into m. 14. Mozart features seventh chords in this way several times, including the “Benedictus,” mm. 5-10, where the succession of seventh chords proceeds downward by perfect fifths. Another important harmonic sequence in the work occurs in “Credo in unum Deum.” First seen in figure 13, and later in mm. 14-18, and mm. 24-28, this descending motive in the orchestra returns as a unifying compositional element in the eighth movement, “Et resurrexit,” and is consistently used through mm. 60-66 and mm. 71-79.

Figure 10. *Missa in A,* ”Kyrie eleison,” mm. 11-13

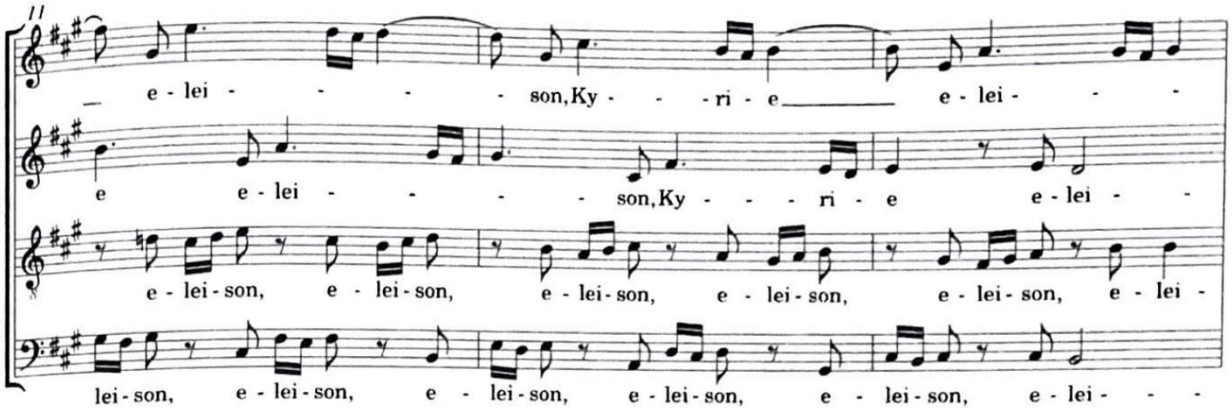
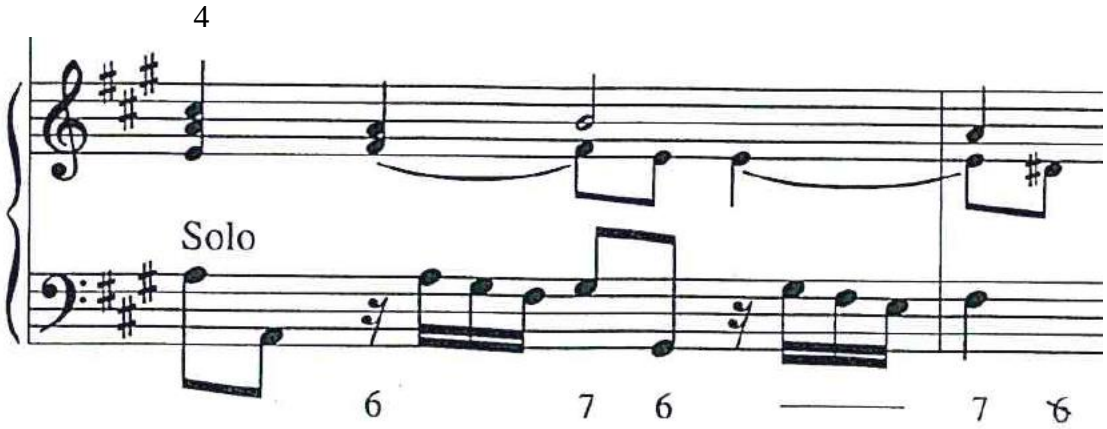


Figure 11. *Missa in A*, "Credo in unum Deum," mm. 4-5



Mozart also employs unexpected harmonies in a few key cadential phrases, namely in the "Gloria in excelsis," and "Dona nobis pacem." In the closing seven measures of "Gloria in excelsis," shown in figure 14, Mozart features both his proclivity for the leading-tone diminished seventh chord, and the first use of the A minor chord, which later becomes the tonal center of the "Benedictus." In the final movement, "Dona nobis pacem," Mozart subverts all expectations in his final cadential pattern, shown in figure 15, using D minor as the penultimate harmony. A predictable plagal cadence of D major to A major is made minor, which rouses numerous questions. Perhaps it reflects the Mozart family's desolate state of illness, or maybe infers Mozart's annoyance at having to write this mass during his sabbatical from the church. Nonetheless, it is a striking moment in the work that displays Mozart's creativity and compositional genius.

Figure 12. *Missa in A*, "Gloria in excelsis," mm. 42-45

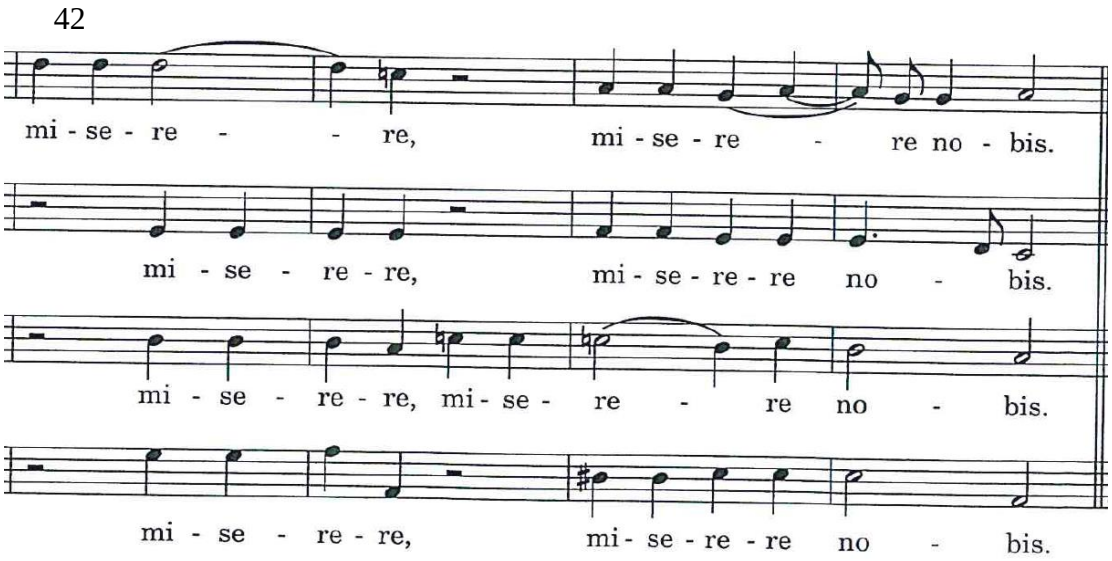
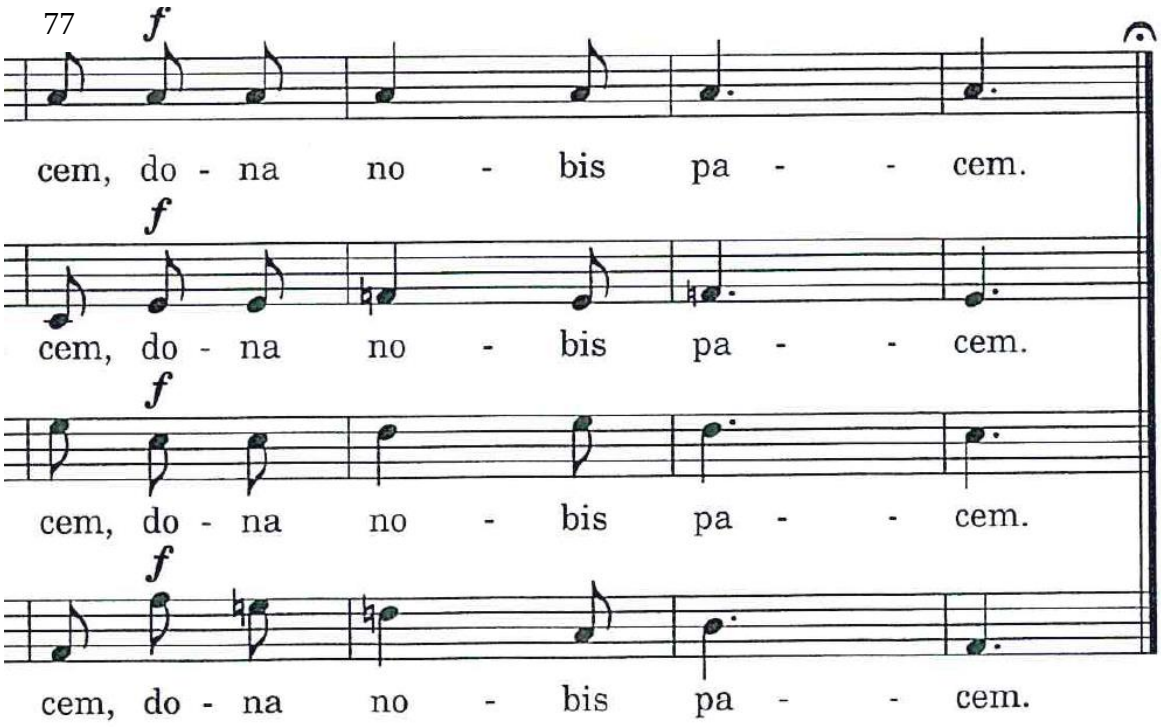


Figure 13. *Missa in A*, "Dona nobis pacem," mm. 77-80



Rehearsal Considerations

Tackling a major work is daunting task, especially when juggling different performing forces. Leopold Mozart's *Missa in A* includes choir, SATB soli, and a small orchestra. Before the first rehearsal, it is imperative that the director clearly lays out which sections of the ensemble are used in each part of the mass. To structure the most efficient rehearsal plan, directors should compile an aid, like table 1, to reference for rehearsal plans. Additional information like difficulty, texture, and number of measures should also influence the decision of which movements to rehearse, and for how long. Determinations of difficulty are subjective, and will likely differ depending on the demographic of the ensemble being conducted. Rehearsals with the choir will take the bulk of the time and should be planned first. The orchestra will need fewer rehearsals, but must still be considered and contacted for availability early in the process. After decisions about which sections to rehearse have been made, the director must use the most efficient tools to quickly teach the notes and rhythms.

Table 1. Movements of Leopold Mozart's *Missa in A*

Movement #	**Texture**	**Difficulty, out of 10**	**Choir**	**Soli**
1. Kyrie eleison	Slow intro, homophony/ polyphony	8	mm. 1-36	No
2. Gloria in excelsis	Mostly homophonic, slight polyphony	7	mm. 1-8, 26-45	SATB, mm. 9-26
3. Quoniam tu solus Sanctus	Solo, no doubling	4	No	S solo, mm. 46-69
4. Cum Sancto Spiritu	Fugue, no stretto	8	mm. 70-87	No
5. Credo in unum Deum	Choir homophonic, off beat entrances, Soli polyphonic, quick solo passages	Choir – 6 Solos - 7	mm. 1-30, alternates choir and solo, call and response	SATB soli, mostly S. mm. 1-30, alternates choir and solo, call and response

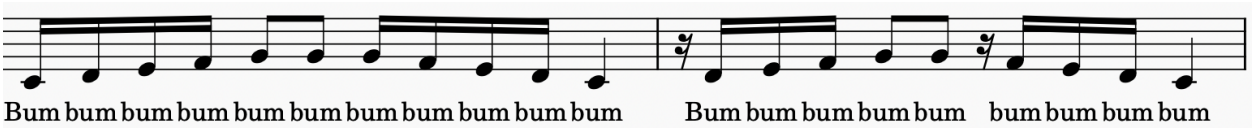
6. Et incarnatus est	Slow, mostly homophonic	5	mm. 31-51	No
7. Crucifixus	Slow, melody doubled in continuo	1	No	B Solo, mm. 52-58
8. Et resurrexit	Choir mostly homophonic, imitative polyphony Soli mostly polyphonic	Choir – 7 Soli – 6	mm. 59-61, 68-70, 80-93	SATB, mm. 61-68, 71-80
9. Et vitam venturi saeculi	Fugue, stretto, active counter-subject	8	mm. 94-115	No
10. Sanctus	Homophony and polyphony, supported by continuo	4	mm. 1-31	No
11. Osanna in excelsis	Imitative Polyphony	5	mm. 32-48	No
12. Benedictus	Slow, question and answer	3	No	SA soli, mm. 1-21
13. Osanna in excelsis	Same as #11	5	mm. 22-38	No
14. Agnus Dei	Slow, active polyphony in soli Choir imitates soli	4	mm. 16-18	SATB soli, mm. 1-15
15. Dona nobis pacem	Medium tempo, 16^{th} note passages, grace notes	6	mm. 50-80	SATB soli, mm. 19-49

The beauty of imitative music is in its name; the musical material is usually passed around the ensemble. Calling the ensemble's attention to these places of imitation is paramount to establishing their understanding of the music. This is most easily accomplished in the fugal movements, "Cum Sancto Spiritu," and "Et vitam venturi saeculi." After analyzing all subject and counter-subject entrances in these, have the entire ensemble sing the first statement of the subject in a comfortable octave, making clear where the subject material ends. Then have them identify and mark each of the subject entrances and endings in the movement. Finally, have the entire choir sing each consecutive subject entrance, jumping from part to part throughout the

work. Then, have the parts sing only their own theme subjects, omitting all the other notes. This strategy works well for the fourth movement, “Cum Sancto Spiritu,” because each subject ends on the pitch on which the next subject starts, there is no stretto, and the subjects are stated one after another. The strategy reinforces the singers’ understanding that the subject is the most important musical idea in the movement, and ensures that the subject will always be brought out.

