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Elements of interpretation in the renaissance and baroque melodic line

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**Elements of interpretation in the Renaissance and Baroque
melodic line**

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San Jose State University, 1989

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ELEMENTS OF INTERPRETATION IN THE
RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE MELODIC LINE

A Master's Project Paper
Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Music
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Plan C

by
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August, 1989

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ABSTRACT

ELEMENTS OF INTERPRETATION IN THE RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE MELODIC LINE

by Robin A. HasBrouck

The purpose of this paper is to enable the choral conductor to gain an understanding of the musical concepts of Renaissance and Baroque line and then direct authentic music. Interpretation, accentuation, tempo, and articulation are discussed. Although the identifying qualities of both periods are distinct, both contain similarities. Elements such as ornamentation are similar while others, such as articulation, are different. Renaissance music flows within a steady pulse with the notes performed in a smooth manner. A steady pulse is also present in Baroque music but the notes are typically performed in a detached fashion.

J. S. Bach's "Der Herr Segne Euch," is used to demonstrate rehearsal methods and conducting techniques. The challenge of being able to perform this music in an authentic manner brings the conductor and the choir to a higher level of musical achievement and satisfaction.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It has been said that during times of great change mankind looks longingly to the past for stability and guidance; in one area of music, at least, this statement is certainly true, for the past two decades have witnessed a revitalized interest in Renaissance and Baroque music. Although the benefits from this revival are numerous and varied, from the point of view of the contemporary choral conductor, the study of the historical development and methods of early music most certainly leads to a solid foundation for all musical interpretation. Initially confusing and overwhelming, the complexities of Renaissance and Baroque interpretation, once grasped, help to clarify the subtle differences for the conductor. It is imperative that the conductor not only gain the understanding of the concepts and methods used during these periods but, that he/she be able to manifest this understanding through the music the choir performs. The purpose of this paper is to review some specific ideas/techniques for teaching choirs how to sing this music, applying these ideas to a song from a sacred cantata.

The hallmark of Renaissance and Baroque music lies in how the melodic line is performed. The line conveys the identifying qualities of the music to the listener and is formed by the relationship of the notes to the text. In

this paper, the writer will compare and contrast Renaissance and Baroque music, centering on these elements of the melodic line: ornamentation, interpretation (including: forward motion, suspension and resolution, messa di voce and diction), accentuation, tactus/tempo, and articulation.

CHAPTER 2

Types of Ornamentation Applied to the Renaissance and Baroque Line

The proper use of ornamentation is essential to the authentic performance of Renaissance and Baroque music. In this category, Renaissance and Baroque are very similar. Ornamentation highlights the mood and style of the song and creates greater rhythmic and melodic interest. Ornamentation is defined as "the modification of music, usually but not always through the addition of notes, to make it more beautiful, or effective, or to demonstrate the abilities of the interpreter"¹ and is limited only by the performer's "innate musicianship and sense of propriety."² "At their best they [the performers] regarded the composer's own text as a challenge to their inventiveness and resource, a basic canvas to be embellished here and there with variations"³ Since these musicians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries elaborated upon the written notes, today's conductor must be able to incorporate ornamentation in order to produce authentic music. As the placement and delivery of every ornament preserves and enhances the mood as well as the message, a challenge for the conductor, then, is to know not only what kinds of ornamentation may be applied to the line but also, where use of ornaments is obligatory. A list of basic guidelines in applying ornamentation to the line are:

1. Ornament at cadences.
2. Add no more than four or five diminution passages per part in one piece.
3. Ornaments should begin on penultimate syllables and end on the last syllable of words.
4. It is best to make diminutions on the vowel "o".
5. Only one part at a time should embellish.
6. Occasional interval-filling embellishments (other than at cadences) are acceptable.⁴

Ornamentation provided a significant bridge connecting the Baroque to the Renaissance period, for even though singers continued to improvise beyond the score, ornaments began to be specified by notational signs during the Baroque period. Ornamentation may be categorized into three groups: trills and diminutions which originated during the Renaissance and, from the Baroque, dynamics. Brief descriptions and examples, first from the Renaissance and then the Baroque, are presented below.

Group 1: The Trill

A trill is "an ornament consisting of more or less rapid alternation of a note with the one next above in the prevailing key or harmony."⁵ The speed of the trill helps to set the mood and message of the music. Variations of the trill include: mordents, gruppetti, vibrato, and tremolo.

Figure 1. Renaissance Trill (Woodhall, The Choral Journal, 1981, page 9)

The trill varies according to its length and whether or not it starts on the main note or an auxiliary note.

Figure 2. Baroque Trills (Randel, The New Harvard Dictionary of Music, page 870)

The cadential trill is considered obligatory (see guidelines, page 4).

A. The Mordent

A mordent (short trill) is a single or multiple alternation of the main note with its lower auxiliary. Execution of the mordent starts on either an upper or a lower note.

Figure 3. Baroque Mordent (Randel, page 509)

B. The Gruppetti

A gruppetti or gruppo is a trill ending in a mordent.

