

To PCO Messiah Chorus Members:

Markings and a few general rules for singing Messiah:

1. Punctuation will almost always dictate breathing or at least lifts/pauses in phrases. It might be a good idea to just speak your part a few times for rhythm, phrasing and diction. Then you can actually sing it.
2. The letter “R” should be flipped like a “D” or in some cases, pronounced “Uh”.
Examples: Forever = Faw-deh-vuh Great = Gdate Preachers = Pdee-chuhz
This minimizes the American “err” and also adds energy and rhythmic vitality to the words that contain “R”.
3. Minimize the “S” consonant. If you separate your teeth slightly after saying “S” almost like “ess-uh”, we won’t get lazy, wet “S” sounds. Again, improves rhythm and clarity.
4. The melismas (or long sixteenth note runs on one vowel) should be practiced slowly for accuracy. We will mark out some patterns to help negotiate the notes. The sound should be slightly “glottal” or like saying “Ah-ah-ah” to a naughty child, but also supported from the abdomen muscles. A bit like a fast, nervous laugh – think Woody Woodpecker. Not completely in the throat or in the abdomen.
5. Be careful of passages that go over page turns and practice turning pages quietly – especially on fast and furious choruses.
6. Unless a chorus follows a very short solo, skip ahead to the next chorus and do not follow the soloists in the score.
7. Recordings with your part slightly amplified are available: **cameratamusic.com**
You can also go to www.cyberbass.com to find midi recordings that can be slowed down to help with difficult passages.
8. Please spend your time reviewing the difficult passages in a chorus and then try to run through the entire chorus rather than just singing choruses over and over.
9. Try to practice the taller, affected English vowels and consonants so that they become natural. Listening to good recordings helps, but you need to get these sounds “under your tongue” so that they do not sound exaggerated or distorted.

Some suggested recordings:

Christopher Hogwood, with soloists Emma Kirkby, Judith Nelson, Carolyn Watkinson, Paul Elliott and David Thomas. The Academy of Ancient Music. 1991 **Decca/L'Oiseau-Lyre**.

Two Robert Shaw Orchestra versions: one with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra & Chamber Choir on **Telarc** CD-80093 and a remastered 2004 version on **RCA/Red Seal**.

John Eliot Gardiner. Monteverdi Choir. **Archiv/Phillips**.

General Markings:

Please take a moment to pre-mark your music – especially if you can only make one or two rehearsals. This will save us time and energy at the dress rehearsal.

1. And the Glory of the Lord

- Separate the initial words “And” “the”
- Reveal-ed – “rih-veel-ehd – do not use a bright ee
- “Flesh” and “shall” will be elided into one “sh” -- flehshall
- One “t” for “it” “together” -- ihtoogehthuh
- measure 17 “lord” should be a quarter note for SAB – tenors carry through
- measure 32 (A) SA should make first beat and eighth note with eighth rest.
- IN GENERAL, when the choir overlaps with a new entrance, we need to put in a quick diminuendo and perhaps even shorten the value. Example: 5 measures before rehearsal C and at letter E. We want to preserve full values when possible, but need to allow for the entrance of voices so that they are not obscured.

2. And He Shall Purify

- do not drop “and”, but also remember to stress “He”
- m. 24 and example of cutting the quarter note on “ness” to follow punctuation
- m. 27 make “purify” eighth note on third beat
- crescendo measure before letter E
- slight crescendo on repeated notes and sustained notes

3. O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion

- don’t drop initial “O”, but give some length with accent on “thou”
- lift between “Judah” and “Behold” m. 12
- “bihold” – rather than “behold”
- breathe or lift with punctuation

4. For Unto Us a Child is Born

- slight crescendo on repeated notes and sustained notes
- “peace” should be an eighth note/eighth rest 5 measures after D, E, etc., BUT not 5 measures after G – that will be full value.