There is a myriad of warmups to consider that supplement students’ understanding of Baroque performance practice. The easiest way to inject Baroque style into a standard five-note descending scalar warmup is by singing on “bum, bum, bum,” or “ping, ping, ping,” to encourage a lighter, bouncier, more buoyant sound. It is also a great idea to rehearse sections of the mass on these syllables. To expose singers to entrances on weak beats, use warmups that begin with or include eighth and sixteenth rests, as in figure 16. Singers should sing the warmup in the first measure for several reps before moving to the warmup in the second measure. To aid the singers, they may clap on the rests for a few repetitions before leaving the claps out.

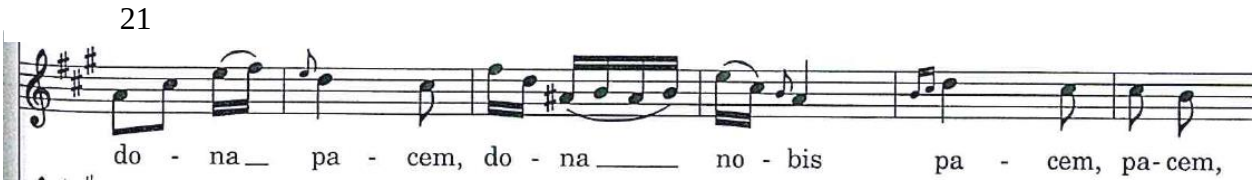
Figure 14. Warmup for offbeat entrances



One of the trickiest characteristics of this piece are its appoggiaturas, like the ones used abundantly in the final movement, “Dona nobis pacem,” shown in figure 17. Baroque style manuals dictate that appoggiaturas should be performed as the rhythm they are marked. For example, m. 22 of figure 17 should be performed as three eighth notes, and m. 25 should be performed as two sixteenth notes and two eighth notes. Singers will almost certainly struggle with these details at sight, and would benefit from their scores being marked before the rehearsals begin. The ambitious educator can cement this knowledge by drafting or locating

worksheets that include appoggiaturas, and by incorporating appoggiaturas into practice sight-singing examples.

Figure 15. *Missa in A*, "Dona nobis pacem," mm. 21-26



Recording Review

Procuring a fine recording of Leopold Mozart's *Missa in A* is difficult. Only one recording currently exists on YouTube and contains only part of the mass. The choir, Capella Theresiana, under the direction of Merczel György in Budapest, Hungary, joins forces with the orchestra Budavári Kamarazenekar for this live performance at the Saint Theresa of Avila Church in Budapest.[28] The ensemble omits movements five through nine, which is understandable considering the time constraints of an in-person mass. It should also be noted that the date of this live Mass service performance, October 18, 2020, is at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which inevitably presented a myriad of rehearsal and performance challenges, including volunteer singers, a lack of rehearsal time, distractions during service, the use of masks, and the distancing required by local governing bodies.

Immediately, the listener will notice the relaxed tempos of the ensemble and resulting lack of vitality that is crucial to the life of Baroque music. The ensemble sings accurately throughout, though often lacks buoyancy and energy. There are moments of tuning and timing

[28] György Merczel, "Leopold Mozart Missa in A," YouTube, Oct 18, 2020, https://youtu.be/9c8gXT_nrLI?si=tm3pqfff9uOVglVg.

issues in soli passages that affect the accuracy of the full choir, as in mm. 24-25 of the “Gloria in excelsis” and in mm. 41-51 of the “Dona Nobis Pacem.” As this recording is one of the few that exists, it is inherently valuable for getting to know the work.

CHAPTER 3

ROBERT SCHUMANN: "ES IST VERRATHEN"

Biography

Robert Schumann is one of the most recognizable Romantic composers to modern audiences. His marriage to composer and pianist, Clara Schumann, and their joint tutelage of and affectionate relationship with Johannes Brahms remains a fascinating development of the Romantic era of music. Robert Schumann's contributions to the German musical canon were prolific, and he was responsible for developing and editing the renowned music journal, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.

Schumann was born into a literary household, which explains much of his fascination with writing and poetry, as his father, August Schumann, was a romance author and translator of Walter Scott and Lord Byron.[29] Robert Schumann's musical tendencies were identified early, as his singing around the house was rewarded with piano lessons beginning at age seven.[30] The adolescent Schumann also studied flute and cello, and explored his passion for the literary arts by writing a collection of his own poetry, sketches of composer biographies, and dramas. He also gathered a community of like-minded students who studied literature, called the *Litterarischer Verein*, or Literary Association.[31] When Schumann was around twenty he was taken in by a piano teacher, Friedrich Wieck, who promised to make the young Schumann into a virtuoso

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[29] John Daverio and Eric Sams, "Schumann, Robert," Grove Music Online, Jan 20, 2001, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.siu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40704.

[30] Daverio and Sams, "Schumann," Grove Music Online.

[31] Daverio and Sams, "Schumann," Grove Music Online.

pianist as he had done with his even younger daughter, Clara.[32] Schumann would ruin his career as a pianist by creating a contraption meant to aid his practice, but instead crippled his fourth finger.[33] Schumann would further disappoint his piano instructor by falling in love with, and later marrying, Wieck's daughter against his wishes.

One of the most remarkable trends of Schumann's life was his descent into madness, institutionalization, and eventual death, which began in the summer of 1833 while he was dealing with his own malaria and the deaths of his brother and sister-in-law.[34] His volatile emotions and hallucinations found their way into his compositional works and writings, and his two opposing personalities are personified as Florestan, Schumann's fun-loving persona, and Eusebius, his more introspective side. Schumann developed a literary society called *Davidsbund*, in which he wrote music critiques under these two pen names along with his friends.[35] Schumann would also include his loved ones and his two personalities in one of his most well-known keyboard compositions, *Carnaval*, which is laden with references to Clara, her father, Paganini, and other symbols important to Schumann.[36]

While Schumann's early career was spent in Leipzig, much of Schumann's late creative and professional life played out in Dresden, where the Schumanns relocated in 1844.[37] An

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[32] Harold C. Schonberg, *The Lives of The Great Composers*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 172-173.

[33] Schonberg, *Lives of Great Composers,* 173.

[34] Daverio and Sams, "Schumann," Grove Music Online.

[35] Daverio and Sams, "Schumann," Grove Music Online.

[36] Schonberg, *Lives of Great Composers*, 179.

[37] Daverio and Sams, „Schumann," Grove Music Online.

important development during their residence in Dresden was the 1848 establishment of a *Chorverein*, or a choral society, which Robert Schumann would go on to compose many songs for, including the *Spanisches Liederspiel*, Op.74, in 1849. This collection of pieces came at a time of relative mental stability for Schumann, perhaps one of the last before his hallucinations would drive him mad.

The *Spanisches Liederspiel* are compositions based on a collection of Spanish poems and texts translated into German by Emanuel Geibel and Paul Heyse.[38] They are originally scored for an SATB quartet of voices with piano, and each of its nine musical numbers features a different collection of performers. Number five, "Es ist verrathen," was written for the full quartet and piano, and offers a small snapshot of Schumann's musical style in the latest years of his compositions. It demonstrates Schumann's refined sense of form, his inclination to choose unconventional harmonies, and features complex piano interludes and postludes.

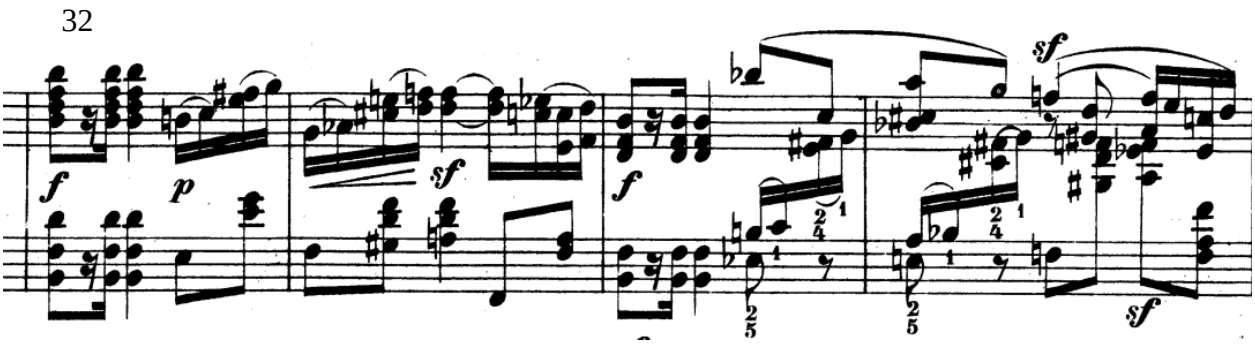
Musical Analysis:

Schumann's song, "Es ist verrathen" from his *Spanisches Liederspiel*, is Classical in form with Romantic harmony and style. The song is laid out in two essentially identical strophes that differ by a small portion of text found in mm. 13-24 and mm. 48-59. The song's phrase structure is laid out almost exclusively in four-bar phrases, with the only exception being a three-bar phrase in mm. 6-8 and mm. 41-43. The three-bar phrase at the beginning serves to balance the single-measure introduction, and the second strophe is merely a repetition. Schumann's rigid adherence to four-bar phrases is Classically inspired, though Schumann does Romanticize this by avoiding period structure. Each strophe is broken into two major parts, with the first containing

[38] Auditorium du Louvre, "Daß du stehst in Liebesglut," LiederNet, https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=96637.

three phrases that end in an authentic cadence setting up a modulation to the dominant, and the second containing five phrases that end on a perfect authentic cadence in the tonic key. The most identifiably Schumann characteristic of the form is the presence of the piano interlude, mm. 32-36, shown in figure 18, and postlude, mm. 67-71, which are trademark compositional devices in his piano/vocal works.

Figure 16. “Es ist verrathen,” mm. 32-35



Harmonically, the song is rooted in B-flat major and, while the key signature remains consistent, tonicizes a variety of harmonies outside the realm of B-flat major. Schumann’s harmonic movement throughout the piece relies on closely related chords and keys with third relationships, which allow Schumann the facility to travel to distantly related keys without much dissonance, including F major, F minor, D major, and G minor. Chromaticism abounds in this song, and increases in intensity as Schumann proceeds through the strophe. Secondary dominants are a fundamental part of the harmonic language, as they are employed early and often in mm. 3-4 and in figure 19, mm. 8-9. Schumann’s language gets more complex in mm. 9-10, in the form of chromatic passing tones that lead back to the dominant key of F major. This use of passing chromaticism enables Schumann to slip into all sorts of foreign harmonic realms like in figure 20, which travels through such keys as D major and G minor with an ascending chromatic bass line that arrives back in the tonic key. Schumann particularly employs leading tones to travel

between harmonic areas, and his use of leading-tone diminished sevenths is on display in mm. 19-20.

