

South Dakota All-State Choir 2009 Score Preparation Notes from Dr. Meidl

The opportunity to be musically expressive is an opportunity that we must never pass up or take for granted. Many choirs have the ability to read the notes, sing a crescendo, or choreograph an interesting line of text. However, we come together as some of the finest singers from across the state with a singular mission...to affectively change the lives of those who hear us (and our own lives in the process) by creating the most extraordinary musical experiences through these diverse works.

How we do this is by attention to the core aspects of each composition...the heart of each of these masterworks...the thing that gives them voice. In some cases, a work has been successfully expressive for centuries, while others are fairly recent. Our task is to explore the melodies, rhythms, textures, timbres, texts, dynamics, articulations and the multitude of other means we have been given by our composers to understand their music.

I am excited to share this opportunity with you and to be with you in South Dakota for a few days in October! Our process of exploration and our final concert will only be as successful as your individual preparation. Use these brief notes as a beginning point for our journey...mark your scores...study your part so the pitches and rhythms are out of our way. After all, the printed score is only our roadmap, the music will have life if we are free to view the scenery along our drive!

See you soon!
Dr. Kevin Meidl

Magnificat

Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) was one of the truly great innovators who worked a generation or so before J.S. Bach during the Baroque period. His music is filled with rhythmic nuance, playful textures, and energy. It is also deeply sacred and rich with symbolism...just count how many times the Holy Trinity is referenced by patterns of three, or repetitions of the same text three times! Today most of us are only familiar with his famous "Canon." This "Magnificat" includes canonic imitation and sequential entrances that make it is not as difficult as it may first appear.

We will sing this piece in Latin. It is a very joyful text from the Advent season which comes just ahead of Christmas. Often called "The Song of Mary" this text shares the joy Mary had upon hearing that she was to give birth to a son. The complete translation and IPA transcription can be found at www.ipasource.com ...although there are many other translations available on line, this source will provide you with the international phonetic alphabet as well.

The vowels in Latin are all very consistent. They are pure and generally very easy to see on the page and hear. The biggest issue is with consonants. As you follow the IPA, you will notice that "h" tends to be silent as in "humilitatem" and that "t" can either be a hard consonant as in the word "fecit" or a "ts" sound as in the last syllable of "potentiam." The "g" can be hard or sound more like a soft "j" depending on where it falls in a word or what vowels surround it. An example would be the hard "g" in "magna" and the soft "j" sound in "progenies." Perhaps the most challenging aspect to Latin is the use of "c" or "ch" in a text. If you think of the word "cello" you will get the correct pronunciation for "c" in the words "fecit" and "ecce." However, most other "c" consonants found in this text including the "ch" in the word "brachio" are pronounced with a hard "k" sound.

I suggest that you pencil in reminders for yourself of these special consonant issues so that we will not have to worry about correct pronunciation. Also, please write the translation of the text into your score so you will always know the meaning of the words as we discover how Pachelbel chose to set them.

In general, we will take phrasing breaks following repetitions in the text. If there is a word or phrase that repeats we will separate between them with a slight pause. This is generally not a place to breath. The first example of

this is after the word "Magnificat" in the first measure. There is no breath needed, but we must phrase to assist the text. The larger phrases and musical periods are fairly obvious as the text will change or the musical idea will change. At these points we will breathe. Examples would be in measure 6-7, 13, 16, 23, etc. The composer usually gives us a rest just for that reason.

The 3/2 time that begins in m.23 and then later in m.105 will keep the same 1/4 note pulse that begins the piece. It will be elegant and graceful at about a tempo of 72. As Pachelbel takes us back and forth through each major division of the piece, that pulse will not change much. However, as we get to m.79 and m.122 it will feel quick due to the rhythmic play of the 1/8 notes and dotted rhythms.