Figure 4. Gruppetti (Woodhall, The Choral Journal, page 9)

C. Vibrato and Tremolo

Vibrato consists of slight fluctuations of pitch used by performers in order to enrich the natural wave of a vocal tone, while tremolo refers to a rapid reiteration of sound on a single pitch. Vibrato and tremolo are controlled by the singer and are applied as special effects in accordance

with the mood of the text. The continuous use of vibrato is considered inappropriate as a straight tone is the norm.

Group 2: Diminutions

Diminutions are ". . . divisions of long note values into notes of shorter duration."⁶ These divisions are embellishments of the interval. Diminutions create elaborate passages by adding more notes to the melodic line.

Figure 5. Renaissance Diminutions (Randel, page 232)

Found in numerous varieties in the Renaissance, diminutions developed further and continued to be applied during the Baroque period.

Figure 6. Baroque Diminutions (Randel, page 232)

It was and is traditional to ornament one syllable of a word at a time; the most common place of embellishment is at the cadence.

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 7. Diminutions for Cadential Figures (Cooper, The Choral Journal, 1986, page 10)

While the diminutions occurred in both periods, it wasn't until the Baroque period that the appoggiatura, the turn, and the slide evolved.

A. The Appoggiatura

The appoggiatura is an important expressive dissonance in polyphonic choral repertory. Appoggiatura means "to lean" and is defined as a "dissonant pitch occurring in a strong metrical position and resolving by ascending or descending a half or whole step to a consonance in a relatively weaker metrical position."⁷ The appoggiatura, then, starts on the strong beat or part of the beat with a dissonant note and is resolved either by a whole or half step to the principal note.

Figure 8. The Appoggiatura (Randel, pages 44-45)

B. The Turn

Turns start on an upper note and continue in a stepwise descent of three notes before returning to the principal note thus, "turning around" on the main note.⁸ Turns can be found at the beginning or end of a note or a trill.

Figure 9. The Turn (Randel, page 885)

C. The Slide

The slide consists of "two notes ascending stepwise to the principal note and slurred to it."⁹

Figure 10. The Slide (Randel, pages 753-754)

Group 3: Dynamic Ornamentation

Dynamic contrasts (gradations of volume) were used to a greater degree during the Baroque period than in the Renaissance. Dynamic ornamentation includes terrace and

echo dynamics, the use of crescendo and diminuendo and, a wider range of volume levels. An increase and/or decrease in the number of singers produce terraced dynamics. Echo dynamics use contrasts such as the interplaying of different bodies of sound, for example: voices in contrast; instruments and voices in contrast; brasses and voices in contrast with strings and voices.¹⁰ Instrumental limits, with volume levels ranging from piano to forte, make choral dynamic extensions beyond the level of instrumentation inappropriate. Due to traditional practices other dynamic variations occur.

Most Baroque movements are understood to begin forte even if not so marked. Later contrasting sections are frequently marked or they may be interpreted as being softer. However, the change in dynamics does not mean a change in mood.¹¹

Notational signs help to differentiate Renaissance from Baroque music, as these allow a more precise description of the composer's intent. However, questioning and re-evaluating post-Baroque editorial markings is prudent as most marks are not the composer's nor do they signify his intent. Although, in the past, ornamentation was often overdone, today it is usually neglected completely. A definite prerequisite for ornamental interpretation is that careful consideration be given to both type and placement in modern performances of early music.

CHAPTER 3

Renaissance and Baroque Interpretation and Accentuation

Renaissance Interpretation

The horizontal direction of Renaissance polyphony is enhanced by the concept of forward motion (singing each note so as to lead or push to the next note of the phrase in the line). The energy and drive of this motion produces an arch-shaped phrase that begins softly, grows to a high point, then ends softly. Lacking the complex harmonic progressions of the Baroque period, Renaissance performers interpreted the polyphonic texture so as to reinforce the momentum and the shape of the line.

Other factors necessary for line interpretation are the recognition of points of suspension and resolution (tension and relaxation), and the technique of messa di voce. The use of suspension and resolution brings the lines together in such a way as to create harmonic dissonance then consonance, which helps to establish interest and adds to the perception of movement. Messa di voce serves a similar function but depends instead on the use of a subtle increase (crescendo) and then a decrease (decrescendo) in volume on one note of long duration. Forward motion may be enhanced using many notes or only one long note. The identification and application of these elements will aid in creating a Renaissance sound.

Baroque Interpretation

There are several similarities between Renaissance and Baroque line: both apply ornamentation and forward motion, maintain a constant pulse, and require clear expression of the text. The concept of forward motion is applicable to Baroque due to the consistent beat and the new harmonic structures (chord progression) within the music. As in the Renaissance, the beat serves as a foundation for the interpretation of Baroque line. The speed of the beat (tempo) is set according to the form of the music and the desired amount of textual expression. The term tactus (pulse) was no longer needed due to the further evolution of musical notation. Beginning in the seventeenth century words which indicate speed or mood, like adagio and allegro, were added to the score. "Every period has had its conventions of tempo expressed in combinations of meter and note-values."¹²

Diction

Diction, the clear enunciation of the word, is another essential ingredient of expression and interpretation and when properly applied, produces the power to move the emotions of the audience. Diction can be improved by placing greater stress on specific consonants. Incisive consonants, which clarify the word, and uniform vowels, which help set the mood of the music, insure that the meaning of the text will be understood by the listener.