Figure 19. “Es ist verrathen,” mm. 7-10

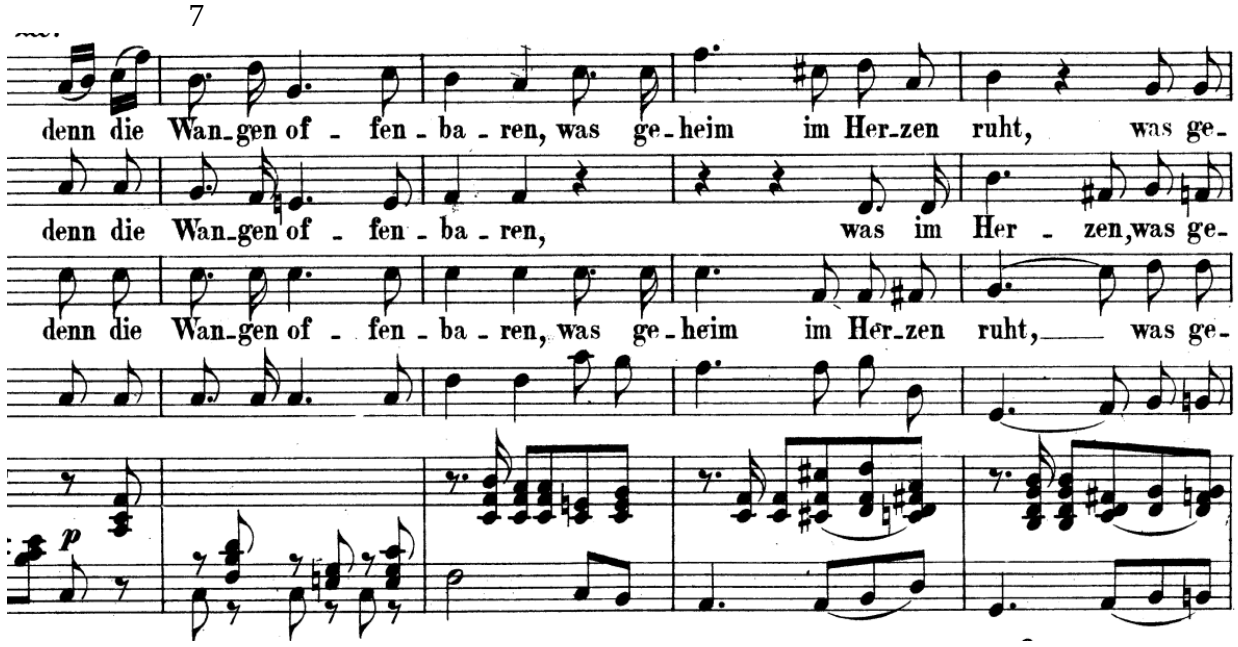
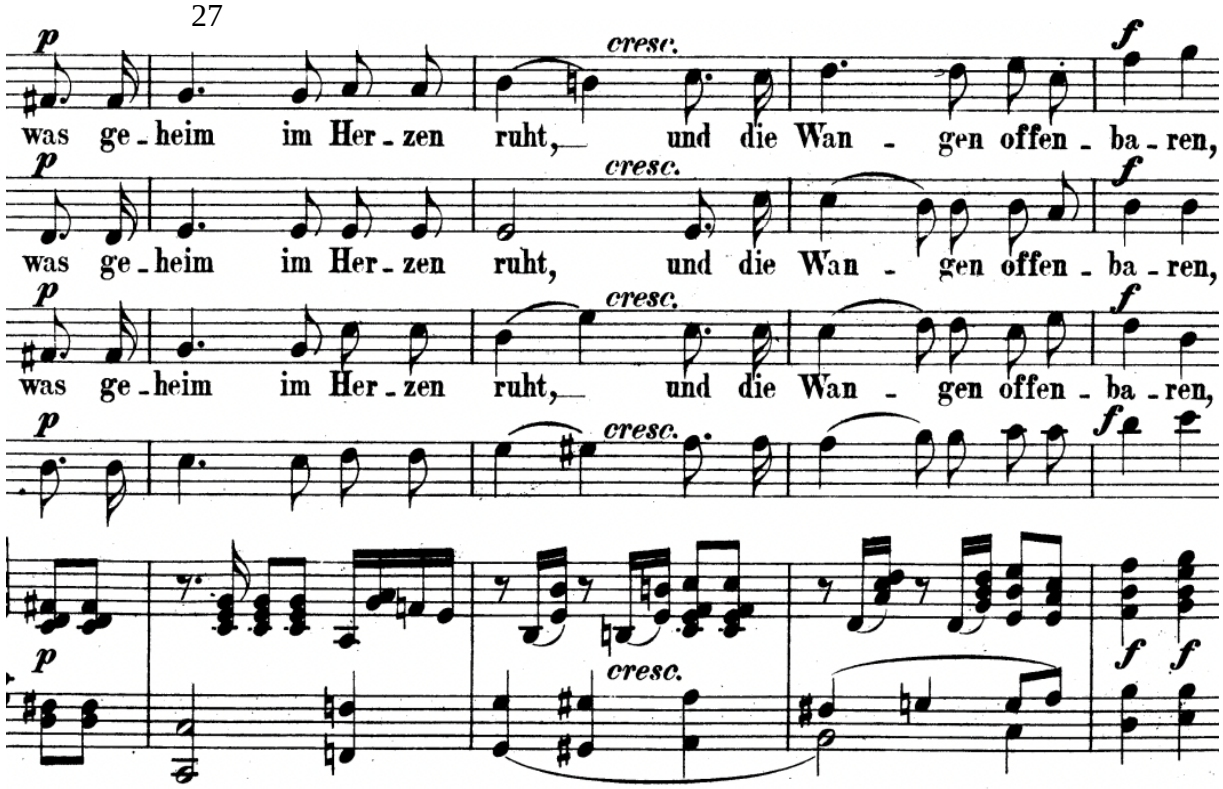


Figure 20. “Es ist verrathen,” mm. 26-30



Schumann's chromaticism and use of the leading tone can be analyzed most plainly in the piano interlude, show in figure 18, which succinctly lays out his compositional approach to the piece. A Roman numeral analysis cannot fully explain what's happening in these measures; the voices need to be isolated to understand Schumann's intent. Beginning in the third beat of m. 32, the top voice is a series of leading tones that resolve upward by half step. The series of strong leading tones eventually reaches the F dominant seventh, which pushes the harmony back to the tonic. Similarly, the bass voice of these measures features an ascending line of irregular intervals that finds its way to the dominant. Mm. 34-36 also feature an independent top and bottom voice that move in contrary motion, while the middle voices proceed much like the first measures of the interlude.

Schumann composes for the piano as if it were an entire orchestra, and this proclivity is a defining characteristic of his work. The wealth of chromaticism in this piece results from the layering of multiple musical motives and voices that are superimposed and independently conceived. In fact, it is Schumann's switching between vertical harmony, as in mm. 1-12, and horizontal composition, as in the piano interlude, that establishes his compositions as something post-classical and unique.

Rehearsal Considerations:

Schumann's vocal works are incredibly fulfilling and fun to sing, but inevitably pose challenges to both the ensemble and the conductor. Diction, style, and chromatic passages make this piece seem daunting, but it is certainly accessible for student ensembles and community groups when broken down in the right way.

A fundamental understanding of German vocal diction is required of the conductor, and so is an ability to convey that knowledge of German morphemes to the ensemble. Thankfully,

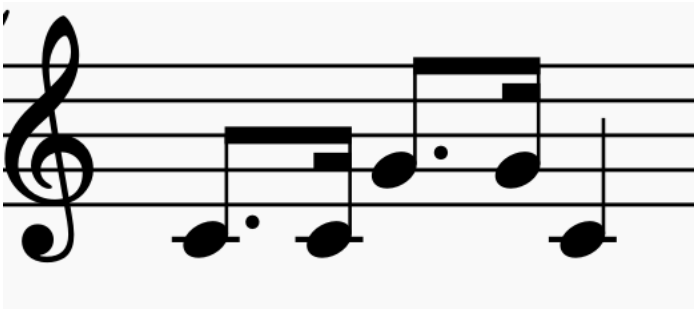
German diction is not terribly different from Italian or Latin, but it does contain a few unexpected rules that are streamlined here. These diction rules are explained using the International Phonetic Alphabet. Three consonants in German make sounds one may not assume: the letter ‘w’ is pronounced [v], the letter ‘v’ is pronounced [f], and the letter ‘z’ is pronounced [ts]. The letter ‘j’ always makes a ‘y’ or [j] sound, much like the psychologist Carl Jung. Adherence to these exceptions alone will have an ensemble sounding decisively more German.

The more nuanced and challenging aspect of German diction lies in the vowels. There are four mixed vowels in German that are not present in modern English. Thankfully, only two are used in the text of “Es ist verrathen.” There is also the presence of the umlaut symbol, [¨], which always changes the pronunciation of the vowel underneath. The easiest of these to deal with is ‘ä’, which simply sounds as [ɛ]. The vowel of ‘ü’ sounds as a mixed vowel, [y] which will require explanation to an ensemble. The mixed vowel [y] is produced by shaping the lips as if singing an [u] and positioning the tongue as if singing [i]. To help singers produce this sound accurately, have them sing [u] alone, then produce [y] by moving only their tongue forward.

The other mixed vowel featured in “Es ist verrathen” is [ʏ], which is a slightly taller version of [y]. This sound can be achieved by rounding the lips to make the sound [ʊ] and positioning the tongue to sing [ɪ]. The only instance of this vowel is in the vowel ‘eu’ which produces the diphthong [ɔʏ]. This is a commonly used sound in German, and shows up several times in this piece. An easy way to explain this sound is to have the ensemble say ‘ahoy!’ The final sound of ‘ahoy’ approximates [ɔʏ].

Dotted rhythms are prevalent in this short work, so executing them accurately is paramount to a successful performance. Most often, the dotted note should be accented or marcato, with a small decrescendo, or even a small lift, before the following note. This simple gesture infuses vitality and buoyancy into the piece, and encourages a vibrant tone from the ensemble. Beyond repeating this gesture within the music, it is wise to incorporate this rhythmic figure into the warmup session. A simple warmup including the dotted-eighth, sixteenth rhythm is shown in figure 21, and can be sung on any neutral syllable. Take this warmup to the next level by accenting the dotted note, singing the sixteenth piano, and growing in dynamic towards the top note, repeating the process going back down.

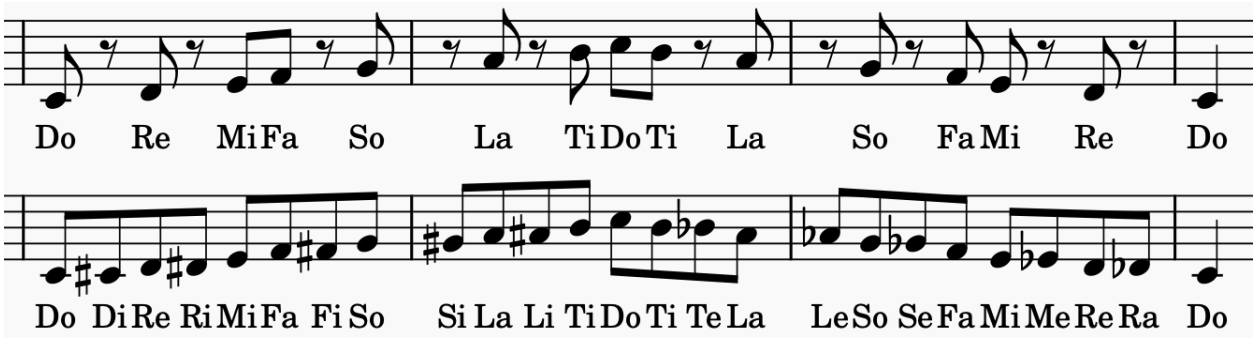
Figure 17. Warmup for dotted-eighth, sixteenth



Singing a chromatically dense work like “Es ist verrathen,” is both challenging and rewarding. This piece is an excellent tool to introduce or reinforce chromatic solfege, as the piece is mostly diatonic but includes brief sections with non-harmonic tones. It may be unwise to expect singers to solfege passages in this piece at sight, so time must be allotted to presenting and modeling the symbols, and for singers to practice writing them in themselves. A warmup that aids in teaching chromatic solfege is a simple ascending and descending scale. Scales are often boring to teach and practice, so a more energized and methodical way to introduce the scale involves singing a normal solfege scale with an altered rhythm, as in figure 22. After learning this, the ensemble can slowly sing the chromatic solfege scale ascending and descending

together before splitting into parts, one group anchoring with the plain solfege scale, while the other practices singing the half-step chromatic scale.

Figure 18. Warmup for chromatic solfege



Review of Recordings:

As Schumann's "Es ist verrathen" is originally scored for a quartet of singers, most recordings feature this voicing. Finding a quality recording of a choir performing this piece is a bit more complicated, though there are good examples that exist. The selected recordings represent both performing forces and range from professional to high school. They include the Ensemble Maja of France, Hebron High School A Capella Choir of Texas, and the Michigan State University Chorale.

The Ensemble Maja is one of the first recordings promoted by YouTube, and for good reason.[39] The professional ensemble is made up of singers and instrumentalists that specialize in twentieth century chamber music for voice and instruments. They currently hold a residency in a *Fondation Singer Polignac à Paris* and have approximately fifteen members, though only five

[39] France Musique concerts, "Robert Schumann : Spanisches Liederspiel – Es ist verraten (Ensemble Maja)," YouTube, Dec 27, 2018. https://youtu.be/si3dLkO7tqs?si=NhdgW1BTpCDj-yhK.

are featured in their recording of "Es ist verrathen."[40] The first and most obvious observation about their recording is the briskness of tempo. Undoubtedly, with so few singers, phrases must be lively, or they may risk running out of breath. Even at their quick tempo, the quartet is not lacking in buoyancy and nuance. They have the luxury of allowing their own vocal color to penetrate, and no voices are at risk of being overshadowed, even by the beautifully vibrant soprano sound. They exercise rubato tastefully and subtly, and are incredibly precise with their diction and phrasing. They make decisions to clip certain accented syllables, like in the downbeat of m. 21 and in beat three of m. 26, and the affect is quite impressive because they are all aligned. Of the quartet recordings, this is one of the best and is valuable even to choirs who wish to perform this piece, as it is a good historical model for accurate performance practice.

The Hebron High School A Capella Choir is an advanced mixed ensemble, and was featured at the Texas Music Educators Association in 2015, where they were professionally recorded performing "Es ist verrathen."[41] Their conductors, Rachel Forester and Nathan Ratliff, aptly lead this young ensemble to an excellent performance of this piece. From the onset, the tone and buoyancy of this ensemble is impressive, and they maintain that vitality throughout their performance. Their relaxed tempo is understandable and appropriate for a younger ensemble, and their German is impeccable. Beyond intonation, blend, and precision, of which the ensemble achieves handily, their performance avoids rubato and softer dynamics. The second

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[40] Ensemble Maja, "Welcome," Accessed Jan 2, 2024, http://www.ensemblemaja.com /intro/.

