

## HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN ORCHESTRA OR ENSEMBLE ARRANGEMENTS

*I would like to share with you how I have written orchestrations for several hymns with little training in composition. An experienced composer would certainly find ways to improve upon what I have done, but we have enjoyed playing these pieces and to us they are uplifting and beautiful. I hope this will help you get started...*

1. Find a **choral arrangement of a hymn** that has a full, rich accompaniment and good variety in the composition. Also, it should have full four part choral harmony (and even more parts are better...i.e. SSAATTBB)
2. Play through the piece until you are familiar with it and begin to hear ways you can adapt it to the instruments you have in your ward.
  - a. For instance, hymns are usually arranged with an introduction, followed by several verses of the song with interludes between each verse. Each verse is varied from the previous one. This is done by having only men or only women sing, by singing in unison, or by singing in full SATB chorus, etc.
  - b. You can take a cue from these choir parts. Where just the men sing the melody, perhaps just the cellos could play the melody.
  - c. On another verse where it is usually sung by two-part women, perhaps the oboe could play the melody and a clarinet or saxophone could play the alto part. Or this would be a nice place for flutes to play several parts. Perhaps the strings could play a soft two-part obligato part in the upper ranges.
  - d. I usually have the piano and organ and harp play the accompaniment throughout the song. Sometimes the organ plays just the SATB parts to vary it from the piano part....Sometimes just the harp plays the accompaniment during the intro or a specific verse. Likewise the piano and organ can take turns playing for variety.
  - e. In the SATB verses the full orchestra could play all the parts. The Cellos and Bass could play the bass and tenor parts. Flutes, oboe, and clarinet/sax could play womens parts with violins playing a higher obligato. OR look in the accompaniment—there may be counter melodies and variations that some of the instruments could play to add depth and variety. (One of the most powerful parts of the piece can be when ALL instruments are playing in unison with the accompaniment by organ, piano, and harp....)
  - f. If you are not familiar with what range each instrument plays, call your musicians and they will tell you. Remember some instruments are B-flat or E-flat instruments. Have your musicians tell you how to adjust for these parts. (see item m. below)
  - g. I have had to rewrite parts when I heard all of them play together for the first time. Some adjustments may need to be made to accommodate louder or softer instruments. For instance, you may need to mike the harp so it can be heard when playing with the group....or have just one flute play instead of all of them in a softer section. The saxophone may need a mute or you may need to open the piano lid in order to hear it, etc.
  - h. The woodwinds and flutes are louder instruments and I had to remember this when I wrote their parts. They cannot play a harmony part with a softer instrument playing the melody....
  - i. Introductions can be simple—One or two flutes or harp or violins playing along with the piano and/or organ. Use your imagination!
  - j. When you first begin to play through the piece to get ideas of how to orchestrate it, pencil in which instruments play which line on your music. Then write out each instrument part on separate staff paper.
  - k. Keep the original for yourself and make copies to distribute to the players.
  - l. Remember that you do not want to limit membership in this ensemble for the sake of the music. It is

important to accept everyone and then adjust their part to them.

m. Here is an approximate rule of thumb when assigning choir parts to instruments:

I Violin: soprano or obligato (higher part)

II violin: alto, soprano, or obligato part

Viola: alto and tenor part (Their part is written on a C clef, where the middle line is middle C—this will stretch your brain power!....)

Cello: tenor or bass (if you have no bass player) (Use pizzicato in passages where you want a light touch.)

Bass: bass or super bass

Oboe: alto (above middle C) and soprano (Usually the melody line)

Clarinet: alto (above middle C) or soprano (This is a B-flat instrument. ie. If the piece is in the key of C, their part is written in the Key of B flat, with all notes one full step lower than the C instruments)

Alto Saxophone: alto (above middle C) and soprano (This is an E-flat instrument. ie. If the piece is written in the key of C, their part is written in the Key of A, a full step and a half lower.) Do not ask me why this is the way it is.....

Flute: alto, soprano, and obligato

Harp: piano part---add a glissando where appropriate....

Organ: plays the piano score. It can play the SATB parts to vary it from the accompaniment, or just chord the song.

Piano: of course uses the piano score.

Following on this website, are orchestral arrangements of 4 hymns, with sheet music for each instrument:

1. Oh How Lovely Was the Morning
2. Abide With Me
3. Away in a Manger
4. Silent Night

Preceding each set of sheet music is a cover sheet with instructions on which choral music must be purchased for piano and organ accompaniment, as well as helpful notes regarding the orchestration.