# **Arranging for Small Choir: 2-part and 3-part**

**Presented by:** Thomas W. Jefferson **Event:** GIA Summer Music Institute

**Date:** July 9–11, 2025

# **Getting Started**

- Select a public domain piece such as hymn, a spiritual, or something that won't require permission from the composer or copyright holder.
- Select a song that is inspiring and meaningful and has a strong melody and interesting harmonic possibilities.
- Decide the appropriate key for your choir and the style, tempo, rhythmic feel, and structure.
- Arranging music may require rewriting parts and/or changing the keys.
- SAB arrangements typically omit the bass or tenor parts and are ideal for school choirs and when fewer male voices are available.
- SSA arrangements allow for a unified sound of female voices and most choirs have more upper voices than lower.
- Upper voice/Lower voice arrangements are ideal where diverse vocal ranges are concerned and when introducing harmony.

## **Key Principles**

- Maintain good voice leading for a balanced and singable arrangement.
- Consider the vocal ranges and tessitura in various choral voicings.
- Revoice chords to accommodate two and three-part voicings.
- Maintain harmonic integrity as much as possible in the adaptation.

# **Style-Specific Tips**

## **Classical Style/Hymns**

- Respect voice leading rules: avoid parallel 5ths and 8ves, resolve dissonances carefully.
- Keep inner lines melodic and singable, not just filler.
- Overlap entries of voices, and vary how they move (parallel, contrary, oblique).
- Vary the spacing between voices to bring a specific voice into focus.
- Use open harmonies or double lines to maintain fullness and depth.
- Vary the texture between homophonic vs. contrapuntal or dense vs. thin.

#### Gospel/Jazz-Inspired Styles

- Use syncopated rhythms
- Use color tones (blue notes, i.e. flatted sevenths)
- Explore alternative voicing techniques, such as close harmonies vs. spread voicings
- Use interplay between voices and textural variation (polyphony, antiphony, and layering)
- Use dissonances and non-chord tones (2nds, 4ths, and 7ths)
- Use octaves, unisons, and 5ths
- Use of varied dynamics, note-bending, ornamentation.

#### **Important Stylistic Differences**

- Use of parallel 5ths and close harmonies for a unified, powerful, and resonant sound.
- Occasional clash in harmonies between choral part and accompaniment should not always be considered a stylistic characteristic that creates a unique sound and texture.

# **Techniques for Two and Three-part Arranging**

## **Two-Part Voicing**

- Use **3rds** and **6ths** to keep parts consonant and independent.
- Use **2nds** (consonant, convey movement) and **4ths** (consonant, full and open sound).
- Use **octaves** and **unisons** for doubling the melody or to emphasize a note.
- Use minor 2nds and major 7ths (for tension and special effects).
- Use 7ths to create tension and color.
- Use counter melodies especially in contemporary styles

#### **Three-Part Voicing**

- Keep the range comfortable.
- Use complete triads when possible; omit the 5th or seventh
- Use close position triads that move stepwise for a better blend.
- Inner voices are singable and stepwise.
- Balances harmonic fullness with vocal accessibility.

# **Examples Referenced in This Handout**

## 2-Part Hymn Style Examples

#### "Shall We Gather at the River"

- 2-Part Voicing: uses harmonic spacing, and contrary movement of vocal lines.
- 2-Part Voicing: uses ascending parallel 6ths (diatonic and chromatically altered to accommodate the piano part).
- "Ave Maria" 2-Part Voicing: unison and 3rds/6ths to harmonize melody.

## **Gospel Style Example**

## "Plenty Good Room"

- 2-Part Voicing: interplay between voices (call and response), "blue notes", and syncopated rhythms.
- 2-Part Voicing: harmonic spacing, oblique and contrary movement of vocal lines.

## **Revoiced Hymn: 4-Part Hymn Style**

## "Sing of Mary"

- Complete 4-part hymn arrangement example with revoicing techniques demonstrated.
- Examples from published works.

Refer to the music examples section at the end of the handout.