[41] Hebron High School A Cappella Choir – Topic, "Spanisches Liederspiel, Op. 74: No. 5, Es ist verraten (Arr. For Choir) (Live)," YouTube, Sep 12, 2015, https://youtu.be /GWZZG_nQB_E?si=dUChuhWioY_xdaCv.

stanza on m. 37 begins soft, but the rest of the recording remains at a medium dynamic. More extreme dynamics and rubato would be two ways this ensemble could infuse more Romantic style into their rendition. This is a wonderful recording of a high school ensemble, and can be used by any young ensemble as a model.

Michigan State University has a legacy of choral excellence, and their recording of "Es ist verrathen," conducted by David Rayl, is further proof. [42] The University Chorale of about 40 singers is MSU's top auditioned ensemble. Their tone has the vibrancy and depth of tone that is only accessible to trained adult voices, and with that fullness of tone comes an inherent balance problem. The bright sopranos and tenors often dominate the recording, while the altos and basses struggle to be heard at times. This may be the result of the recording equipment, the performing venue, or an oversight by the singers who sing too much like a soloist. Repeated listening confirms the latter, where individual voices often distinguish themselves, particularly in the tenor section. This ensemble takes a more relaxed tempo, likely due to the size of the ensemble and in pursuit of precision. It is likely the correct decision considering their elevated execution, the musicality of their phrases, the subtlety of their word stress, and the uniformity of the vowels. This choral recording is one of the best for collegiate and adult ensembles that seek to perform this piece.

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[42] Michigan State University College of Music, "MSU University Chorale Spanisches Liederspiel, Op. 74 V. Es ist verrathen by Schumann 4.1.2017," YouTube, Oct 9, 2017, https://youtu.be/VWDIe1aRqiY?si=SHmVr7rSKIqR1h1b.

CHAPTER 4

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS: *CALME DES NUITS*

Biography

French composer Camille Saint-Saëns wrote some of the most commercially recognizable pieces of the late nineteenth century, and was a figurehead of French music, culture, and fine arts. Pieces like *Danse Macabre* and *Le Carnaval des animaux* are still performed and adored to this day and maintain appeal to audiences far beyond the usual concertgoers. Saint-Saëns was not only a virtuosic performer and composer, but also a prolific writer and music critic. Saint-Saëns's childhood talent established a quick and enduring comparison to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, as his prodigious skill at the keyboard and for composing prompted his mother and great-aunt to seek out appropriate music education for his development.[43] Saint-Saëns's years as a student were spent studying organ with Alexandre Boëly and piano with Camille Stamaty, lesser-known French composers and keyboardists of the early nineteenth century, before attending the Paris Conservatoire in 1848. There he continued his studies in composition with Fromental Halévy, a French composer who taught for many years at the Conservatoire, and whose other students included Gounod and Bizet.[44]

Saint-Saëns' musical influences are firmly rooted in the great composers that came before him. He concertized many of Mozart's concerti, and extensively studied the contrapuntal

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[43] Timothy S. Flynn, *Camille Saint-Saëns: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge Music Bibliographies, 2003), 2.

[44] Hugh MacDonald, "Halévy, (Jacques-, Francois-) Fromental (-Elie) [Fromentin(-Elias)]," Grove Music Online, Jan 20, 2001. https://doi-org.proxy.lib.siu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.12213.

techniques of Bach. Further, he loved the works of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Schumann, and passed on the legacy of these great composers to the students he taught while at the École Niedermeyer. [45] While the majority of Saint-Saëns professional life was spent as a church organist and concertizer, his short tenure as piano professor at the École Niedermeyer, an institution dedicated to the study of sacred music in Paris, established Saint-Saëns's profound relationship with Gabriel Fauré. What began as a mentorship soon grew into a close friendship that would span the rest of Saint-Saëns's life.

Saint-Saëns's contributions to the musical canon were celebrated in 1881 with his election to the Parisian learned society, Académie des Beaux-Arts, which spurred a momentous period for Saint-Saëns. [46] Saint-Saëns continued to write significant works, like his opera *Henry VIII* (1882) and *Le Carnaval des animaux* (1886), and he notably began writing more openly about his wariness of the growing Wagnerian cult and its counter-culture in France.[47] The spectacle of Wagner's operas had taken the world by storm, and he had amassed a remarkable following in Europe that polarized the musical scene with radicals who either lauded or resented Wagner. In 1885, Saint-Saëns wrote in his book, *Harmonie et mélodie*, "I myself believed for a certain time that I was a Wagnerian. How wrong I was and how far this was from a true

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[45] Daniel M. Fallon and James Harding, "Saint-Saëns, (Charles) Camille," Grove Music Online, Jan 20, 2001, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.siu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.24335.

[46] Stephen Studd, *Saint-Saëns: a Critical Biography* (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 134.

[47] Studd, *Saint-Saëns*, 148.

reckoning!"[48] Further, he ends his essay with the assertion, "Wagneromania is ridiculous but excusable; Wagnerophobia is a disease."[49] A piece that succinctly demonstrates Saint-Saëns's reaction to the emotional excesses and scale of Wagnerian Romanticism is *Calme des nuits,* the first of two secular choral pieces that were published in 1882. The piece contains harmonic content that establishes its position in the Romantic period, but also contains a tasteful subtlety and structure that diametrically opposes the grandeur and scale of the German romantics, and favors the delicacy and nuance of French style.

Musical Analysis

Static, suspended in time, and nuanced like the ebb of tide, Saint-Saëns's *Calme des nuits* aesthetically adheres to primary tenants of French Romanticism. At first glance, and perhaps first listen, assumptions about the score's simplicity are easily made. A closer look at the substance of the music and poetry reveals a more complex composition.

The essence of this piece is the harmony, with melody only playing a minimal role. The piece is pervaded by a sense of breadth, and Saint-Saëns achieves this by using long, tied note values and by staying grounded in one harmony, often for several measures. Saint-Saëns also evokes the natural world by using only consonant major and minor chords. The first nineteen measures of music employ only five different chords, some of which are quite distant and non-diatonic. Saint-Saëns contributes to this musical breadth by elongating phrases, and staggering entrances of the voices at the beginning of phrases. This happens at the beginning of the piece, in figure 23, and repeats this in mm. 33-37 and mm. 49-53.

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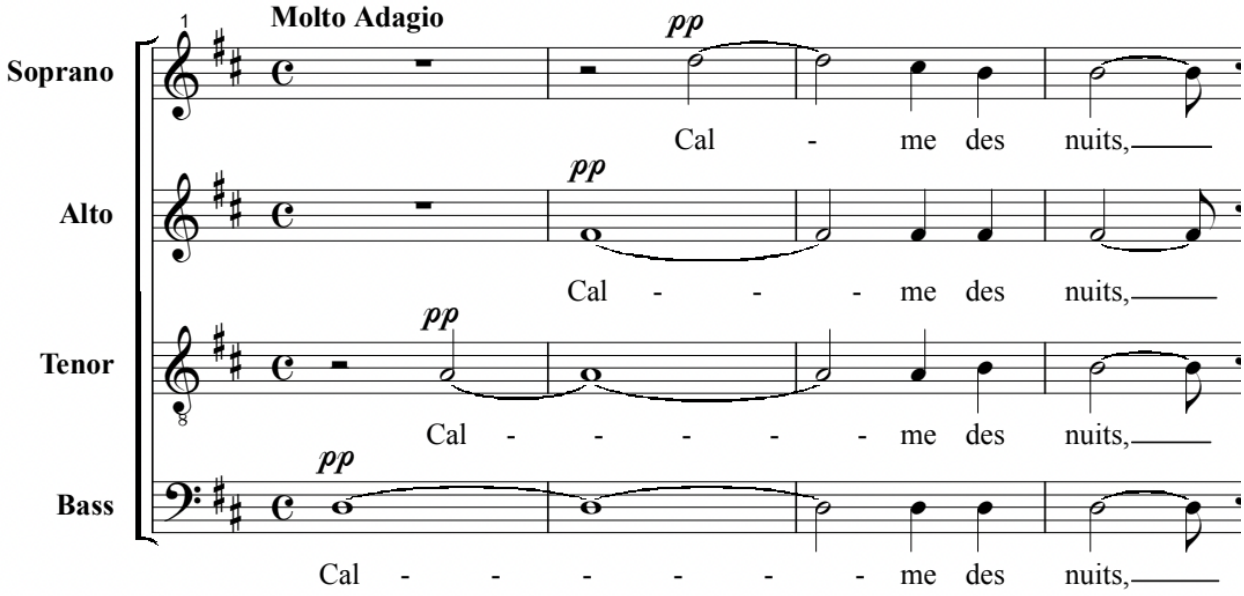
[48] Camille Saint-Saëns, "Camille Saint-Saëns: On Music and Musicians." Ed. and trans. Roger Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 102.

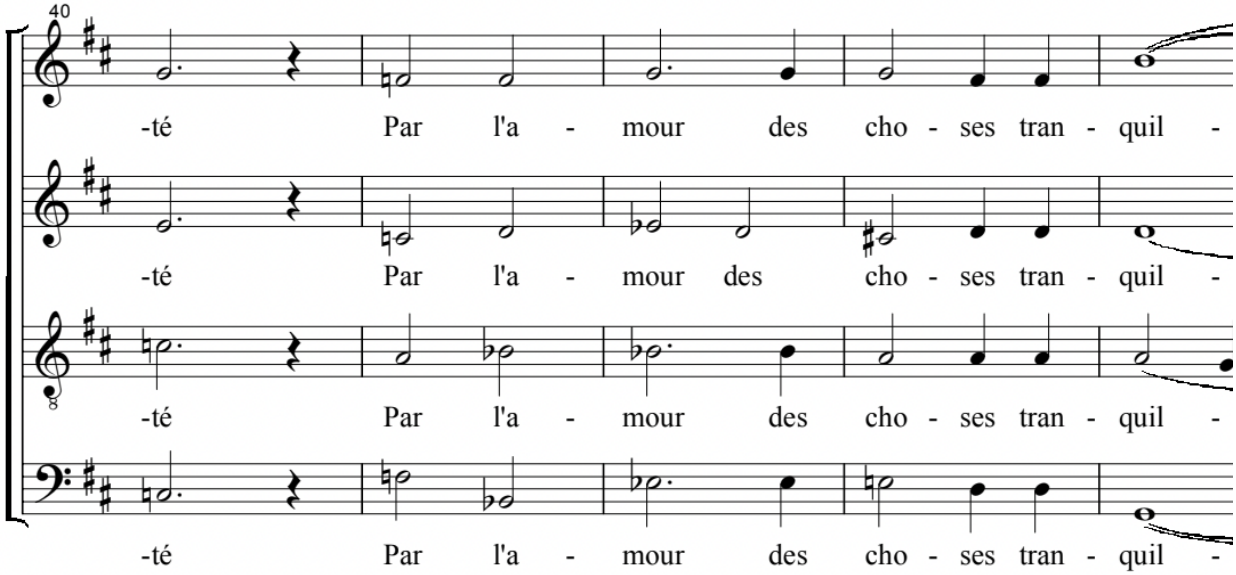
[49] Saint-Saëns, "On Music and Musicians," Ed. and trans. Nichols, 107.

Figure 19. *Calme des nuits*, mm. 1-4



While a Roman numeral analysis does not fully capture the harmonic complexity of the piece, it does reveal Saint-Saëns's attraction to flat harmonies, particularly the flat mediant (F major), flat supertonic (E-flat Major) and flat leading-tone (C major). All the distant chords used throughout the piece are plainly laid out in a dominant sequence in figure 24. The most fascinating movement is the diminished-fifth from E-flat major to A major, which brings the sequence back to the written key of D major. Saint-Saëns's succession of chords in these measures always maintains a common tone, and the other voices move by step or perfect interval, subtly slipping between chords. Saint-Saëns reinforces this shiftiness in his phrase lengths, in which no two consecutive phrases are the same length. The shortest phrase is two measures and the longest, making up the entire coda, is ten measures. This instability of phrase length and tonal center, coupled with the subtlety of the voice-leading, creates an ethereal effect of traveling between worlds.

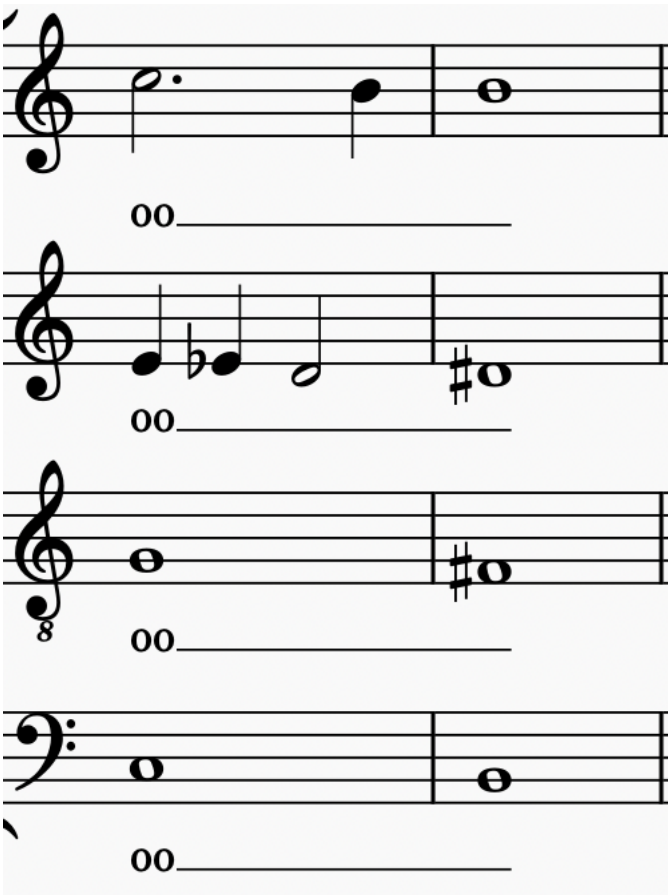
Figure 20. *Calme des nuits*, mm. 40-44



Rehearsal Considerations

Because *Calme des nuits* shifts to distant harmonies with tiny movements, great care must be taken with singers' ability to sing half-steps and whole-steps in tune. An SATB tuning exercise to add at the end of the warmup session involves the choir beginning on a major chord, and moving through a series of half-steps to arrive at a new major chord one half step lower, depicted in figure 25. This exercise is suitable for isolating the hazardous descending half-step, which is so often sung too low and brings choirs out of tune. Descending half-steps can also be isolated in a descending solfege scale warmup, by calling the choir's attention to the half-steps that occur between Fa-Mi, and Do-Ti, and having the singers point upwards when singing those pitches in succession to remind them to make the half-step small.