One final note about style in this piece. We will want to lift off of every note and every 1/8 note rest. What might initially feel "choppy" to you as you practice, will give this piece a lot of life in our performance. Even at a more moderate tempo, this piece should dance and have an inner rhythmic drive that propels it forward. As you sing, feel the "and" of every beat and try to pull through it with even more energy than you begin the beat. Pachelbel's magnificent setting of this "Magnificat" will be an amazing start to our program!

There Shall A Star

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) lived a very short but extremely prolific compositional life and was one of the most highly acclaimed composers and conductors of his time. We are performing this piece in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the composer's birth (1809-2009). Of all his masterful compositions, it is perhaps his unfinished oratorio "Christus" that captivates our attention most. Begun a year before his death, and including one of the most lovely anthems in the choral repertory, we are only left to wonder what the entire work could have become.

Not unlike the "Magnificat" there is a great deal of imitation in this work. However, the musical ideas are carried into complete melodic lines and are shared from solo vocal lines to full SATB voicing. Masterful textures are created through overlapping lines and a continuous "passing of the torch" from part to part. Mendelssohn is purposeful in not allowing a moment of vocal silence until the entire musical idea is complete in m. 28.

In great contrast, the B section of the work takes over following a short bridge and angrily lines up all voices in rhythmic unison. Almost mocking the tuneful melody, it comes back in harmonically altered above and within this dramatic texture until the section tires itself into a rebirth of hope and joy in m. 63.

The final chorale is very much a tribute to Mendelssohn's German musical heritage and in particular the music of J.S. Bach. Mendelssohn had lived and worked a great deal of his life in Leipzig and considered himself an heir to Bach's musical legacy. This chorale will be sung in a fairly straight-forward way with the final cut offs being always on the following rests.

A final note on tempo...this piece will be sung more quickly than most recordings you will hear. I am thinking about the overall tempo as being dictated by the style of the B section material and definitely with a pulse of two beats per measure rather than the indicated common time. This will give the work more flow and also allow word-stress to appropriately be articulated.

Abendlied zu Gott (Evening Song to God)

As with Mendelssohn, we are performing this Haydn work in celebration of a great composer. However, this piece is presented in recognition of the composer's death in 1809. In the past 200 years since the passing of Joseph Haydn, the world has found his music to be some of the most pleasing and artistically crafted works in the repertoire. As a composer who lived and worked in the late Classical period (he was a contemporary of Mozart), Haydn's music is very orderly, elegant, and lovely. His oratorio "The Creation" is the most often performed oratorio in the world...even heard more often than Handel's famous "Messiah."

"Abendlied zu Gott" is a song written as part of a collection of works for chorus and is considered one of the most beautiful. In part, it is loved for its amazing melody which is introduced by the altos in m.3. All parts eventually

take this subject and then follow the fugue with a countersubject again first introduced by the altos in m. 10. Together these melodic lines produce some of the most memorable and tuneful music in the Western world.

Although "free counterpoint" exists in all voices, Haydn leads the singer to believe that his or her part is the most important melodic material...everything is interesting, and everything is beautiful. Ornaments are added as in m. 49, or the melody altered as in the tenor line in m.90 to create textural interest. The melismatic patterns in 101 set up an elegant final statement that pairs bass/alto and soprano/tenor into the final phrase of closure.

The text is a prayer, the translation of which appears in your score. We will sing it in German (there is very little text...lots of repetition). German is a language not unfamiliar to many of us in the Midwest. It is mostly straightforward and predictable. Be sure to roll the "r" of the word "Herr" and the word "der". Keep in mind that in German the "ch" is an aspirated sound created in the back of the throat as in the words "dich" and "ich." Be sure not to pronounce these consonants with a "k" sound.

The second set of text on the counter melody includes a "z" consonant which should be pronounced as a "tz" in the word "zu." The "e" vowels would normally be pronounced as in the word "say", however I would prefer more of an "uh" sound at the end of the words "geringe" and "singe." The "th" consonants sound as a singular "t" as in the word "gethan."