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# Workshop Handout: "Revoicing Examples"

Title: Arranging for Small Choir: 2-Part and 3-Part

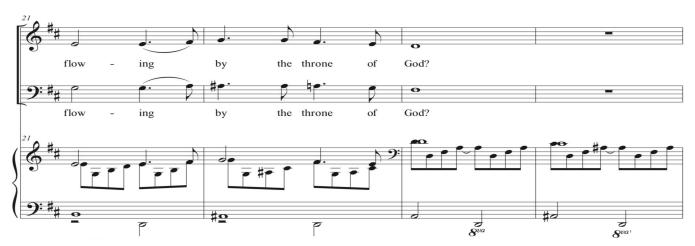
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2-Part Voicing: uses harmonic spacing, and contrary movement of vocal lines.



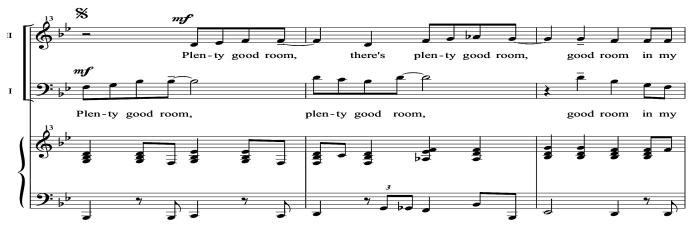
2-Part Voicing: uses ascending parallel  $6^{ths}$  (diatonic and chromatically altered to accommodate the piano part.



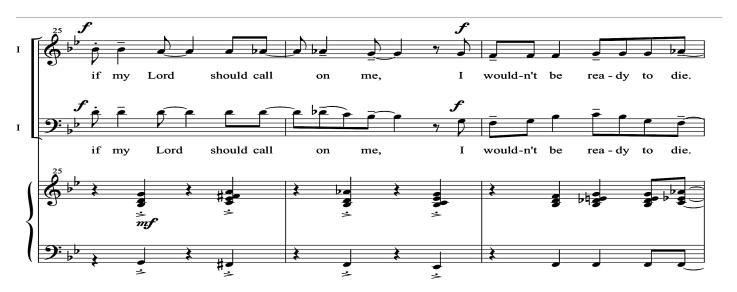
2-Part Voicing Example- "Ave Maria" - transposed to A-flat major



2-Part Voicing: uses interplay between voices (call and response), "blue notes", and syncopated rhythms.

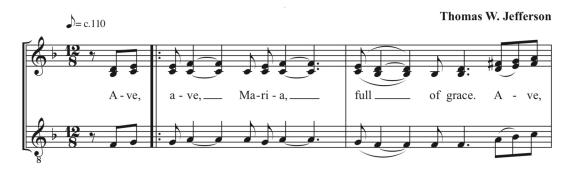


2-Part Voicing: use of harmonic spacing, oblique and contrary movement of vocal lines.



Refer to the music examples section at the end of the handout.

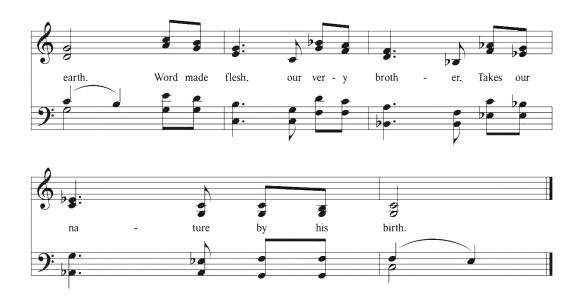
"3-Part SAT-style: full triads, voice-friendly motion"



Revoiced Hymn: 4-Part Hymn style: "Sing of Mary"

# Sing of Mary



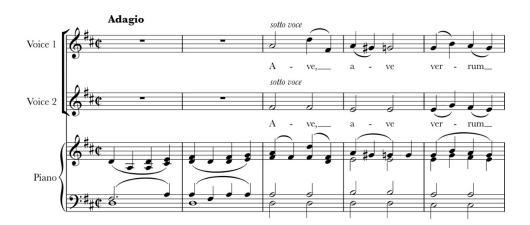


## Examples from published works

# Ave Verum Corpus

arranged for choir and piano

W.A. Mozart



## Sing Hosanna

Trad.