Figure 21. Warmup for tuning half-steps



There are incredibly long phrases in the score with no place to breathe, so the singers must stagger breathe in places. In a piece so exposed, it is wise to assign places to breathe that are specific to the singer, so that no two singers within a section will breathe at the same time. This can be easily accomplished by assigning each singer a number, one through four, which indicates which beat in the measure they may take a breath.

The long-held harmonies of this piece lend themselves well to subtle and dramatic changes in dynamic. This piece is excellent for training singers to make something out of every sustained note, and this point can be cemented with a warmup that forces the choir to control a long crescendo and decrescendo. Singing on a simple major chord, the choir steadily crescendos from pianissimo to fortissimo over eight beats, and decrescendos from fortissimo to pianissimo

over a second eight beats, performed in one breath. Singers may struggle to control their decrescendo, and could sing too softly, too early.

One of the deterring factors in performing this piece is the French diction. Mixed vowels and nasal vowels are not used in English, so these sounds may be foreign to your singers and will require practice. Thankfully, *Calme des nuits* only uses two of four mixed vowels, and three of four nasal vowels, which will be discussed using the International Phonetic Alphabet. The mixed vowel [y] is produced by shaping the lips as if singing an [u] and positioning the tongue as if singing [i]. To help singers produce this sound accurately, have them sing [u] alone, then produce [y] by moving only their tongue forward. This can be done with increasing speed for comic effect. The mixed vowel [œ] is difficult to grasp for novices in French diction; it is a combination of the lip shape of [ɔ] and the tongue and jaw position of [ɛ]. It is the most open of the mixed vowels, and can be most directly achieved by singing the vowel [ɛ], rounding the lips, and maintaining a lowered jaw position.

Nasal vowels give the French language its distinct sound, and singers will enjoy getting to produce these sounds. While learning nasal vowels, singers will likely make noises that are too brassy and lateral. They may need reminding that even these nasal vowels are meant to be beautiful sounds. Thankfully, all nasal vowels have a natural counterpart with no nasality, so it is easy to demonstrate the natural vowels before adding nasality: [ɑ], [ɛ], and [o]. [ɑ] is a darker version of the bright [a], so [ɑ] requires a taller soft palette that aids in producing nasality. French is also unique in its closed [o] sound being very small, almost as small as [u]. The nasal vowels are represented with a tilde: [ɑ̃], [ɛ̃], and [õ]. Communicating this language to singers will help them mark their own music, and ensure they remember which sound is used in each instance. Each of these sounds should be modeled on the natural vowel first, and then with added

nasality. Singers may need help accessing their nasal cavity; they can be instructed to raise their eyebrows, touch their nose, or point a finger straight forward from their eye line.

Review of Recordings

The most outstanding recording of *Calme des nuits* most certainly belongs to the Monteverdi Choir under the direction of Sir John Eliot Gardiner.[50] The professional ensemble of twenty-five to thirty-five singers is one of the largest ensembles in the queue of YouTube recordings. The Monteverdi Choir achieves an immense amount of nuance and dynamic variation throughout the piece, honoring Saint-Saëns's dynamic markings and illuminating the poetry with their expressive choices. Though the phrases are long, they are infused with forward motion and direction. As the Monteverdi Choir has garnered a reputation for consistency in historically informed performance practice, their recording is an excellent example to play for an ensemble to demonstrate appropriate style considerations.

The National Youth Choir of Australia is an auditioned ensemble of twenty-five singers aged eighteen to twenty-six. Their recording of *Calme des nuits* proves that the piece is approachable for younger singers, and may serve as a more appropriate tone ideal for younger ensembles. Their tuning and blend are exquisite, though much of the beauty in the recording is lost because of the lack of forward motion. Noel Ancell, the conductor of this ensemble, establishes a glacial tempo, which obscures any nuance that the choir hopes to achieve. The slow tempo also betrays any note insecurities, particularly those of the tenors in mm. 33 and 39, and

[50] Monteverdi Choir – Topic, "Saint-Saëns: Calme des nuits, Op. 68, No.1," YouTube, Jan 9, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc8bH8MCOhw&ab_channel =MonteverdiChoir-Topic.

the basses in m. 52. Further, the accompanying video reveals the lack of emotional investment from the singers, which colors their recording with an unfortunate beige.

For smaller chamber ensembles, the recording of *Calme des nuits* by Seraphim Consort of England is worth considering.[51] Because of the piece's long phrases, the group of four professionals assumes a brisk tempo to make the phrases comfortable. They display a generosity of rubato that is more easily executed by an ensemble of their size, and they tailor their speed to the length of the phrase. Performing this piece with one singer per part presents other challenges, which creep into this performance. The subtle vibrato of the soprano from the very beginning threatens to dominate the sound, at times covering up the other parts and failing to blend with the straight tone of the other singers. The conspicuous pitch errors by the alto in mm. 21 and 50 are unmistakable with no others supporting her. Their recording is delightfully musical and nuanced, and is a great model for other chamber ensembles wishing to perform this piece.

[51] SeraphimConsort, "Calme des nuits – C. Saint-Saëns," YouTube, Jul 9, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSLaUlriAeE&ab_channel=SeraphimConsort.

CHAPTER 5

RANDALL THOMPSON: *THE BEST OF ROOMS*

Biography

Randall Thompson is a legend of American choral composition and music education in the twentieth century. Works like *Alleluia*, *Frostiana,* and *The Last Words of David* remain staples of the choral repertory that are performed by high schools, colleges, and community ensembles alike. Beyond his additions to the choral repertoire, he also had a significant influence on the adoption of liberal arts music education in colleges across the country. Thompson served as an educator and administrator at several recognizable institutions including a professorship at the University of California at Berkeley, director of music at the Curtis Institute of Music (where he would teach orchestration to Leonard Bernstein), a stint at Princeton University, and the Walter Bigelow Rosen professor of composition at his alma mater, Harvard University.[52] His success as an academic and musicologist was directly related to his book, *College Music*, which he compiled for the Association of American Colleges.[53] The writings in his book clearly lay out a liberal arts approach to an academic music education, and reveal a distancing from conservatory-style lessons and performances.[54] Thompson carried these ideals to the universities he worked in, and several other institutions still use his model as a blueprint for their own liberal arts education.

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[52] Frederic Woodbridge Wilson, "Thompson, (Ira) Randall," rev. David Francis Urrows, *Grove Music Online*, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.siu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2258527.

[53] Caroline Cepin Benser and David Francis Urrows, *Randall Thompson: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 3.

[54] Wilson, "Thompson, Randall," G*rove Music Online*.

Thompson was surrounded by academia from his earliest years. He was born in New York City in 1899 as the son of an English teacher at the nearby Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, where Thompson's parents lived in a residential dormitory on the school's campus.[55] Thompson's musical instruction began with family friends and other teachers at the school, and he possessed an immediate talent for playing keyboard instruments, which earned him the honor of becoming the school organist at age sixteen.[56] His collegiate music training began at Harvard University, where he studied with Walter Spalding and Edward Burlingame Hill, while privately studying with Ernest Bloch in New York City.[57] Thompson would also be awarded a prestigious Prix de Rome scholarship that would allow him to study with Felix Lamond at the American Academy in 1922.[58]

Thompson's choral music is beloved for its rich sonorities, thoughtful part-writing, and inherent storytelling; all characteristics that would oppose the status quo of serialism that was taking over the academic composition studio. As such, Thompson's music was embraced more by the community organization, the student choir, and the church choir.[59] The love of these groups secured Thompson's compositions as standards in the American choral canon.

One such choral composition that is representative of Thompson's style is *The Best of Rooms*, a sacred piece with poetry by the Englishman, Robert Herrick. The piece was written in

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[55] Benser and Urrows, *Randall Thompson*, 4.

[56] Benser and Urrows, *Randall Thompson*, 5.

[57] Wilson, "Thompson, Randall," G*rove Music Online*.

[58] Wilson, "Thompson, Randall," G*rove Music Online*.

[59] Benser and Urrows, *Randall Thompson*, 3.

1963, two years before he would retire from his position at Harvard University.[60] *The Best of Rooms* is also one of Thompson's selected works in the National Endowment for the Arts's and Chorus America's publication, *American Masterpieces: Choral Music*.[61] This work is representative of Thompson's sensitive text expression, voice-leading, and consonant uses of distant harmonies.

Musical Analysis:

Randall Thompson's *The Best of Rooms* is a case study in Thompson's compositional style, and reveals Thompson's mastery of counterpoint and the voice. Each of the four voices serves a specific role in the unraveling of the piece. The soprano and bass voices are mostly foundational and static up until their activity in mm. 29-40. These two outer voices move deliberately by step, often one measure at a time, carving out a visual shape of the piece with their ascension and descension. For example, from mm. 1-7, the soprano has only one pitch per measure, each one step higher than the last. In mm. 20-28, the bass voice lays out a chromatic descent at a similarly slow pace and moving by step, except for a leap from mm. 25-26.

The alto and tenor voices have the most active parts, filling out the internal harmonies and guiding the choir to sometimes distant tonal areas. They function to infuse forward motion in the piece and contain numerous non-chord tones that make a Roman numeral analysis difficult. The evolution of the inner voices parallels the dynamic contour of the piece, as the intervallic leaps in the inner voices get larger as the piece builds to its climax in m. 33. The alto and tenor voices in mm. 1-6, partially represented in figure 26, contain mostly leaps of a third from beat

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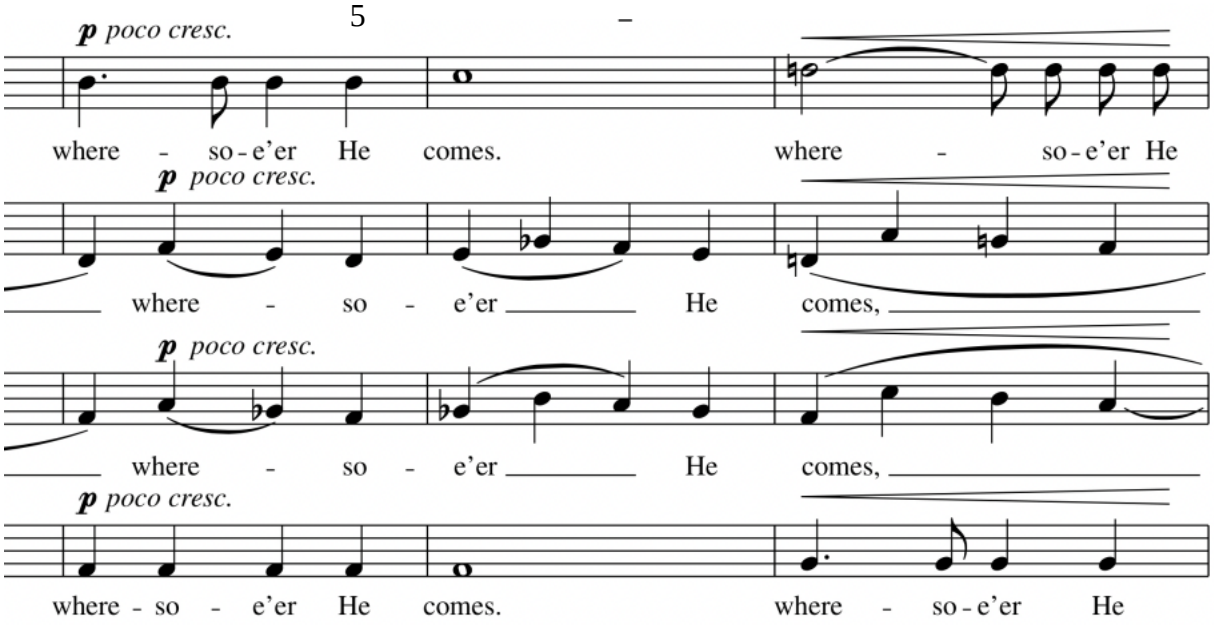
[60] Benser and Urrows, *Randall Thompson*, 206.

[61] Bill Parker, *American Masterpieces: Choral Music*, National Endowment for the Arts and Chorus America, https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GOVPUB-NF2-PURL-LPS76484.

one into beat two. Once the piece begins to crescendo in m. 7, the leaps become fifths, and then both return to the level in which they started. In mm. 20-24, both the alto and tenor begin leaping in fifths, tracking the long crescendo that leads until m. 33.