"Enunciation of the words is inseparable from the production of the notes both in their sonority (coloring of the vowel) and in the articulation."¹⁴

Text and tonal expressions are also created through vowel modification. Every vowel must be uniformly shaped into a round, open quality. Forming consistent tone colors through vowel modification brings about beautiful, matched sonorities (tone quality) and also supports intonation.

"Not only must each note be heard, but each note must be sounded with its true intonation so that all will be intelligible to the listeners."¹⁵

An excellent over-all quality used for modifying vowels is the "uh" sound. The darker quality of the "uh" helps to shape the mouth, and open the throat which then unifies choral tones and creates the desired blend. Other examples of vowel modifications used in choral singing include forming: "ih" instead of the "ee" vowel, "aw" in place of "ah," and "eh" in place of the "ay" vowel. The unification of vowels and the application of stress to specific consonants supported by correct articulation is a technique which will not only clarify the text but transmit the meaning of the music to the audience.

Renaissance and Baroque Accentuation

Accentuations are distinguished by contrasts of note duration and pitch differentiation within the phrase. The three types of phrases accentuation--agogic, dynamic

(considered dynamic ornamentation during the Baroque period), and tonic--shape the contours of the line as particular notes at strategic points are stressed with varying degrees of intensity. By way of clarification, dynamic accentuation of the Renaissance differs from Baroque dynamic ornamentation in that volume is applied as suggested by the shape or curve of the polyphonic line. Because of the sectional structure of Baroque music, volume levels are tools of expression and are used differently. These three types of accentuation are applicable to both Renaissance and Baroque choral music.

Agogic Accentuation

Agogic accents are placed on notes of longer duration than their surrounding neighbors. These add contrast which enhance the forward motion and are essential to Renaissance line. Notes of longer duration must be vital and energetic and cannot remain static. Paul Salomonivich, in the April 11, 1989, workshop with the San Jose State University Choraliers, described the agogic accent as the technique of "activating the long notes."¹⁶ This is sometimes referred to as singing the long notes with "spin." Spin is difficult to define. It requires a certain resonance that enlivens and adds body to the tone of a note. The agogic accent adds intensity to longer notes but is not a real crescendo. It is similar to a crescendo in that a change in volume is

heard but, in the agogic accent, the end of the note is usually softer.

Dynamic Accentuation

Dynamic accentuation is the application of varying degrees of volume which, when placed in the line, clarify the text and mood of a piece and enhances forward motion of the line. "An accent is dynamic if the pitch or chord is louder than its surroundings."¹⁷ Both the degree of volume and the change in volume help to create direction in music. Although, characteristically, Renaissance music made use of a limited range of dynamic levels, some variation in volume is available to the conductor. Increases often occur naturally at the highest note in a phrase. The interplay between voices (polyphony) helps to determine the amount of dynamic accentuation thus allowing contrast throughout a work. One voice enters as other voices develop, imitate and/or rest. Careful planning and execution are required in order to insure that the subtle changes of volume take place within the long, arch-like lines of polyphony.

Tonic Accentuation

As in dynamic accentuation, tonic accentuation depends upon the curve of the line. Tonic accents occur on the highest (or lowest) note in a given phrase and are performed with greater stress than their neighboring notes. Pitch levels within the line identify which tones require more intensity. The arch-like curve is most common although

other shapes may occur. Often, following a tonic accentuation, a relaxation or a lessening of intensity occurs.

CHAPTER 4

Tactus and Tempo

Renaissance Tactus

The fundamental rhythmic unit upon which Renaissance music was constructed is the "tactus" which serves not only as the foundation upon which the line functions but also sets the standard of performance. The tactus, defined as "the basic unit of musical time,"¹⁸ is known today as the "beat" of the music and was related to the rate of normal human breathing. This unit consists of both a downbeat and an upbeat (usually expressed by one half note) and contains two or three quarter notes ranging from either as many as sixty to eighty pulses per minute to as slow as forty-eight to sixty pulses per minute. This range of speed was set by the theorists of the time. The tactus can vary at specific points according to changes in the proportions or temporal durations of the notes. Proportions are ratios "expressing the relationship between the note values of a work or passage and an assumed normal relationship of note-values" based upon the tactus.¹⁹ The tactus may be altered to include "a gentle rallentando at the end of each piece."²⁰ The tactus, then, is based upon the concept of a fundamental yet proportionally variable unit of time that is determined, not only by the temporal durations of the notes, but by the way they are manipulated by the composer.

