

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

Presented by: Thomas W. Jefferson

Event: GIA Summer Music Institute

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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.
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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.
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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.
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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.
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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”

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

This musical score illustrates 2-part voicing with harmonic spacing and contrary movement. It features two vocal staves (Soprano and Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The vocal lines begin at measure 25 with a crescendo and a forte dynamic. The lyrics are: "Oo Yes, we'll gath - er at the". The piano part also begins at measure 25 with a crescendo and a forte dynamic, featuring a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

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

This musical score illustrates 2-part voicing using ascending parallel 6ths. It features two vocal staves (Soprano and Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The vocal lines begin at measure 21 with a crescendo and a forte dynamic. The lyrics are: "flow - ing by the throne of God?". The piano part also begins at measure 21 with a crescendo and a forte dynamic, featuring a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

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

A musical score for a vocal piece in 12/8 time, key of B-flat major. The score consists of two staves. The lyrics are: "A - ve, a - ve, Ma - ri - a, full of grace. A - ve,". The melody is simple and repetitive, with a strong emphasis on the first and third beats of each measure.

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

A musical score for a vocal piece in 12/8 time, key of B-flat major. The score consists of two staves. The lyrics are: "Plen - ty good room, there's plen - ty good room, good room in my". The melody is simple and repetitive, with a strong emphasis on the first and third beats of each measure. The piano accompaniment features a syncopated rhythm in the right hand and a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand.

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

A musical score for a vocal piece in 12/8 time, key of B-flat major. The score consists of two staves. The lyrics are: "if my Lord should call on me, I would-n't be rea - dy to die." The melody is simple and repetitive, with a strong emphasis on the first and third beats of each measure. The piano accompaniment features a syncopated rhythm in the right hand and a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand.

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

♩ = c.110

Thomas W. Jefferson

A - ve, a - ve, Ma - ri - a, full of grace. A - ve,

Revoiced Hymn: 4-Part Hymn style: “Sing of Mary”

Sing of Mary

Roland F. Palmer, 1891-1985

Thomas W. Jefferson

♩ = 70

Sing of Ma - ry, pure and low - ly, Vir - gin

Moth - er un - de - filed. Sing of God's own Son most

ho - ly, who be - came her lit - tle child. Fair - est

child of fair - est moth - er, God the Lord who came to

earth. Word made flesh, our ver - y broth - er, Takes our

na - ture by his birth.

Examples from published works

Ave Verum Corpus

arranged for choir and piano

W.A. Mozart

Adagio

Voice 1 *sotto voce*
A - ve, a - ve ver - rum

Voice 2 *sotto voce*
A - ve, a - ve ver - rum

Piano

Sing Hosanna

Trad.

Soprano



Give me joy in my heart, keep me prais-ing,— Give me joy in my heart, I
Give me peace in my heart, keep me pra - ying,— Give me peace in my heart, I
Give me joy in my heart, keep me prais-ing,— Give me joy in my heart, I
Give my oil in my lamp, keep me bur - ning,— Give me oil in my lamp, I
Give me peace in my heart, keep me re - sting,— Give me peace in my heart, I

Alto



Give me joy in my heart, keep me prais-ing,— Give me joy in my heart, I
Give me peace in my heart, keep me pra - ying,— Give me peace in my heart, I
Give me joy in my heart, keep me prais-ing,— Give me joy in my heart, I
Give my oil in my lamp, keep me bur - ning,— Give me oil in my lamp, I
Give me peace in my heart, keep me re - sting,— Give me peace in my heart, I

Bass



Give me joy in my heart, keep me prais - ing, Give me joy in my heart, I
Give me peace in my heart, keep me pra - ying, Give me peace in my heart, I
Give me joy in my heart, keep me prais - ing, Give me joy in my heart, I
Give my oil in my lamp, keep me bur - ning, Give me oil in my lamp, I
Give me peace in my heart, keep me re - sting, Give me peace in my heart, I

Piano