We will look for the apex of each phrase and the opportunities to build and return dynamically in each melodic line. The pleading "Herr! Herr!" statement will contrast the more humble fugal melody.

This is an absolutely profound work that you will simply love.

There Will Be Rest

Frank Ticheli sets the poem of Sara Teasdale in a profound and memorable way. We will take our time through the first eight bars and allow the moment to dictate our steps. As hesitant and unsure as we start, by m.8 we will arrive at a tempo and direction that will be lead by three introductory quarter notes. Always moving forward, the piece takes on new strength by m.23 that carries it through to the contrasting sections of m.49, m.59 and the final statement in m.75.

Each section brings its own unique character and musical idea to the overall work.

There are important moments of divisi. As you will be selected in quartets, let's take a chance and ask each of you to sing the pitches that are most comfortable for you, and those pitches that would normally be yours in your school choir. We will cross our fingers that we will achieve balance! It is particularly important for basses to consider whether they have a low Eb...if it is possible and comfortable...please cover that pitch when it arrives.

The poem is built with a great deal of alliteration. Be aware of these moments as you rehearse. Seek out a caressing of the consonants in "sure, stars, shining" and "reign of rest."

Another amazing piece that will be with you forever!

The Teddy Bear's Picnic

Andrew Carter takes this playful child's song and sets it in a very interesting...and not so easy arrangement. Be very careful as you prepare your part to hear your line as it harmonizes with the other three parts. The chords can be thick and you will want to slowly listen to how your pitch fits the overall structure. Likewise, take some time to move from section to section as the texture and tonality have a tendency to shift quickly.

Phrases should be to their full length, be sure not to breathe in the middle of phrases but rather at the end of the complete sentence. Have fun with the words and tell the story! This piece is great fun for singers and listeners alike.

Roll, Jordan, Roll

Stacey Gibbs is a contemporary composer from Michigan who is getting a lot of attention today for his unique arrangements of traditional spirituals. "Roll, Jordan, Roll" was just published this year and is a great ending piece for our part of the concert. Note the pronunciation of the word "Jordan."

The two biggest concerns with this piece are the divisi and the glissandi. Let's again trust your teacher and your personal experience to select a part that best fits your voice. Whichever part you choose in those divisi moments, be absolutely secure...practice against the other parts in that section and know which part is yours. The harmonies are fairly easy and often parts divide into octaves. Let's see if we can achieve balance!

The glissandi are fun! The soft one in the female voices m.44-m.45 is really important...take your time going down and practice arriving at the correct chord in m.45. The last one in m.84-m.85 is very strong and full. Again practice slowly and check your arrival at the final chord. By the way, we will take a break before singing the final word "roll."! What a great piece!

The Promise of Living

Aaron Copland's familiar piece "The Promise of Living" is a wonderful slice of Americana that you will really enjoy. Breathing is tricky with long phrases, leaps and mixed meter. We will plan to take breaths at the end of each three or four measure statement at the beginning, but cover them to a point so that the legato feel is not disturbed. Tenors need to be very light with the use of head-voice as appropriate.

The second section begins with low basses. It is important to have both bass and baritone covered well. As you practice, always have someone sing or play (on the piano) the opposite part so you can hear the relationship between both bass parts. The tenor part works into the texture on p.9 but is quite independent and stands alone melodically. It will be helpful as you prepare to have someone sing that part too.

The tempo starts to move more dramatically as we reach the men's triple meter and then powerfully both ideas combine in a type of "quodlibet" where we hear two familiar tunes at the same time. Be careful to keep the duple eighth note patterns clean against the triplet rhythms below.

As the piece gets more powerful and stronger dynamically, be sure to breathe well, and keep everything very open. Do not over sing but rather sing well within your voice. As the baritone, tenor, and soprano parts get high...keep it very open and don't worry too much about the consonants. First sopranos should skip the words all together at 40 singing only an "ah" vowel in that register.

This is a classic American work that you with completely enjoy...have fun!