Baroque Tempo

The tempo (speed of the music) affects the expression of the text and contributes to setting the mood of the music. As in the Renaissance, Baroque music generally maintains a strict, unchanging tempo but allows variation in its recitatives, vocal monody, and final cadences. Although no absolute rules can be found regarding the tempo of a work, guidelines are available. C.P.E. Bach described tempo in terms of types of articulation stating ". . . the liveliness of allegros is conveyed by detached notes, and the expressiveness of adagios by sustained [notes] . . ." ²¹ The degree of space required between notes dictate a faster tempo. A moderate tempo is suitable when numerous short notes, leaps, and arpeggios form the vocal line. Longer note values usually connote a legato style of singing. These factors, as well as those listed below, contribute to the determination of an appropriate tempo:

1. the acoustical parameters of the performance area,
2. the character and text of the music,
3. identification of the fastest note values in the score,
4. the abilities of the musicians. ²²

Experimentation with varying degrees of speed during the choral rehearsal will clarify for the conductor which tempo will produce the desired results for an authentic interpretation.

CHAPTER 5

Renaissance and Baroque Articulation

The key to understanding what type of interpretation is correct is the knowledge of how notes are sung in different types of songs. Articulation refers to how notes are attacked as well as the length of separation between notes or groups of notes in a phrase. Articulations encompass a wide range of variation, from a total absence of note separation, as in a legato style, to a considerable amount of separation, as in a détaché style. "The realization, in performance, of the phrase structure [a unit of musical syntax, defined by melodic contour and rhythmic pattern] is largely a function of the performer's articulation."²³

One essential type of articulation used almost exclusively in Renaissance music is the legato (smooth and connected) style. Legato articulation enables the long polyphonic lines to flow, intertwine, and develop. Exceptions to a legato interpretation depends upon the acoustics of the performance room. In order to prevent the lines and words from becoming garbled in a large resonant room, a slight separation between the notes is necessary. The overall feeling should remain legato.

An essential difference between the two periods is that the music of the Renaissance is performed in legato style while Baroque is performed by using détaché articulation (notes performed with separation). Notes in a phrase were

executed in a full but disconnected manner. The *detaché* technique is also described as a "hit-fade" type of attack, which means to begin the tone with force and then start an immediate decay. Robert Donington described the line as a "shapely stream of sound that can indeed be interrupted but not disrupted," a technique copied from the instrumentalists of the day.²⁴ Donington states:

The silence of articulation is an almost universal necessity . . . it must be employed in countless situations where it would not naturally occur to a modern interpreter . . . a slight silence . . . may occur between every two notes . . . it is less articulate than the staccato, but more so than the legato, and it must be consciously cultivated for Baroque music.²⁵

Other features integral to Baroque articulation are described as: "clear articulatory silences, non-legato singing, varieties of patterns in unequal notes, use of vivid slurs, motivial and figural grouping by articulation, word stress, [and] agogic accents."²⁶

Interpreters are well-advised to consider and apply the ideas of Quantz, L. Mozart, and C.P.E. Bach. The correlation between instrumental phraseology and the singer's inclination to perform in the same style is an essential clue to how the melodic line ought to sound. The premise that singers followed conventions consistent with instrumentalists in certain aspects of performance is convincing.

In cases where instruments were not doubling the choral lines, singers could hardly be expected to listen to deft, interesting patterns of tongued and slurred notes

in [the] flute or oboe without being influenced when the same passage appeared in the vocal lines a few measures later.²⁷

The distinct, well-planned articulation clarifies the words in the text and projects the message and mood. "Christians, be joyful" from J.S. Bach's "Weihnacht Oratorium" or "Christmas Oratorio," is a good example of space and silence composed in the line leading to the necessary *detaché* articulation.

"No two notes running should necessarily be given quite the same degree or manner of separation."²⁸ The degree of silence created clarity and translucence within the desired aerated texture. A vital, robust, yet translucent sound is intrinsic to Baroque music.

33

Soprano

Alto

Tenore

Basso

Viol. 4r

Ob. 4r

Fl. 4r

Va.

Timp.

Figure 11. "Christians, be joyful" from J.S. Bach.
 "Weihnacht Oratorium:" Silence of Articulation (Durr
 [arr.], 1963, page 2, measure 33)

The Slur

Contrasting with *detache*, the slur indicates that notes are performed in a legato style, represented by a curved line above or below two or more different pitches, connecting a single syllable and producing a distinctive

sound. Groups of notes are slurred and often placed within an otherwise detached texture. It is important to distinguish the slur from the tie as the tie connects notes of the same pitch. Quantz advised, "one must be careful not to slur notes which ought to be detached, and not to detach [notes] which ought to be slurred."²⁹ In the last measures of "Christians, be joyful" of J.S. Bach's *Weihnacht Oratorium*, the notated slur is evident. Here, the alto voice is notated with slurs and contrasts with the other voices composed with a *detaché* articulation in mind.

197

ren, laßt uns den Na - men des Herr - schers ver - eh-ren!

ren, laßt uns den Na - men des Herr - schers ver - eh-ren!

ren, laßt uns den Na - men des Herr - schers ver - eh-ren!

ren, laßt uns den Na - men des Herr - schers ver - eh-ren!