Figure 22. *The Best of Rooms*, mm. 5-7



The piece's long, dovetailed phrases proceed with few cadential points and rests, making an explicit form difficult to identify. The work is laid out in two major sections, but is through-composed. There are only four rests in the work. Three of the rests serve as textual beats or dramatic devices and are found in mm. 1-2 and m. 47. The fourth rest in m. 15, shown in figure 27, serves the structural role of separating the piece into two sections. Thompson sets up a cadence in m. 14 with pedal A-flats that promise a tonic resolution, but the tenor and alto voices proceed to negate those expectations and instead transform the cadence into an inverted subdominant chord. It is in m. 16, seen in figure 28, where the piece resets and unfolds in much the same way as the beginning. Where the first section lasts fifteen measures, the second is longer, thicker in texture, larger in range and dynamic, and more harmonically adventurous.

Figure 24. *The Best of Rooms*, mm. 14-15

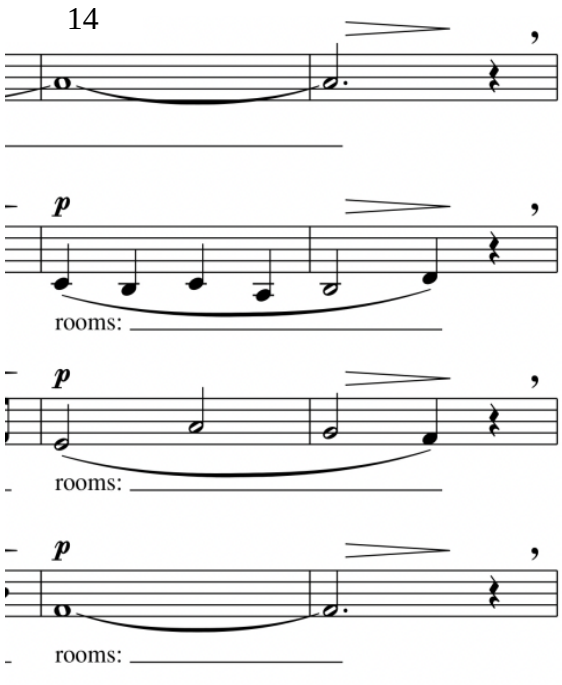
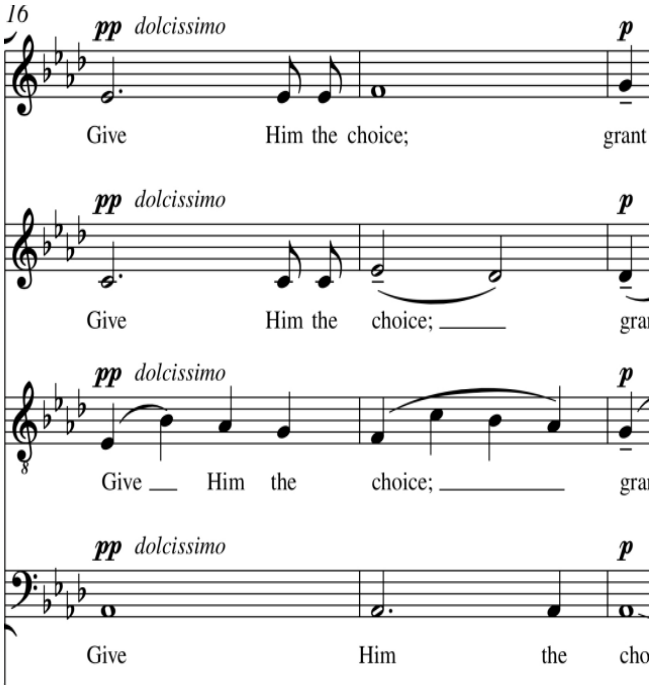
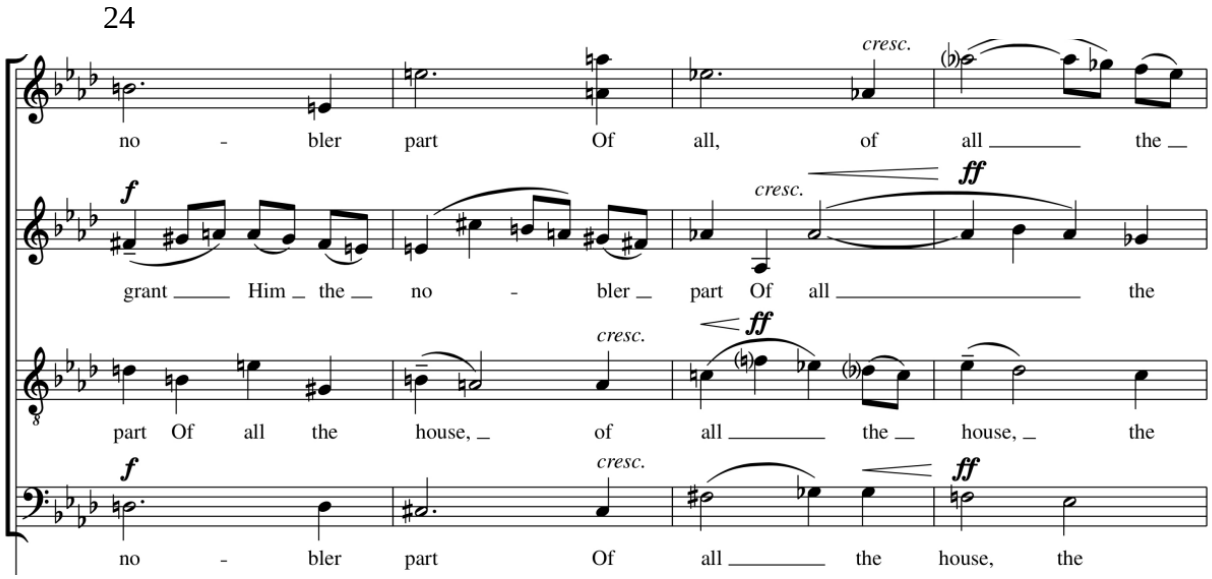


Figure 23. *The Best of Rooms*, mm. 16-17



Thompson's harmonic language in *The Best of Rooms* is reliant on inversions and seventh chords. While many of these chords are diatonic, Thompson often deviates from the printed key and features harmonies that convey a sense of drama and gravitas. Two of the most dramatic segments of the work lie in mm. 22-27 and mm. 29-36. In m. 35, Thompson breaks traditional voice-leading rules with a series of descending parallel fourths. In mm. 22-27, partially shown in figure 29, Thompson tonicizes A major, a half-step higher than the original tonic of A-flat major. Thompson slips into the realm of A major with the leaps in the inner voices and some enharmonic tones in m. 27. Thompson continues to elevate the dramatic impact of the work in the following mm. 29-36, by marking *poco movendo* in m. 29, and increasing the dynamic in mm. 31-33. These devices culminate in the climax of the piece in mm. 33-35, where Thompson indicates another surge in tempo and each voice part sings high in their range.

Figure 25. *The Best of Rooms,* mm. 24-27



Rehearsal Considerations:

Thompson's *The Best of Rooms* contains lush harmonies, and its conjunct lines and occasionally angular leaps are great sight-reading for a more advanced choir. Much of the piece is diatonic, though there are places of harmonic difficulty, and the expansive phrases prove difficult for younger and inexperienced ensembles. This piece is, however, accessible to the most advanced high school choirs with enough voices. With all its challenges, conductors of *The Best of Rooms* must take care to anticipate potential problems that this piece presents.

Foremost is the issue of breathing. The only obvious breathing places in this piece are at rests, of which there are only four instances. Otherwise, it is up to the conductor to decide places for corporate, part-specific, or staggered breaths. The number of breaths to plan is directly related to the age and skill level of the ensemble, and a younger choir will need more breaths than an adult choir. A solid option for taking breaths would be for each part to breathe when there is a comma in the text, and even then, the director must decide whether to take a full beat or a half-beat to breathe. Stagger breathing is the preferred option for continuity of vocal line and

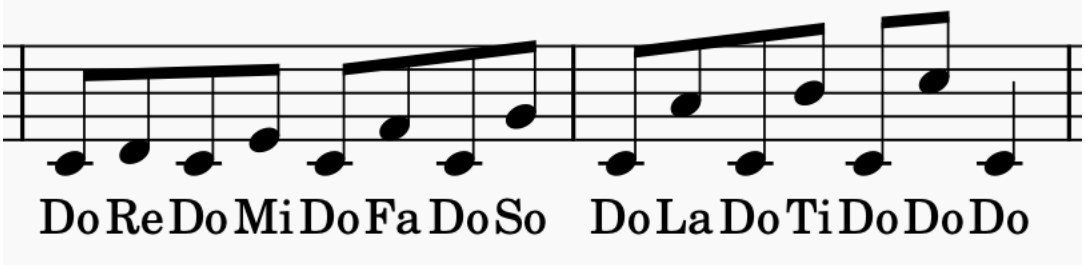
legato, and will give the impression that the choir is more mature. Effective stagger breathing can be ensured by giving each chorister a number, one through four, which indicates the beat on which they are allowed to breathe. It is important to number by section; in other words, number the sopranos, then number the altos, etc. This ensures that a large part of any section is not compressed into one or two beats to breathe.

The Best of Rooms is full of scalar passagework. Most of this movement is in duet with the tenors and altos. There are portions of the piece, mm. 29-40, in which all the parts are moving homophonically or in different duets. Isolating and identifying these duets is paramount to ensuring your choir is rhythmically together and in tune. There are very few places when a part is not in duet, so encouraging the sections to always have another section to listen to will enhance blend, unity, sound, and morale. These types of passages can also be experimented with in the warmup. Solfege scales in canon are an easy way to develop part independence, and this common warmup can be done in duets as well. Have one part start on Do, the second on La, and they proceed up and down a full scale together while listening to each other and tuning thirds. A variation of this warmup is found above, in figure 8.

Another particularly challenging aspect of this piece is the amount and size of intervallic leaps. The altos and tenors have a leap nearly once per measure, and the sopranos are leaping fifths and octaves when they are not moving by step. These leaps include nearly every interval in the diatonic scale, and even a few tritones, so the choir's fundamental understanding of interval relationships must be advanced. A warmup that reinforces singing every interval from Do is shown in figure 30, beginning with a step and getting larger at each repetition. Eventually the warmup reaches an octave, and the choir can be challenged on different days by starting this warmup in a different place. Another expressive layer can be added to this warmup by

encouraging the ensemble to sing into the lower pitch and float the higher pitch, equalizing the volume of each pitch and discouraging singers from reaching or pressing for the higher notes. Another interval game that can quickly remind singers of interval relationships is as simple as writing a solfege scale on the board and pointing at the desired pitches. Having the choir echo the selected pitches on the scale forces them to react quickly and develop muscle memory for not only interval leaps, but the sound and place of each note in the solfege scale.

Figure 26. Warmup for intervallic leaps



Review of Recordings

Given the satisfaction of singing works by Thompson, there are a myriad of great recordings that exist of his compositions. *The Best of Rooms* is no different, as there are plenty of recordings to explore beyond what is covered in this research. The recordings selected for this piece include the professional Catholic ensemble, Gloriæ Dei Cantores, from Orleans, Massachusetts, Durango High School Choir out of Las Vegas, Nevada, and the Chamber Choir from The Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Gloriæ Dei Cantores is an exceptional church choir that resides in the Benedictine Community of Jesus in Orleans, Massachusetts. They perform weekly at the Church of the Transfiguration in the heart of the community, and the choir is made up of around thirty-five trained adult singers. Their recording of Thomspon's *The Best of Rooms* is found on their album

Paths of Grace, released in September 2006.[62] In this professional recording, conducted by Elizabeth Patterson, their ensemble possesses a lovely lightness and brightness of tone. Their sopranos should be commended for their restraint and for never overpowering the other sections, though they infrequently lose blend when individuals allow vibrato to cloud the tone, as in mm. 7 and 11. The tenors tend to lose blend when high in the voice while attempting to bring out musically important lines, specifically in m. 32 and mm. 37-38. These small infractions take little away from what is overall an exemplary performance, with an incredible blend in the most intimate sections of the music. The altos and basses are solid, and the full ensemble gives life to each moving line, demonstrating an understanding of each part's role within the piece. Their intonation through Thompson's tricky chromatic sections is impressive, and their recording is an excellent role model for any adult church choir, community choir, or even professional ensembles.

The Durango High School advanced ensemble, Vocal Infinity, produced a fine recording of *The Best of Rooms* whilst performing in the World Strides Festival in 2019.[63] The ensemble contains about thirty singers and is one of four ensembles offered at Durango High School, from Las Vegas, Nevada. The current director of this ensemble is Kimberly Li. The audio is raw and unedited within the church venue, but the minor ambient noise in the background does not distract from this exceptional high school recording. The ensemble expertly stays in tune throughout their memorized performance, and is mindful to bring out the moving lines

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[62] Robert Herrick – Topic, "The Best of Rooms," YouTube, Feb 18, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YYYeGE4TJk&ab_channel=RobertHerrick-Topic.

