

Congregational Singing

Week 1 – Man of Sorrows, What a Name!

September 18, 2016

15 minutes

Participants: Rob Rayburn, Ron Bechtel, Margaret Eby, Congregation

Purpose: Teach congregation 1st phrase of a Man of Sorrows. What a Name! in 4-part harmony. This hymn (or portions) will be used in future presentations to illustrate musical techniques and vocabulary.

Desired Outcome Congregation has understanding of musical principles and has applied them to the hymn that was taught.

4 minutes

Introduction

Rob Rayburn

4 minutes

Principles of Congregational Singing

- ✓ Music should help the congregation understand the poetry
- ✓ You don't have to read music to sing harmony (learn by rote/listening)
- ✓ Find the part that feels most comfortable (S or A; T or B)
- ✓ Purpose of each part: Bass is foundation of harmony; Soprano is melody; Inner parts (Tenor and Alto) complete the harmony and add interest.

10 minutes

Exercise / Applying the Principles

- ✓ Congregation sings soprano line - melody
- ✓ Congregation learns bass line - foundation
- ✓ Men sing bass line
- ✓ Congregation learns tenor line (women in their own register)– harmonic interest
- ✓ Men sing bass and tenor lines
- ✓ Children sing melody, basses sing bass line, tenors sing tenor line
- ✓ Women learn alto line
- ✓ Children sing melody (some women and men may), basses sing bass line tenors sing tenor line (some women may), women sing alto line.

1 minute

Conclusion

- ✓ At-home techniques to re-inforce what was taught
 - ✓ Next time we'll discuss: Sigla (unison, men only, women only, a cappella), volume/dynamics, and singing the punctuation.
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Resources:

Printed Hymn Handout: Man of Sorrows, What a Name

Hymn printed as seen in hymnal

Hymn also printed with each voice (SATB) printed separately

Poetry printed alone (without music).

Teaching the Hymn by rote (1st phrase only):

Step 1: Margaret (and male singer to be named later) starts by singing the bass line of the 1st phrase of the hymn bass line. Without saying a word, the leaders “invite” the congregation to echo what they just sang. We will repeat this at least once – possibly twice. When the congregation knows that phrase, Leaders asks men only to sing the bass line.

Margaret says, “You’ve just learned the bass line, lowest notes of the hymn, Man of Sorrows, What a Name. We teach the bass line first because it is the foundation of the hymn’s musical structure. All other parts are “built” upon that bass line. Let’s learn another part.”

Step 2; Margaret (and male singer to be named later) sings the tenor line and “invites” the congregation to echo. Repeat as necessary. Then ask men only to echo the bass line; Ask men only to echo the tenor line. Congregation sings both parts together.

Margaret says, “That was the higher men’s part – the tenor line. Men, did you feel more comfortable singing the lower part or the upper part? As a member of a congregation that sings in harmony, we will all be challenged to find that part that fits best in range our voice. Men, I’d like you to choose the line that felt best to you and learn and remember that part. Let’s try the men only again. First the bass line and then the tenor line and then both lines together.

Step 2(a): Leaders sing bass line. Men echo bass line. Leaders sing tenor line. Men echo tenor line. Leaders invite men to sing both lines together.

Margaret says, “Now the men have learned both the bass and tenor line. The bass is the foundation. But the tenor line (along with the alto line we’ll learn in a moment) is an inner voice. Sometimes the inner voices (tenor and alto) are the hardest to hear, but they provide musical substance. Often times the composer uses these inner voices to change the mood of the hymn because these voices are responsible for providing the harmonic structure. It’s the harmony (harmonic structure) that sets the musical mood. Women, let’s learn the alto line, the other inner voice.

Step 3: Margaret sings alto line and invites women only to sing alto line.

Step 4: Male leader sings bass line and asks men to echo bass line. Male leaders sings tenor line and asks tenors to echo it. Leaders ask women to sing alto line along with the men singing bass and tenor.

Step 5: Margaret sings melody and asks children to echo. (NOTE: If the children are not very loud, Margaret may ask some women to join them in singing the melody).

Margaret says, “Now that you are getting more comfortable with the part you’re singing, it’s time to start listening to the other parts that you’re not singing. For example, if the children are going to sing the melody, and all of us

adults are going to sing the harmony, we are going to have to be sure we can hear the children singing. So hold back a little and contain your singing and listen for the children's voices. Let's try this phrase in 4-part harmony.

Step 6: Leaders invite basses and children to sing. Then basses, tenors and children sing together. Then bass tenors, women and children to sing. .

Tell them what you've told 'em:

Margaret says, "You've just learned the 1st phrase of a hymn in 4-part harmony. You know now that the bass is the foundation upon which the hymn's music or harmony is built. And the inner voices, tenor and alto, provide the musical interest. The melody, as you know, is the top voice and the one most easily heard. You know now that if you are having trouble singing the harmony, try singing one of the outer voices – men singing bass line and women singing the melody.

While we are emphasizing singing hymns in harmony, we must never forget that the music enhances the poetry. I find it easy to ignore the words I'm singing because I'm more interested in singing the alto line. As you develop your hymn singing skills, you will become more and more responsible for ensuring that the music you're singing is truly enhancing the poetry and helping you and the rest of the congregation appreciate the words being sung.

You realize now, that you do not have to know how to read music to learn the harmony. Listening to someone else sing the part is the easiest way to learn. Take advantage of those who sit near you who are singing harmony. Listen and follow them. If you are a woman who has trouble finding the alto line, and there is a man behind you with a lovely tenor voice – just try to sing what he's singing.

The next time, we are together we will learn the next phrase of this hymn. So keep practicing what you've learned today. We'll also talk about a handful of simple techniques we, as a congregation of singers, can use to enhance the understanding of the poetry"