Da capo

Figure 12. The Slur. "Christians, be joyful" from J.S. Bach's Weihnachts Oratorium (Durr, page 13, measure 197)

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: "Der Herr Segne Euch,"

A Practical Example for the

High School Conductor

In this concluding chapter, a Baroque song "Der Herr Segne Euch" (The Lord Bless You), from the sacred cantata "Der Herr denket an uns," composed by J.S. Bach, will be presented as an example of what the high school choral director can do in order for this music to sound authentic. This duet is an excellent choice in which to begin the journey into performing early music, as it may be performed by any combination of high and low voices: Soprano-Alto; Soprano-Bass; Tenor-Alto; Tenor-Bass. Some of the elements presented in this paper and conducting ideas are applied to "Der Herr Segne Euch." Included are conducting gestures and rehearsal and performance ideas, enabling the conductor to teach Baroque choral music with validity. Development of an authentic performance requires not only the knowledge and creativity of the conductor, but, also, a flexible and well-rehearsed choir.

One aspect most perplexing for the conductor is how to teach ornamentation. One workable solution to this problem of how to ornament is first writing out the specific ornament desired in the score, and then preparing the introduction of ornamentation to the choir. A characteristic ornament, the trill, is a good place to begin

adding ornaments. Study the score and circle all cadences. Vocal trills should be added at all cadences; that is a requirement of Baroque music. The conductor should write in the music, the exact notes to be sung in the trill, then rehearse the entire choir singing just that trill, until it is comfortable for the singers and it sounds correct. Then, add the other voice and sing both trills together.

The first instance in "Der Herr Segne Euch" for adding a trill is measure fourteen. The trill is sung at the same time by both the high and low voices. Trills, in this case, ought to be performed on the beat and accented from the upper (auxiliary) note.

4

bless you, the Lord bless you, yea, now, yea, now and ev - er -
seg - ne euch, der Herr seg - ne euch je mehr und mehr, je mehr und

the Lord bless you, yea, now and ev - er - more, for - ev - er -
der Herr seg - ne euch je mehr und mehr, je mehr, je mehr und

more.
mehr.

more.
mehr.

Man.

Figure 13. J.S. Bach's "Der Herr Segne Euch" (Concordia Publisher, page 4, measure 4)

Another appropriate place for a trill is measure sixty-three.

The image displays a musical score for J.S. Bach's "Der Herr Segne Euch." It consists of three staves. The top two staves are vocal parts with lyrics in English and German. The bottom staff is a keyboard accompaniment. The lyrics are: "you and your chil - dren." and "euch und eure Kin - der." The music is in G major, 3/4 time. The trill is indicated by a trill symbol (a vertical line with two dots) over the final note of the phrase, which is a G4. The trill is performed on the right hand of the keyboard.

Figure 14. J.S. Bach's "Der Herr Segne Euch," trill at cadence, page 6, measure 54

Also, the conductor should search out places where other ornaments (such as a mordent or appoggiatura) may fit. The application of a mordent at the last phrase fits very well, as it is a short trill with a lower neighbor, and will enhance the word, "segne" or "bless."

Figure 15. J.S. Bach's "Der Herr Segne Euch," use of a mordent, page 7, measure 71

Be sure to practice each ornament with the full choir before adding any to the line. One technique this writer found helpful is to tell the singers to shake their heads slightly, when each trill or mordent arrives. This has a freeing effect upon the voice and reminds all members exactly where the ornament belongs. The high school conductor and choir will experience satisfaction in reaching this goal of correct ornamentation.

Another example of how to ornament is to make use of the dynamic contrasts built into the music, as well as directing the crescendo and diminuendo at appropriate points in the phrase. The dynamic parameters ought to be from

piano to forte, utilizing this full range in order to enhance the energy and mood of the song. The use of echo dynamics, on bottom of page four, exemplifies the possibilities of volume contrasts. The low voice enters first, then the high voice, creating an echo effect. These short motives begin with a rest, allowing the other voice to enter and be heard, and creating an opportunity for the important word "segne" or bless, to receive more intensity.

The phrase "je mehr und mehr" or "yea more and more" is an excellent place for conducting a crescendo. This phrase, occurring several times throughout the song, should begin softly, grow to a high point and then as the phrase ends, diminuendo. The bottom of page five and top of page six is another good example of the line requiring a crescendo. When conducting this rather long crescendo, start with the left hand low, at waist level, and slowly with intensity, maintaining a steady pulse, raise the hand in a circular motion to the highest point of desired volume. Then, turn the hand over and continuing the circle, bring it back to the low starting position.

bless you, for - ev - er - more, yea, now and ev - er - more, yea, now and ev - er -
 seg - ne euch je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr, je mehr und

yea, now and ev - er - more, yea, now and ev - er - more, yea, now and ev - er -
 je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr, je

more, for - ev - er - more, yea, now, yea, now and ev - er - more,
 mehr, je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr,

more, for - ev - er - more, yea, now, yea, now and ev - er - more,
 mehr und mehr, je mehr, je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr,

Man.

