

The Keyboard Accompaniment

The Role of the Accompaniment

- 1) Enhances the mood of the text. This may be achieved through dynamics, register, texture, rhythm, and counter-material. If the subject matter of the text involves folk material you may want a guitar or banjo type accompaniment. If the text has religious connotations an a cappella setting might be desirable.
- 2) Provides harmonic support, rhythmic impetus, meter, and counterpoint. As a general rule, the less these elements appear in the vocal parts the more they should appear in the accompaniment. For example, a solo melody in a vocal part should be filled out harmonically by the accompaniment.
- 3) Gives pitches for the voices - especially starting notes and doubling awkward leaps or chromatic passages.
- 4) Provides contrasting instrumental sections such as introductions, interludes, endings. The accompaniment also establishes moods, key, tempo, meter, and style.
- 5) May create sudden changes in key, tempo, mood, or style.
- 6) Fills between vocal phrases to allow breathes.
- 7) Contributes to the energy and growth of the development. May be done by extending range, change of register, rhythmic acceleration, harmonic density. Variations may also be used.
- 8) Unifies the arrangement. A distinct melodic or rhythmic motive of the vocal parts may serve as the motive of accompaniment. This motive may be developed through standard motivic practices.
- 9) Silence. A cappella moments at the right point may be very effective.

Technical Considerations

- 1) Keyboard accompaniment for elementary or middle school should be relatively easy to play.
- 2) Range: The bass should stay between C and c1 (2 octs.). The right hand usually plays between c1 and g2.
- 3) Right hand - may double top vocal line above and below at the octave or at the unison. It may also play counter-material.
- 4) Left hand - doubles the lowest vocal part by unison of an octave lower.

Styles of Accompaniment

- 1) Choral Doubling - Simply involving the exact doubling of the vocal parts. Used for Hymn settings primarily.
- 2) Arpeggiation - provides a certain flowing momentum. Be sure to consider chord spacing rules and voice leading.
- 3) Rhythmic patterns and figures - Certain styles may be expressed through the associations of a rhythmic pattern.
- 4) Counter-material - independent material that does not belong to or doubles the vocal material. May be used in leading into the next sub-phrase. Be sure it does not distract from or dominate the choral writing. It should remain outside the choral register and have contrasting shape and rhythm.
- 5) Unconventional Voicings - harmonic embellishments such as change of inversion, chord substitution, adding 7ths, 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, quartal/quintal chords, clusters, etc.
- 6) Special effects - use your imagination.

Introductions and Endings

Introductions

Introductions are usually derived from important motivic material in the body of the arrangement. They should establish mood and style. Four possible derivations of the introductory material:

- 1) Derived from the first phrase. This creates unity and also provides pitches for the singers.
- 2) Based on ending phrases or subsequent phrases of the main body. Used in multi-verse arrangements.
- 3) Derived from the accompaniment if the accompaniment has a catchy rhythmic pattern.
- 4) Combine prominent melodic material with portions of accompanimental patterns.

Endings

Endings should be conclusive providing emphasis on the final musical or textural ideas. Three possible derivations of ending material:

- 1) Repeat the last phrase or concentrate on an important motive.
- 2) Rhythmically augment the final phrase. This will effectively broaden the tempo.
- 3) Tag ending - a brief punctuation to signal the end.

Freely composed intros and endings based on rhythmic and harmonic patterns or textural references are also possible. Imitation is an often used technique.