[63] Durango High School Choir, "World Strides Festival-Best of Rooms-Vocal Infinity," YouTube, Apr 29, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bevcKykYBP8&ab_channel=DurangoHighSchoolChoir.

throughout the score. The very first note they sing is exquisitely tuned with a rich vowel, and the vowels that follow become shallower and more lateral. Their tone is acceptable throughout, though they oversing through the thickest parts of the texture. The choir is too loud starting in m. 22, and they continue to sing favoring volume over beauty until m. 39. They follow Thompson's *poco movendo* on m. 29, but perhaps too fast, as they rush through these active lines. Because of this choice they struggle to catch breaths, which is especially apparent with the tenors in mm. 30-32. Issues like those identified are to be expected with high school singers, and this recording still stands as one impressive to watch. This recording is particularly useful to other high school teachers who can show their own ensembles what is possible, and teach them pitfalls to avoid.

The final recording is a professional chamber ensemble from the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.[64] Under the direction of Dr. Jean-Sébastien Vallée, the twelve-voice ensemble published a recorded introit for a service at their church during the height of the pandemic in September 2020. Singing unmasked and spread out at least six feet within the church pews, the highly trained choir produces an immaculate rendition of *The Best of Rooms*. The videography and audio quality are excellent and indicate the church's abundance of resources. The venue has a resonance that bolsters the presence of these few singers, and contributes greatly to the success of the recording. The blend the ensemble can achieve at such a distance is impressive, and their clarity of tone is brilliant. Each breath is together, and the phrases breathe and contract with life. The only critique of the recording is the frequent, amusing projection of the organ player's face on a screen behind the conductor. For this reason, it may be

[64] The Church of St. Andrew & St. Paul, "The Best of Rooms – Randall Thompson," YouTube, Sep 27, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ien0Qb3WDNw&ab_channel=TheChurchofSt.Andrew%26St.Paul.

best to play the audio of the piece only. It is a joy to listen to, and a great recording for any ensemble to use as a goal.

CHAPTER 6

LIBBY LARSEN: *REASONS FOR LOVING THE HARMONICA*

Biography

Libby Larsen is one of the most prolific and beloved living composers in America, and her oeuvre of over 500 works encompasses nearly every genre, and a significant portion is written for voices.[65] Among her many accolades for her compositions, Larsen holds a Grammy Award, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Lifetime achievement award, the 2010 George Peabody Medal, and the Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.[66] Originally from Wilmington, Delaware, she currently resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she co-founded the American Composer's Forum with Stephen Paulus.[67]

Larsen was brought up in the Catholic church and school system, where she was taught Gregorian chant and musical literacy from a young age.[68] Both of her parents were involved in music as a hobby, and Larsen was surrounded by classmates who received the same quality

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[65] Mary Anne Feldman, "Larsen [Reece], Libby [Elizabeth) (Brown)," Grove Music Online, October 16, 2013, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.siu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2250015.

[66] Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words: Conversations With Composers in the United States* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 299.

[67] Libby Larsen, "Press," Biography, last modified 2019, https://libbylarsen.com/press/.

[68] Tina Milhorn Stallard, "Libby Larsen." In *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music: Nine American Composers*, ed. Michael K. Slayton (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), 192.

musical instruction.[69] Larsen went on to attend a public high school, and then the University of Minnesota, where she received her Bachelors, Masters, and PhD degrees.[70]

Larsen has been interviewed numerous times about her compositions, where she has revealed much about her compositional process, her thoughts on instrumental and choral composing, and her love of working hands-on with the performers and conductors that take up her music. She generally describes composition as, "placing sounds in order in time and space."[71] In an interview with Jennifer Kelly, Larsen details her thoughts about choirs:

> "What I need with choral music is communication with the whole community… It's a community of voices that come together, breathe together, and receive their energy from each other and the people who are there… For me, the choral experience is a gathering of people coming together to keep time through breathing, which is the most primal experience we have. I care about words. I care about the nature of the bard – the chorus as bard. We count on certain choral sounds, such as the St. Olaf sound or the Zielinski sound, but they are all in service of the community. The community of the words, the people, the singers, the hearers.[72]

In her text-based compositions, Larsen is strongly influenced by the rhythm of American English, which aligns with her works being meant to tell a story.[73] The vitality and punctuation of American speech is perhaps the most important essence of her compositions, and she evokes this by precisely deciding meters and placing bar lines to clearly demarcate places of metrical stress and rest. One of Larsen's story-driven choral works that clearly demonstrates her speech-driven approach to composing, as well as her refreshing sense of humor, is *Reasons for Loving*

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[69] Stallard, "Libby Larsen," 192.

[70] Feldman, "Larsen, Libby," Grove Music Online.

[71] Feldman, "Larsen, Libby," Grove Music Online.

[72] Kelly, *In Her Own Words*, 304.

[73] Stallard, "Libby Larsen," 193.

the Harmonica. This piece was written for the American Boychoir in 1997, while she was the composer in residence for the Colorado Symphony Orchestra.

Musical Analysis:

Libby Larsen's *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica* is made up of several motivic ideas that are developed and reharmonized throughout the work. Rather than following an established form, the piece plays out in a series of musical phrases that align with phrases of text. The most abundant and charming musical motive that comprises a large portion of the work is the oscillation between two triadic chords whose roots lie one step apart. Established in the first two measures, pictured in figure 31, some version of this oscillation is present in nearly every measure of the score. The rhythm of the oscillation is variable, and Larsen frequently layers different oscillations on top of each other, even sharing the motive with the piano, as seen in figure 32. Larsen also juxtaposes neighboring tonal centers by having the melody play out in a chord that opposes the underlying harmony. The soprano melody that starts on m. 3 in figure 31 plays out in B minor over the A minor and G major oscillation in the rest of the choir. Because this motive is saturated throughout the work, there is no clear tonal center, and numerous places verge on bitonality.

Figure 27. *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica*, mm. 1-3

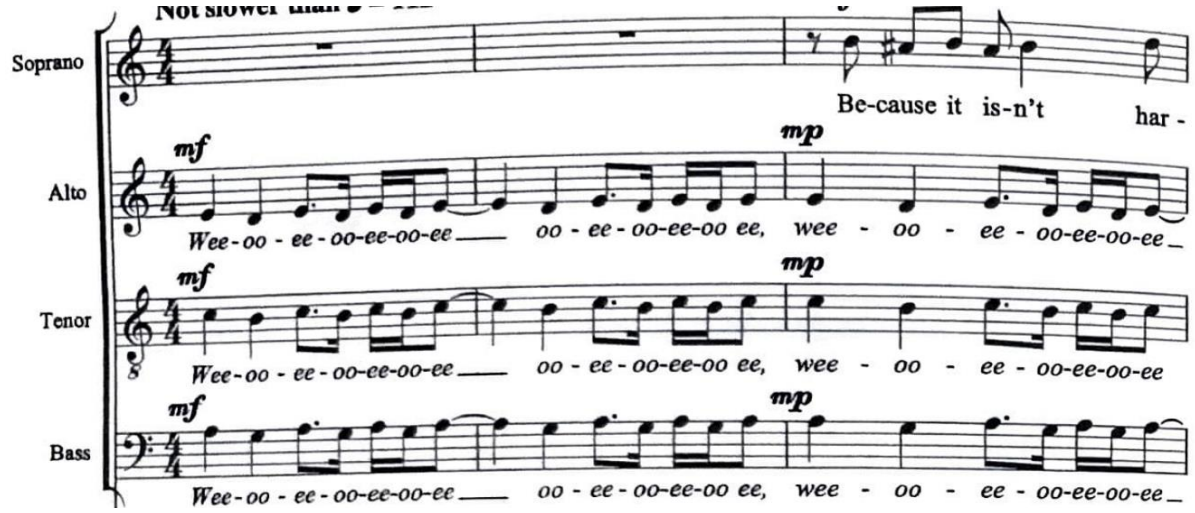
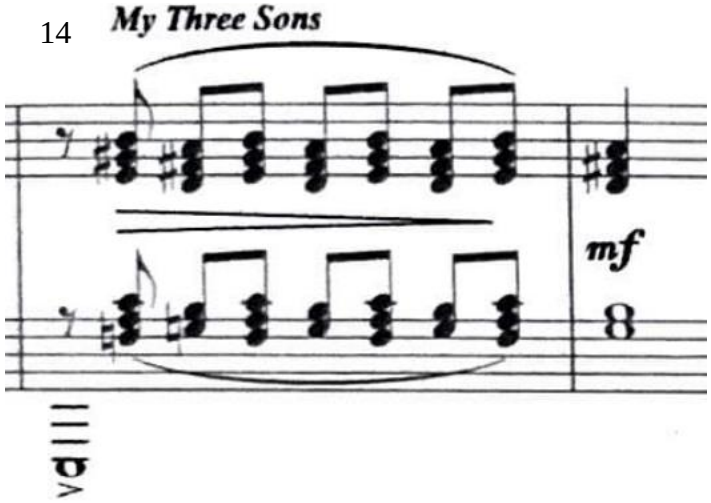


Figure 28. *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica*, mm. 14-15



This is such a genius compositional tool because it is rooted in the basic function of the harmonica. The harmonica is built on triadic harmony, and produces different pitches when blowing/exhaling and drawing/inhaling. As seen in figure 33, which represents the most common tuning of a harmonica, all blown notes sound a C major triad, and drawn notes contain other neighboring triads: D minor, G major, and B diminished. D minor is the most strongly represented harmony in drawn notes, and thus the most common oscillation between blowing and drawing results in two triads that are one step apart. Larsen reinforces this point by adding the syllables “wee-oo” as the sound that accompanies the oscillation to mimic the blowing and drawing of a harmonica. Larsen also references pop culture melodies in her writing for the piano and indicates those references in the score. This includes the theme song from the 1960’s sitcom *My Three Sons*, referenced in figure 32, and Dinah Shore’s Chevrolet jingle, used in mm. 17-18 on the measure where the choir sings about a “Chevy.”

Blow notes	C	E	G	C	E	G	C	E	G	C
Hole's number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Draw notes	D	G	B	D	F	A	B	D	F	A

Figure 33. Richter Harmonica Tuning. Data from Yonberg Pure Mountain Sound, "Richter Tuning," Accessed Feb 29, 2024, https://www.yonberg-harmonica.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Richter-and-Solo-Tunings-1.pdf.

Larsen's melodic lines are tuneful, even when they compete with the accompaniment. Some melodies are built solely on the oscillation between neighboring tones, as in mm. 29-32, which generates a whimsical tritone on the word "tolerates." Other melodies feature a variation of oscillation, but imply a particular harmony, as in mm. 23-24 where the melody implies C Mixolydian. In the phrase pictured in figures 34 and 35, Larsen smartly tonicizes two tonal centers one step apart within the same musical phrase. figure 34 implies F major, and figure 35 implies E-flat major, illuminating the cynicism of which the choir sings.

Figure 34. *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica*, mm. 53-54

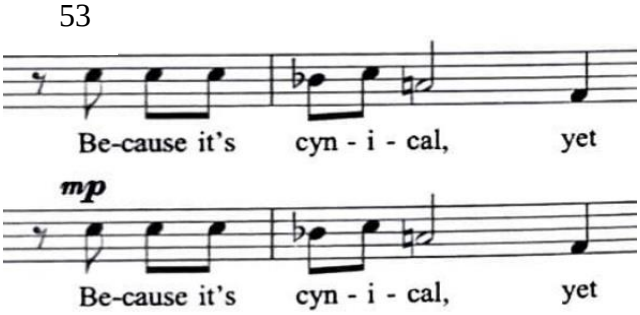
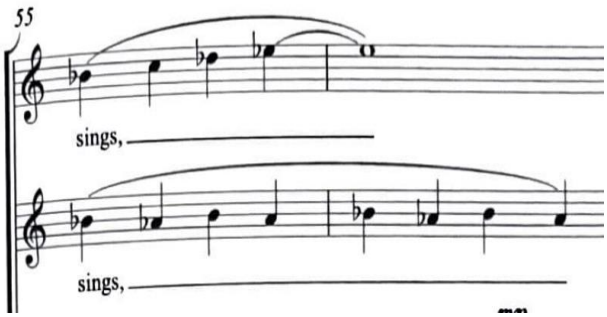