98-1474

Figure 16. J.S. Bach's "Der Herr Segne Euch," Applying a crescendo, page 5, measures 36-44

With practice the choir will respond to whatever degree of volume the conductor has deemed appropriate. These ideas

present a place to begin and the choir will be curious and excited at the possibility of ornamenting the score.

The conductor's ability to interpret the text and line is achieved first, by reading the text aloud, in order to determine the meaningful words which clarify the message and mood. The first priority when singing in a foreign language is to translate the text. The conductor must understand each word so as to make the correct decisions about the stress and intensity of the word accent. In "Der Herr Segne Euch," the most important word to be emphasized is "segne." Because producing greater intensity on particular words or phrases builds excitement, the conductor must decide when and how much intensity should be applied to a syllable, word or phrase, and then, indicate to the singers the amount of intensity by gesture and by the size of the beat pattern. In the opening phrase a small gesture on beats two and three and a larger, stronger gesture on the downbeat will direct the singers to give more emphasis to the significant word, "segne."

Interpreting early music to the choir must include analogies which relate to the mood and meaning of the song. In "Der Herr Segne Euch" suggestions such as "sing with religious conviction and fervor," and "exude spirituality, joyfulness, thankfulness and love of children" instill the right musical attitude. These ideas and others listed in the addendum, as well as each conductor's, will set the mood

and create interest for the choir so that the music transmits the authentic feeling to the audience.

Accentuation illuminates these interpretive ideas because the points of intensity in the line are highlighted. Studying the line and its development shows the conductor these areas requiring a type of accentuation. As noted previously in this paper, manipulating dynamic contrasts is considered either ornamentation or accentuation. The size and style of the beat pattern shown in the right hand directs the singers how and where to alter intensity. The left hand can also indicate the progression of the tone's activity.

A variation of a tonic accent, whether at the beginning, middle, or end of a phrase, is to sing the highest note softer rather than louder as is typical, thus creating a delicate sound. This interpretation may work well at the entrance of the high voice on page five, measure 33.

The Lord bless you, the Lord
Der Herr seg - ne euch, der Herr

for-ev-er-more, for-ev-er-more,
je mehr und mehr, je mehr und mehr,

Ped.

Figure 17. J.S. Bach's "Der Herr Segne Euch," a tonic accent, page 5, measure 33

The ability on the part of the conductor to interpret the music, add ornamentation and/or accentuation is a significant part of the whole in working to build the appropriate sound of Baroque music. However, without the proper choice of the tempo all these elements are weakened. A steady, consistent pulse is mandatory. There should be no ritards or accelerandos. This music was composed with an absolutely unchanging pulse and must be performed so. The tempo is determined by several factors. First, the mood of the piece in "Der Herr Segne Euch" is brought out by a medium fast speed. The second important variable is the acoustical characteristics of the performance room. If, for

example, the room resonates acoustically, a slower beat is preferred, so that the notes and words do not become muddled. A room lacking acoustical ring requires a faster tempo, thus insuring the clarity of the text and the transmission of the mood. The third and probably most influential factor is that the conductor, choir, and accompanist must all internalize the same beat. An appropriate speed can be discovered by experimenting with speed during the rehearsal taking into account these other factors. This writer experimented with metronome markings of eighty to one hundred and chose the quarter note to equal eighty-eight due to the performance room.

As the conductor works through the elements of style, an important identifying quality which unites these concepts and techniques is the type of articulation applied to each note. A detached style is the hallmark of a Baroque sound. The performers must use space, silence and the "hit-fade" attack in order to achieve a *detaché* articulation. There should be no legato articulation. In "Der Herr Segne Euch" the notes are short--eighth or quarter--matching the syllables of the text.

The conductor can introduce this style of articulation by directing the choir to sing each phrase in an exaggerated staccato fashion and then add more length and fullness to the notes but maintain detachment. Conducting in a *detaché* style requires the beat pattern to be small in

scale and show little rebound. This gesture reminds the performers that the music is detached and keeps them from falling into the more familiar type of legato articulation.

With this background, it is possible to perform music from the Renaissance and Baroque and be true to the spirit of the music if the conductor applies specific qualities to the carefully prepared score: ornamentation, accentuation, tempo and articulation. These qualities help to build a solid foundation from which many exciting interpretations may arise. They are the stepping stones to a quality performance and to great satisfaction not only for the conductor and choir, but most importantly for the audience.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS IN
PREPARING FOR A GRADUATE RECITAL

Appendix A
Problems and Solutions in
Preparing for a Graduate Recital

There are numerous musical problems throughout the rehearsals leading up to a performance. In last-minute preparations before a concert, choosing specific problems and concentrating on them will enable the performers to grasp the essence of the music. Below are several problems and possible solutions which this writer found successful in preparing for a graduate recital.

