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CAGO Exam: Choral and Solo Repertoire

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CAGO EXAM: CHORAL AND SOLO REPERTOIRE

James W. Kosnik

MOZART: "Laudate Dominum," from *Vesperae solennes de confessorum*, K. 339 (composed in Salzburg, 1780)

In his book, *Classical Music: The Era of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven* (W.W. Norton), Philip G. Downs states, "This bel canto vocal melody, which has in it nothing of the virtuosic or the secular/operatic, is one of Mozart's miracles, for its shape is not dictated by text or by musical repetition." Using the Alfred (ed. Parker/Shaw) edition (LG 51165), the organist must establish a practice and performance strategy that takes several artistic factors into consideration.

Tempo. The "Andante ma un poco sostenuto" tempo indication is probably a 6/8 meter rather than compound duple. When I performed this work recently with the soprano soloist and choir at my church, we agreed on an eighth-note pulse between 104 and 112.

Texture delineation. The organist must discern the implicit textural scheme and prepare it accordingly. I suggest conveying a sense of three layers of texture using specific registrations to convey this layout:

A. A solo melody line played with the right hand on a separate manual. Since this melody often migrates to the tenor voice, the solo line can occasionally be played with the left hand while the right hand plays the arpeggiated accompaniment pattern.

B. The left hand arpeggiated figure played on a second manual with contrasting registration.

C. Mozart's bass line played with the pedals.

Registration. Consider using a solo 8' flute stop for the accompaniment melody in the right hand, perhaps on the Great. Consider a different 8' flute (softer) and/or 8' Gemshorn for the arpeggiated accompaniment pattern on a second manual (enclosed), such as the Swell. Consider coupling the Swell to the Great, so that you can convey subtle dynamic inflections as indicated in the edition. Use a 16' Subbass and an 8' Gedeckt for the Pedal. When the choir enters with the "Gloria Patri," add a 4' flute to the Swell and perhaps an additional 8' stop under expression.



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Score preparation. At m. 11, transfer the right hand from the solo manual to the accompaniment manual; then at mm. 15–16, let the left hand play the tenor voice for two measures on the Great while the right hand continues to play the arpeggiated material on the Swell. The right hand then returns to the Great (solo manual) from mm. 17–26. An important performance consideration occurs at mm. 27–29: the left-hand accompaniment must try to include the sustained tenor material whenever possible. This means that the continuity of the arpeggiated material takes precedence while the tenor voice material is incorporated into the left-hand pattern. In other words, the organist must decide whether or not to play all the written notes in the tenor. Remember: the arpeggiated accompanimental figuration must take precedence throughout the piece! A similar situation occurs at mm. 33–36; however, here it is even more difficult to play all of the sustained notes while maintaining the accompaniment pattern.

When the choir enters at m. 42, play the accompaniment in the right hand while soloing out the tenor voice. Switch hands beginning at m. 49, with the tenor G transferred to the accompaniment pattern and sustained. Beginning at m. 54, the left hand is on the solo (Great), while the right hand plays the arpeggiated pattern (Swell). Reverse hands at m. 63 with the right hand featured until m. 70.

Practice considerations.

A. Practice the left hand arpeggio figure alone; maintain a steady pulse using your metronome. Continue the left-hand pattern again beginning at mm. 17–24. Practice and maintain your left-hand accompaniment throughout the piece.

B. Add the Pedal now while playing the left-hand arpeggiated accompanimental figure.

C. Sing the vocal melody, or have your soprano soloist practice singing

the melody while you play the accompaniment pattern. Make a recording for study purposes, and check for problem places.

D. Use the same considerations for the choral “Gloria Patri.”

E. Now practice the right-hand melodic solo while playing the left-hand accompaniment and the Pedal; be sure to frequently review the alternating manuals material. This will give you confidence that you can accompany the piece on the organ with the soloist and the choir. The most important aspect is to keep the accompaniment going! Be rhythmic with a steady pulse; try to provide an artistic accompaniment to this “bel canto miracle.”

FAURÉ: “Pie Jesu”

Let’s try to transfer the pianistic style of the Masters Music Publications version found in *Four Sacred Songs* (M2960).

Tempo. A true “Adagio” needs to be maintained throughout this piece. Keep a strong, underlying pulse of quarter note = 48, with a supple and relaxed eighth note within the beat.

Texture delineation. The organist needs to take a different approach to texture from that of the “Laudate Dominum.” Mozart’s accompaniment conveyed the sense of three independent lines; the accompaniment for “Pie Jesu” is more homophonic. Notice that this edition occasionally has a five-part texture, which frequently returns to four voices. In my opinion, the “ideal” accompaniment is the transparent four-part texture beginning at mm. 2–7, with three voice parts on the manual and the bass played in the Pedal. A superb reference for our ideal texture is John Rutter’s edition of Fauré’s *Requiem* published by Hinshaw Music. Whenever possible, the organist needs to try to keep this “ideal” texture in mind. (Please refer to the next section, “Editorial considerations.”)

Editorial considerations. At the end of m. 7, Fauré composes a three-measure ritornello that “frames” the vocal phrase. Artistically, the ritornello conveys the sense of “paraphrased tintinnabulation” (beginning in mm. 8 and 9) and is heard throughout the movement. Here the piano-to-organ transfer issue is classic: what to do with all of the pianistic octave writing? Answer: try to omit doubled voices! (Again, take a look at the solution John Rutter provides in his edition.) Play the soprano D–F–D–C pattern while sustaining the interior alto A half-note in the right hand; consider eliminating the lower D–F–D–C pattern in the right hand because it is in the upper voice. This will help to maintain your legato technique. Play the tenor voice D–F–D–C and the half-note A in the left hand while the Pedal sustains the bass pitches. The legato technique takes precedence; therefore, consider eliminating doubled pitches (especially if you register this on soft 8’ and 4’ flutes). Continue your editorial revisions through m. 9; even simplify the eight-note chord in m. 10. Repeat this process for the ritornello at mm. 17–18. Another editorial consideration occurs with the expansion of the piano texture beginning at mm. 19–25. Practice two voices in each hand in a legato style. Eliminate the doubled bass voice (bass voice in octaves) to just one note (one 16’ sound is sufficient). At m. 23, consider playing the Pedal line B–C–D as a scalar pattern rather than leaping down a seventh from B to C. This is a terrific section to practice your finger substitution technique for all of the manual thirds and sixths!

Practice consideration. Try to practice and perform a smooth legato technique throughout the piece. Remember, you are playing a keyboard transcription of a beautiful orchestral accompaniment. Therefore, strive to maintain the orchestral effect (late 19th-century Romantic) throughout the piece. Notice in m. 5 the alto half-note F is played in the right hand; consider playing the alto E^b on the third beat with the left hand and also the alto F on beat four. The sharing of the inner voices between both hands is challenging; yet it is important for creating a good legato technique. The sharing of the inner voices between both hands also occurs throughout the difficult passages in sixths beginning at m. 27. When unable to use finger substitution, you may use the shared voice technique to maintain your legato sound.

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