

Bach Chorales in the Orchestra & Band Rehearsal

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Charles Laux, presenter

chuck@lauxweb.com

The C. Leon King High School Orchestra Chamber Strings, demonstration group

Why use chorales?

1. They work!
2. They are versatile.

What do chorales help teach my students?

1. Tone Production
 - a. chorales are slow to moderate and can easily be played with a full sound. No special articulations, just big fat tone.
2. Rhythm Skills
 - a. from simple to complex – independence of rhythm
 - b. syncopation
3. Sight Reading Skills
 - a. great to get used to odd/difficult keys
 - b. teaches independence of line, great for the weaker sections of the ensemble
 - c. utilize for first 10-15 minutes of class each day
4. Listening Skills
 - a. melodic listening
 - b. harmonic listening
5. Intonation Tuning / Ear Training
 - a. comprised of the fundamental harmonies on what most of our music is built upon
6. Blend/Balance
 - a. chord by chord practice
 - b. section at a time
7. Theory
 - a. key signatures/sense of key
 - i. point out the "important" notes – root, third, fifth
 - ii. more terms -- leading tone, subdominant, etc.
 - iii. students learn their "role" in the particular chord/key
 - b. enharmonics
 - i. get bands used to sharp keys, get orchestras used to flat keys
 - c. chords
 - i. inversions, 7th chords and beyond (analysis)
 - d. harmonic vs. non-harmonic tones.
 - e. cadences
 - i. complete vs. incomplete
 - f. phrasing
8. Following the Conductor
 - a. simple notes, no set tempi, fermatas = students can watch a lot
9. Across the curriculum
 - a. History -- the significance of the chorales and J.S. Bach as a composer
 - b. Language -- students will see German text and translation

What makes Bach chorales so special?

1. each line is important -- helps end the "Why do first violins/trumpets always get the good parts?" questions
2. "real music," not a generic warm up
3. significance of Bach and his importance in the history of music

How do I begin?

1. Start with a simple chorale.
2. Choose a "safe" key, maybe Eb major for band and D or G major for orchestra.
3. Choose one with simple rhythms.
4. First play the scale of the key the chorale is in.
5. Work your whole ensemble in short sections, 4-8 measures. Don't go on until it's really strong. Each time give them something more to work on.

Advanced ideas...

1. Have small groups play to let the non-playing students listen and analyze - positive or constructive comments.
2. Record your group playing the chorale. Make copies of the full score (usually 1 page), and pass them out to your students. Students can then **see** how their part fits into the chorale. Some find this especially helpful, especially visual learners.

Where do I get chorales for classroom use?

There are **many** published versions of Bach Chorales for use by bands and orchestras. I have used the following book with middle school and high school orchestras. A class set is a wonderful investment.

371 4-part Chorales published by DeHaske (a German publisher).

Distributed in the U.S. by Hal Leonard Corp. www.halleonard.com
Books list for \$7.95 each, score is \$29.95. Books come as Part 1, 2, 3, 4.
Each part can be purchased in different keys for different instruments (including a part 3 version in alto clef for violas!).

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