1. Problem: Establishing the tempo at the start.
Solution: Conduct two bars in a very small pattern and count the beats silently for the choir before beginning each song.
2. Problem: Lack of expression in the singers' faces.
Solution: Constantly remind the singers with the following words or phrases: "look like the music," "bright eyes," "smile" (when appropriate), "show the emotion of the song in your face," "feel the music and the words," "look confident (even if you do not feel confident)", "be thrilled by the text," "show the mood of the text in your expression," "become the music," "look the part," "expressive face," "convince me that

you mean it," "tell the story," and "reflect your love of music in your face."

3. Problem: No ornamentation in the score or the singers' experience.

Solution: Write out specific ornaments. Practice singing them together. Mark in the score what notes are changed. Listen to examples from recordings or guest singers.

4. Problem: Lack of forward motion or "pull" in the line.

Solution: "Lean" on all suspensions. Know where in the score points of harmonic arrival and imitation occur. Use imagery such as: the feeling of one note piling up, and pushing the next note off the page; because of the drive and desire to get to the next note. Every note and every phrase must "spin" and have energy. Notes should be light and airy, according to the style. The conductor shows the "spin" needed by using a circling motion with the left hand while the right hand maintains the beat. Tell the singers to picture skipping tones (stones) on the water, thus illustrating the forward motion in a line of music. Insist on keeping the quarter note constant. Singers can tap either themselves, their music, or the person's

shoulder next to them thus, physically keeping the tactus absolutely constant. De-emphasize the "little words," and lean on the nouns, verbs, and adjectives, so the important words are stressed. An excellent device to sense the pulse and mood of a song in rehearsal is to gently sway as in a dance, while singing, without moving or walking. As a general rule, start each phrase softly, allowing for growth in intensity and dynamics as the phrase develops. The conductor must show through her gestures where the line is going and the singers must have each arch marked in their scores.

5. Problem: Conducting the correct accentuation in Baroque music.

Solution: First, be sure to have an equal balance of voices and instruments. Before the song begins in rehearsal, speak aloud the key words to be accented in the phrase. In "Der Herr Segne Euch," conducting the music calls for a pattern of $3/4$ time where the second and third beats are shown by small beats and beat one of the next measure is a big gesture. "Feel it in one," instead of $3/4$, this way the accentuation occurs in the

correct place. Show a bigger gesture on the precise word which illuminates the text. Place more emphasis and stress on that particular beat in the pattern, even to the point of exaggeration. Show the phrase in the hand by varying the size of the beat. Use "impulse of will" as to when and how to sing each word and phrase. Tell singers to "explode all consonants" when appropriate. Conducting the *detache* style requires the conductor to show little rebound throughout the beat pattern. This enables the singer to perform each note with the space required for this style. The conductor must be dramatic, and insist that the choir respond in accordance to the gesture and facial expression of the conductor.

6. Problem: Singers are "buried" in their scores.

Solution: The conductor must be vigilant concerning the amount of eye contact with the singers. Continually say to them: "look up," "eyes," "watch closely." Always insist that all eyes are up for the cues and cut-offs. Stop immediately and start again until singers are trained to look up for all important areas in the music. Singers must hold the music up,

so that the transition between the score and the conductor is limited, smooth, and easy. Singers should look down just to remind themselves where they are and then look up throughout the entire song. Only with close eye contact can the style be communicated from the conductor to the singer and then most importantly to the audience.

7. Problem: Lack of vowel uniformity.

Solution: Use the information on vowel modification presented in this paper. Every vowel must be modified in choral singing. Use the "uh" sound for every vowel. This helps to insure the darker, richer quality necessary for a beautiful blend. Constantly remind the singers to "drop the jaw," "open the throat," and "yawn" for an open relaxed sensation, "feel the tones in their eyes," use the "kiss position," "do not spread lips." "Always work for the beauty of the vowel." "Make sounds to be proud of." In rehearsal, ask the singers to lightly place their fingers in their cheeks while singing and a rounder, warmer tone will result. When a "bad vowel" is sung the conductor must stop immediately. Point out this "bad vowel" to the singers and

work on adjusting the mouth shape or imagery needed to improve the sound of the vowel. The conductor shows the shape of the vowel desired on her lips. Emphasize the necessity of a good breath before each entrance. The conductor must always breathe with the singers.

8. Problem: Lack of singers' involvement with the text.

Solution: The conductor must choose carefully descriptive words which reflect the mood of each piece. Make a list of possibilities such as: "full and serene, melancholy, heartfelt, mournful, severe, lovely, somber and sad, dance-like, ethereal, lively, reflective, dream-like, joyful, exuberant, dignified, with a fervent spirit, frivolously, passionately, intimately, with brilliance, quietly, like a lullaby, feeling dejection and loss, with vitality and energy, with conviction, etc.

In every rehearsal the conductor should present one mood for each song. Below are the titles of the songs and some of the words and/or phrases this conductor used during rehearsals before the recital:

English carol, This Endris Night: a joyous birth, a dream-like effect, tell the story of the baby, be happy.

