

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

PERFORMANCE NOTES

THE GATHERING

Ideally the atmosphere of the church should be still and reflective, so plan to finish rehearsing half an hour before the service starts. If possible have subdued lighting but make sure the choir and congregation can see their music or service sheets.

The whole service should not be rushed. There should be time between the various sections for contemplation although some parts of the service could follow on immediately to reflect the more dramatic sequence of events.

Encourage the choir to stand as the ministers enter.

Trisagion I

This could be sung by one voice, possibly out of sight to the congregation. The repeat could be sung by the same voice or another voice in another part of the church.

The organ music should start before the prayer is read. The reader should speak slowly over the top of the music. It does not matter if the reader finishes before the organ. This should be practised in advance to check balance between the organ and the reader.

If the music is being played on a piano or keyboard the LH notes should be struck every two bars.

Hymn: This is the night

The Highwood tune may not be known by everyone, in which case it may be advisable to start with unison choir alone on the first verse with the congregation joining in on verse 2.

I – JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Response

Encourage the choir to give a strong lead in the spoken parts of the service.

Psalm 69

This could be sung by choir alone or with the congregation or by a small group of singers either in unison or in harmony. This needs to be sung expressively without hurrying. Vary the dynamic of the verses to achieve contrast.

Psalm 130: Out of the direst depths

This hymn would be effective sung unaccompanied or with instruments such as a string quartet or wind instruments. Encourage singers to sing two lines in one breath in verses 1 and 4.

Psalm 69: When the waters cover me

The cello part is not obligatory although its use will greatly add to the performance. Other solo instruments could be used as appropriate although the part would need to be written out for them at a convenient pitch.

The choir should breathe at the commas, the sopranos waiting to end the last note of the phrase at the same time as the lower parts. The last crotchet of the alto, tenor and bass

parts should be shortened to a quaver to allow the last consonant to be placed, e.g. in bars 12, 14, 18, 22.

Notice that this piece is to be sung strongly- *mf* for verse 1 and *f* for verse 2, although care should be taken to ensure that the choir does not dominate the cello/solo instrument.

The solo instrument could be used at other times in the service to provide moments of reflection or introductions.

Trisagion 2

With the entire choir singing in unison it is important that no voices dominate and that the pitching of notes is unanimous particularly on repeated notes.

II – PETER DENIES JESUS

Hymn: Drop, drop slow tears

This could be sung unaccompanied, possibly with a solo soprano in verse 2 accompanied by humming in the lower parts.

Trisagion 3

The organ should sound the initial chord first with the men entering over the chord.

III – JESUS BEFORE PILATE

Anthem: It is a thing most wonderful (Moger)

The melody should always be legato and expressive. A solo alto voice would suit the first verse (why should sopranos get all the solos?!). In the harmony section on page 54, basses should take care not to force the sound on the high notes even if the word is 'nails'. The words to this anthem are very positive and optimistic and they must be heard and given the colour they deserve, particularly 'wonderful', 'love' and 'flame'.

In the last verse, the descant must not dominate the melody.

Encourage singers to stay motionless until the very end of the piece.

Anthem: It is a thing most wonderful (Moore)

Singers should not be phased by the time changes but feel the melody rather like plainsong or recitative. The unison singing in the outer sections should be light and flowing with accurate pitching and clear expressive words. Encourage singers to observe the dynamics.

The central section needs a strong soprano who will be heard above the choir on page 61. Rhythmic accuracy is also very important here.

Trisagion 4

A quiet chord should be sounded on the organ to give the singers their notes.

IV – JESUS IS LED OUT TO BE CRUCIFIED

Hymn: Take up thy cross

This hymn increases in strength from the beginning until the end. Try reflecting this by increasing the dynamic in each verse, culminating in a bright and well-focussed descant.

Anthem: Take up your cross (Corp)

This setting is more reflective than the hymn, but should be sung with the same commitment and intensity. The verses could be an opportunity for a tenor or bass solo. A piano, harp or guitar with solo instrument accompaniment would work well to provide contrast.

Trisagion 5

The congregational melody should also be sung sufficient sopranos so the congregation can hear them and join in confidently.

V – JESUS IS CRUCIFIED

Anthem: Wondrous Cross (Wilby)

The melody should be sung expressively with care to sustain the notes at the end of phrases. In the faster middle section the lower parts should sound together with careful attention to tuning.

Organists should clearly articulate the initial quaver pattern in each bar. The accompaniment may be more successful played on a piano.

This piece is included on the RSCM Millennium Youth Choir's CD *Out of the stillness* available from RSCM Music Direct.

Anthem: Crucifixus a 6 (Lotti)

Although not as well known as Lotti's eight-part *Crucifixus*, this setting still has the expressive suspensions and intensity of the larger piece. Use the dynamic suggestions from the organ part and create a sustained web of sound. In the suspensions, encourage singers to tastefully crescendo through the long notes to the dissonant chords and diminuendo into the resolutions.

Although the piece is most effective when sung unaccompanied, organ continuo may be used to provide support for the singers if required.

Trisagion 6

This time the chant is sung with strength and intensity. Only a small group should sing the high descant taking care not to dominate the other parts.

VI - JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

Song: At the foot of the cross

This piece is best accompanied by piano or guitar. The syncopated rhythms should be relaxed rather than pointed and heavy singing should not obscure the text. Choir singers may find it easier not to look at the music but learn the melody by rote. This could be an opportunity for a solo, possibly by someone from outside the choir with a more relaxed singing style. The song maybe sung several times increasing in intensity.

Hymn: Morning glory, starlit sky

Plan some dynamic contrast for the verses.

Anthem: Were you there? (Barnard)

A straightforward setting. Plan some dynamic variety between the verses. Verse 2 could be sung by a soloist with the other voices singing 'ah' or humming.

Anthem: Were you there? (Ogden)

If possible the echo choir should be positioned some distance from the main choir, but it must be able to hear them and see the conductor. Experience has shown that eight or even 12 singers may be needed in the echo choir to produce a full sustained sound.

Verses 1 can be sung by a solo voice or by all the ladies or men. Verse 3 can be sung by solo voice or by all the sopranos and altos.

This piece is included on the RSCM Millennium Youth Choir's CD *Out of the stillness* available from RSCM Music Direct.

Hymn: O sacred head

This hymn could be accompanied by the organ or maybe by a string quartet in the manner of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. It could also be sung unaccompanied by the congregation and choir.

VII - THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

This Lenten Gospel Acclamation is performed like this:

Organ chord

All sing acclamation in unison

Congregation and choir sing acclamation with soprano descant

Verse sung by choir or solo voice

Congregation and choir sing acclamation with soprano descant

Canticle: The song of Christ's glory

This is a confident text which needs to be declaimed and not rushed. The first three verses could be unaccompanied with the organ joining the singers at verse 4.

Anthem: The song of Christ's glory (Ives)

This setting needs much attention to detail in pitching and ensemble but the hard work will be justified by the result, as the piece is very atmospheric and intensely moving. Care should be taken to practice the link between sections as pitching the new reciting note or chord can sometimes be tricky, especially between pages 94 and 95.

An easier version for SATB (no divisions) with organ accompaniment is available from www.rscm.com/publications/downloads.php

Trisagion 7

This needs to be sung strongly by everyone.

THE CONCLUSION

Hymn: My song is love unknown

The descant needs careful tuning of certain intervals particularly in the third line.

A reflective organ voluntary would be suitable at the end. The mood of the service could be sustained by keeping the choir in their places encouraging choir and congregation to listen to the voluntary.