5. Glory to God

- Glawdee to Gawd – with energy on sixteenths
- slower (meno mosso) m. 5 “and peace on earth” , but a tempo at letter A
- connect “peace on earth” peesawnuth – “earth” should lean toward the vowel used in “love”.
- separate “good” from “will” with a staccato at B – do not shorten half note “good”
- Letter D staccato over each “good” and “will” for first three measures after D

6. His Yoke Is Easy, and His Burthen is Light (not in this chorus)

- slightly separate the dotted sixteen from the 32nd note in the opening figure
- focus on the first part of diphthong on light = lah-eet – pure “ah”
- watch dynamic contrasts between p and f – not easy because the chorus is challenging and most tend to sing it heavy and loud.
- burthen = buthen (the uh in “bug”) and practice the energetic shake of the sixteenth notes without smacking the “then” of “burthen” – (same approach to “light”)
- start slower and build up speed – practice text without singing

7. All We Like Sheep Have Gone Astray

- a. slightly detach “we” before “like”,
- b. “astray” should always have an arch shaped dynamic, always ending gently,
- c. practice “turn-ed” melismas slowly and observe patterns so as not to go astray!
- d. single pitched “ev’ry one to his own way” needs forward direction and tapered ending.
- e. hold first half of diphthong on the “eh” of “astray” ending with “ee”.
- f. slight separation between pitches when “turn-ed” is an octave leap.
- g. “way” at G is a quartet note/quarter rest and then observe Adagio using punctuation for breaks.
- h. treat “turned” vowel like “burthen” vowel and avoid strong “r”. Closer to “tuh-ned”.

8. Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates

- a. S/A “Lift” is pulsed but connected to “up” separate “up” from “your” – energy on the sixteenths
- b. T/B “who” should be slightly detached and marked with a pulse from abdomen
- c. Let’s go with “Who is **the** King of glory” rather than “this”. Handel scholars can send me their arguments and complaints after the concert. ☺
- d. m. 16 – make the pick-up notes on “the” sixteenth notes.
- e. 9 measures after B – crescendo for three measures (SSA)
- f. forward energy and pulse on “the Lord of hosts”

9. The Lord Gave the Word

- a. change eighth to sixteenth on initial “The Lord” and “the Word” each time.
- b. detach “great” from “was” without punching. “**pdee**-chuhz” – accent on first syllable
- c. use punctuation for lifts and breaths
- d. stress quarter note “great”

10. Hallelujah

- a. meno mosso at letter C “The kingdom” – a tempo at D “and He shall reign”
- b. brisk tempo throughout - stress “Hah-leh-**loo**- yah” – the “le” should be a bit brighter than “leh”, but not quite “lay”

11. Worthy is the Lamb/Amen

- a. careful on “worthy” – closer to vowel of “wood”
- b. we can’t articulate punctuation with speed, so think musical phrases for “Blessing and honor, glory and pow’r be unto Him, be unto Him.” Crescendo this phrase
- c. “glory and” should be elided to “glo ryand” or “glaw deand”
- d. energy on “sitteth”, but don’t rush
- e. separate last “forever” & “and” at Adagio (just before the Amen)
- f. Amen will be energetic - lift between Amens (generally)
- g. detach quarter notes before G, except 12 before G (p.247)
- h. add “men” to D before
- i. detach octave leaps whenever they occur
- j. quarter rest 10 before G and 5 after G

You will receive more markings and assistance during the Sunday night rehearsals, but please bear in mind that all Messiah performances vary from one another. Some are incredibly different. No version is authoritative – even Mozart thought he could “improve” upon it. Yet each performance offers something unique to consider. Preparing a work that is so well known, and perhaps the most frequently performed in history, makes this even more difficult at times.

Lawrence and I may even have differing opinions here and there, but we will do our best to present an interpretation that will be exciting and moving for both the musicians and the audience.

Thank you for joining us. I look forward to rehearsing and performing with you!

Rob Lappa

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