Figure 35. *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica*, mm. 55-56

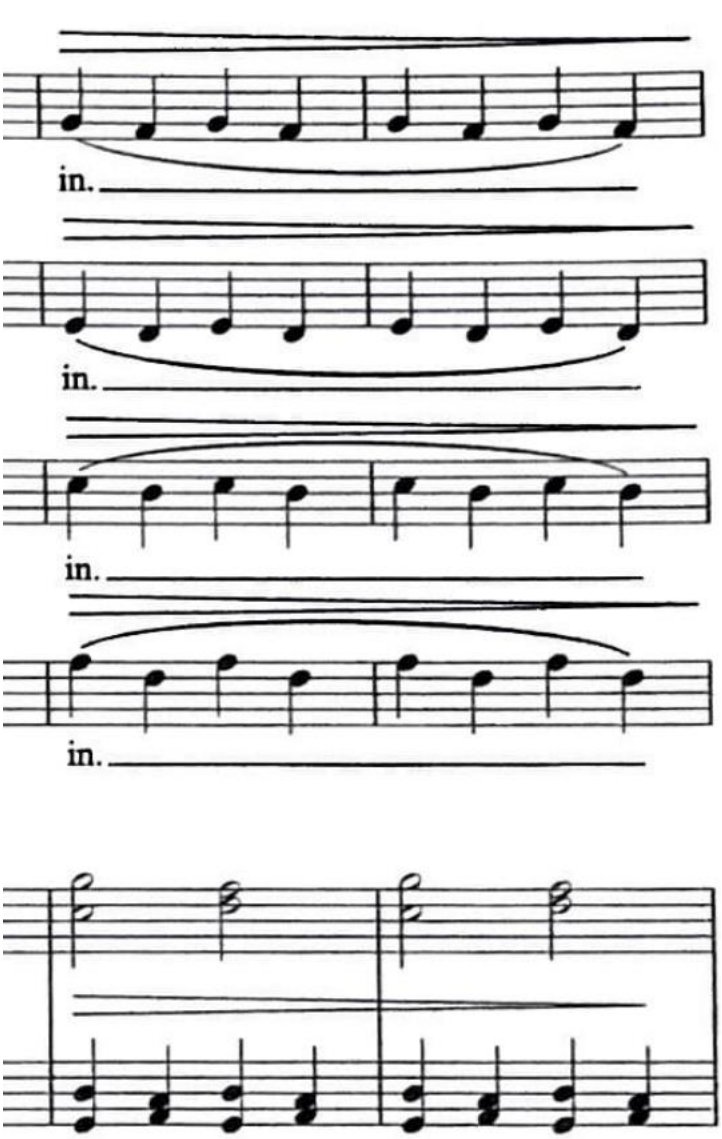


Larsen resolves the piece in an appropriately quirky way. Beginning in m. 65, Larsen revisits each phrase of text used before “cynical, yet sings,” adding a lower harmony to the original melody which implies a new tonal center, G. The final phrase of text is sung at a unison G, while the accompaniment oscillates between an inverted C major seventh and D minor. The piece proceeds harmonically like this until m. 81, seen in figure 36, where the choir begins an oscillation of their own on A minor and B diminished. All the harmonies used in this final section of music feature chords that are present in the Richter harmonica tuning shown above in figure 33, as well as the initial chord of the piece, A minor. The piece continues this shifting until it gradually comes to a final rest on a second inversion B diminished chord, cleverly one step away from the beginning chord of A minor.

Rehearsal Considerations

Though this piece was originally written for boys choir, directors should not assume ease. There are elements of this piece that will pose a challenge to even advanced groups, while remaining accessible to young singers. The difficulty of rhythm in this piece boils down to the first two measures, figure 31, above. The dotted-eighth, sixteenth rhythm can be taught by rote, as a call and response, or by incorporating rhythm reading into the warmup. A proven strategy is to write the sixteenth note counts of a full measure of four on the board, and have students repeat the counting whilst removing a few counts at a time until only the desired rhythm remains.

Figure 29. *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica*, mm. 81-82



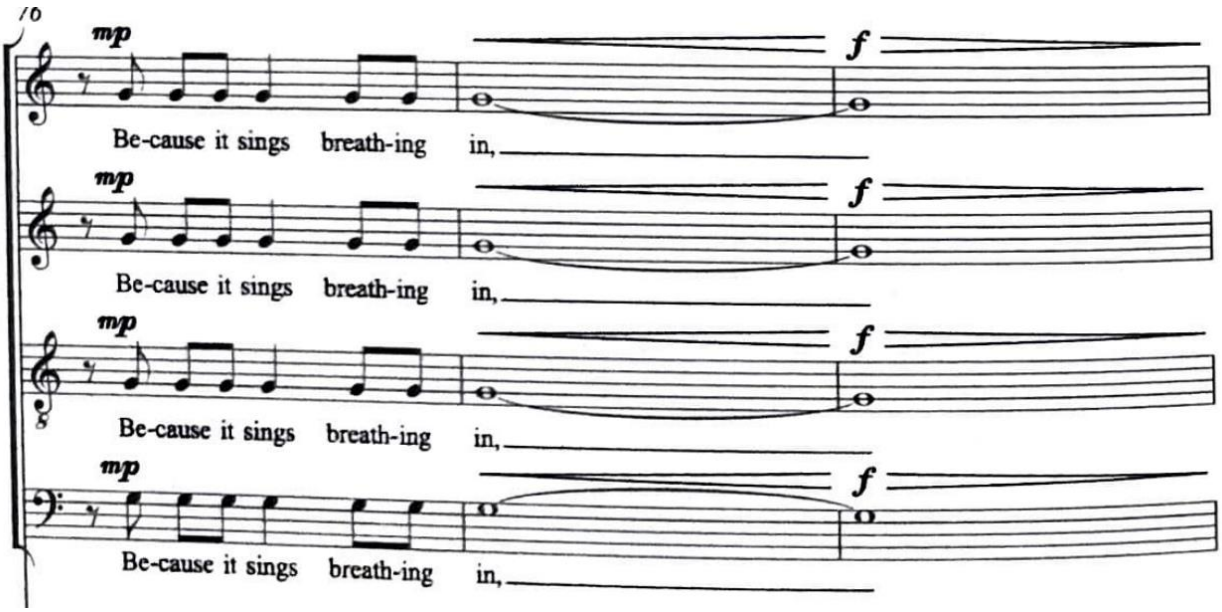
Tuning and part independence are likely the most imposing challenges that this piece presents to inexperienced singers, so it is wise to spend time drilling half-steps and whole-steps. A simple exercise to practice with singers involves singing specified intervals from an established tonic note, increasing the interval as the exercise progresses. Do-Di-Do-Ti-Do, then Do-Re-Do-Te-Do, then Do-Ri-Do-La-Do, and so on. The goal of this exercise is to train your singers to sing half-steps, whole-steps, and thirds from any given pitch. The difficulty exercise

can be increased by splitting the singers into two and even three parts, and choosing different starting pitches for each.

In fact, any familiar warmup can be modified to encourage the part independence and accuracy necessary to execute this piece. To tailor a warmup for this song, simply split an ensemble in two, and have them start a warmup one whole-step or half-step apart. *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica* edges towards bitonality, so establishing that unsettling feeling will only help singers feel confident when reading through this piece.

The dynamics in this piece are exciting and necessary, especially those on the last page, where the choir is in unison and must uniformly perform a dramatic crescendo and decrescendo, shown in figure 37. These measures can be directly used as a warmup, and will benefit singers' musicianship in any song. Singers will most likely decrescendo too quickly after reaching the loudest moment, so directors can write out intended dynamics on each beat to help students visualize the progression of dynamics.

Figure 30. *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica*, mm. 76-78



Like most pieces, this work is often best rehearsed by speaking the rhythm first before singing, especially when adding the words. There are several off-beat entrances that singers may stumble over, and this is easily prevented by focusing solely on the rhythm on first read-through. When rehearsing pitches, identify which part carries the melody of a section, and have all parts sing that line together before breaking up to read their individual lines. For example, all singers should learn the soprano part in mm. 3-4, as most every singer will sing it at some point in the piece.

Review of Recordings

The only existing recording of Larsen's *Reasons for Loving the Harmonica* is the ensemble which commissioned the work, the American Boychoir.[74] The ensemble of thirty-six to forty singers included boys from fourth through eighth grades and featured students with changed and unchanged voices. Sadly, the ensemble has ceased performing and the associated school has shut down amid financial difficulties, despite their status as a "national treasure."[75] They maintain an archival website dedicated to preserving their place in music history.[76] Their recording of this piece is expectedly precise and musical. Their rhythmic accuracy and attention to dynamics in the opening phrases of the piece are remarkable. They do a fine job tuning unexpected cadences like those in m. 14, and their diction is exquisite, especially in mm. 29-50. They understand the tone shift that happens in m. 53, and shift to a more legato approach. This

[74] The American Boychoir – Topic, "Reasons for the Loving the Harmonica," YouTube, Nov 5, 2014, https://youtu.be/s05vbzxbuOE?si=3ZMpFdV_l2F_y3U1.

[75] The Boychoir Foundation, "American Boychoir," 2020, Accessed Nov 15, 2023, https://americanboychoir.org/.

[76] The Boychoir Foundation, https://americanboychoir.org/.

recording is an excellent one to reference for notes and rhythms, and for stylistic considerations, though the tone ideal presented is only advisable for younger singers. Because the ensemble is so young, they are more limited in their ability to sing at extreme dynamics and range. This recording does have notable dynamic contrast, though phrases which include *subito* or large crescendos can be more robust. Larsen clearly composed with limited range in mind, which makes this piece as appropriate for young singers as it is for more mature singers. More mature singers can make this piece spectacular with their use of dynamics and articulation.

Differences in the printed score from Oxford Music Publishing and the American Boychoir recording prompted a series of emails with the publishing company and with Libby Larsen. In the email exchange, Libby Larsen confirmed that she was not involved in the making of the American Boychoir recording, and provided her manuscript score.[77] Her personal score revealed that the printed scores from Oxford Music Publishing contained two egregious errors, including the omission of an optional piano part on m. 12, and the omission of five measures on page eight of the score. To remedy this issue, an insert to the score was drafted to replace page eight, which included the missing measures and the original material of page eight. This insert can be found in the Appendix.

[77] Libby Larsen, email message to the author, 2/10/24.

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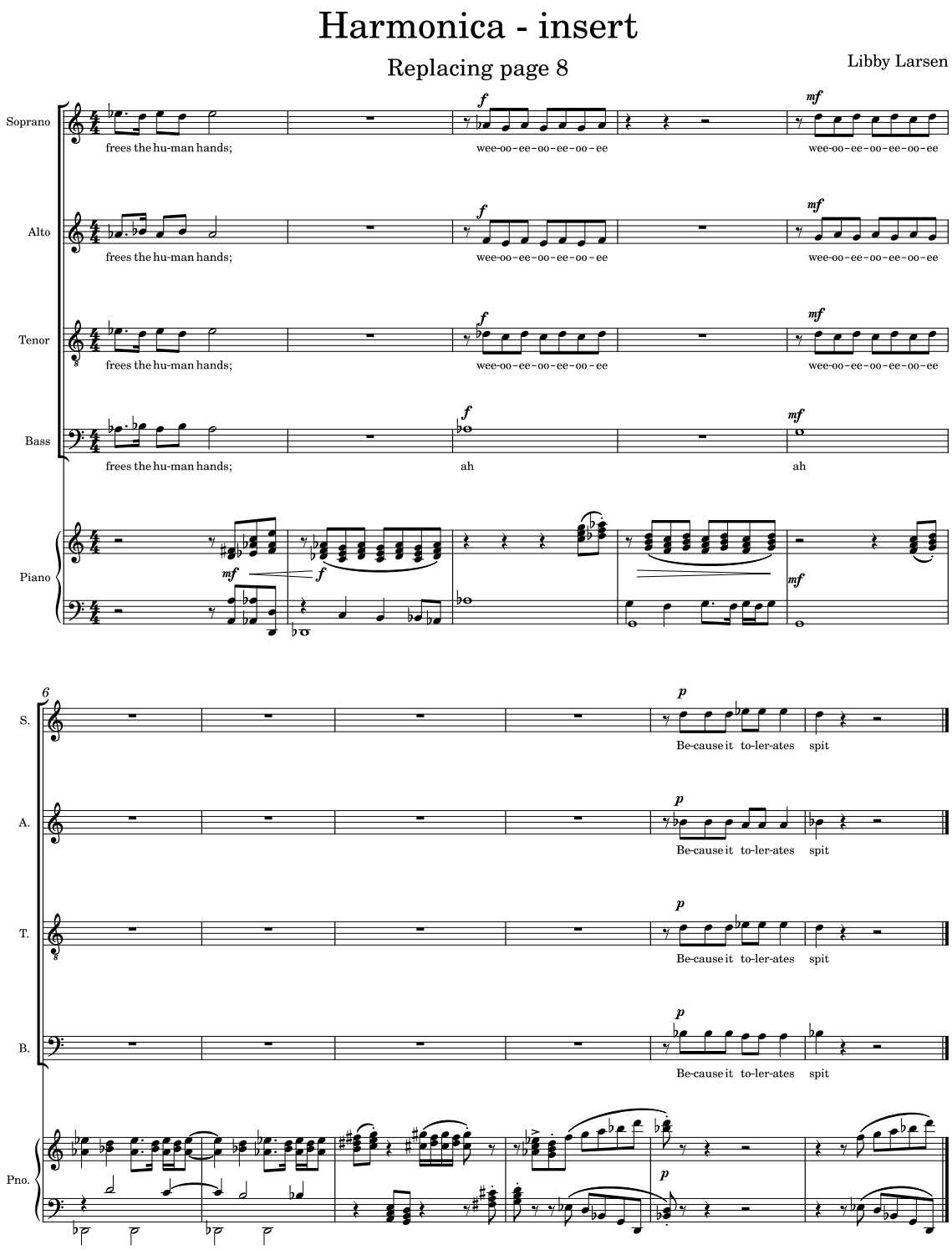
APPENDIX

REASONS FOR LOVING THE HARMONICA: PAGE 8 INSERT



VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Mason Rice

Mason.rice@outlook.com

University of Kentucky
Bachelor of Music in Music Education, Voice, May 2018

Research Paper Title:
Pedagogues and Prodigies: A Conductor's Guide to Selected Works of Sweelinck, L. Mozart, Schumann, Saint-Saëns, Thompson, And Larsen

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