- Isaac, Innsbruck now I must leave thee: love of country, passion, one phrase one breath, totally dejected, sound sad and ready to cry, sorrowful, more dramatic, leaving your homeland.
- Sermisy, Amours Partes: anger, vehemence, intensity, then at the repeat: resigned, soft yet intense.
- Wilbye, Away, Thou Shalt not Love Me: Sassy, lively, heartfelt over wrong intention, intimate yet with spirit.
- Hassler, All Joy and Mirth: as a jester, happy, exuberant, a dance, joyful, and think in two-bar phrases.
- Byrd, Non Nobis Domine: reverent, roll all R's, spin every note, reflective, spiritual, "activate the long notes," arch-like phrases, pull the line, feel the inner pulse.
- Lotti, Mass in B flat: religious fervor, conviction, rapture, love of God, holy, heartfelt, at peace, warm spirit, spirituality, use "English boy choir sound," imitate the tension and release of pulling a rubber band.
- Bach, Der Herr Segne Euch: be convincing, more positive, Christian fervor, conviction, show excitement and energy, this music has wings, lighter, dignity, religious spirit, dance-like (in one), joyful, a blessing for children, precise.

Sister M. Elaine (arr.), Al Nino Jesu: as if you're dancing
in long black skirts, swaying to the music, a
lullaby, "come and see the baby," roll all R's.

Folk song, Tis a Gift to be Simple: thankful, reflective
yet with joy, with spirit, with simplicity, full,
serene, light, pure.

Zannelli (arr.), The Water is Wide: sensitive, melancholy,
with dignity, passion with restraint, smooth yet
distinct flow, tell the story.

Copland, At the River: start strongly, religious fervor,
with great dignity.

Copland, Ching-a-ring Chaw: tell the minstrel's story,
dramatic, with energy, be joyous: pianist must
accent downbeat and left hand.

All music must sound spontaneous. With the intensity of
word symbolism, the mood and message of the text will be
transmitted to the audience. This is the essence of making
music, to enrich the audience as well as the performers'
lives by the beauty of the music being performed.

APPENDIX B
A SAMPLE LETTER WRITTEN TO
THE PERFORMERS IN A GRADUATE RECITAL

Appendix B

A Sample Letter Written to
the Performers in a Graduate Recital

Dear Singers and Instrumentalists,

I want to thank each of you for your time, talent, and willingness to participate in my Graduate recital. We have worked so hard, and now it is time to enjoy the music, and bring each song to life! Let's make music together with vitality, energy and a great sense of drama! You must be thrilled by each text, each mood and communicate that excitement to our audience. Make sounds you'll be proud of. Every vowel, dark and round and every consonant so clear and together--because we are looking at one another! Breathe together. Listen to each other and blend. The beauty of the vowel and the message of every song is most important. YOU ARE READY. BE POSITIVE. Watch me ("Look Up"), and SMILE!! Remember, our first and foremost goal is to now, enrich the audience's lives, by being so convinced (personally) of the beauty of the music that we are performing, that they are moved also.

I believe we are all in for a very special night of making music together. Thank-you and above all . . . ENJOY YOURSELF!!

NOTES

NOTES

¹Don Randel, The New Harvard Dictionary of Music, (2nd ed.) (Cambridge, Mass: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 594.

²Robert Donington, A Performer's Guide to Baroque Music (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 163.

³Thurston Dart, The Interpretation of Music (New York: Harper and Row, Inc., 1963), 59.

⁴Dennis Woodhall, "Some Guidelines for the Modern Choral Conductor," The Choral Journal, XIII (Oct. 1981), 11.

⁵Randel, op. cit., 869.

⁶Craig Tolin, "An Outline of Performance Practices in Late Fifteenth- and Early Sixteenth-Century Sacred Choral Music," The Choral Journal, XXIII, 3, (1986), 6.

⁷Randel, op. cit., 4.

⁸Ibid., 885.

⁹Ibid., 753.

¹⁰Paul F. Roe, Choral Music Education (2nd ed.) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983), 292.

¹¹Ray Robinson and Allen Winold, The Choral Experience (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 413.

¹²Randel, op. cit., 839.

¹³Ibid., 16.

¹⁴Donington, op. cit., 68.

¹⁵Don Moses, "Articulation in Late Baroque Choral Music," The Choral Journal, XXVII, (1987), 19.

¹⁶Paul Salomonivich, San Jose State University Choralier Workshop (April, 1988).

¹⁷Randel, op. cit., 3.

¹⁸Robinson, op. cit., 362.

¹⁹Randel, op. cit., 660.

²⁰Robinson, op. cit., 360-361.

²¹Donington, op. cit., 285.

²²Robinson, op. cit., 408.

²³Randel, op. cit., 629.

²⁴Donington, op. cit., 67.

²⁵Moses, op. cit., 19.

²⁶Ibid., 23.

²⁷Ibid., 17.

²⁸Randel, op. cit., 17.

²⁹Donington, op. cit., 285.

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