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choir



CANON IN E MINOR - MOZART

USING THIS CANON

Compiled for the Presto project
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Dublin City University, 2023

FOR DEVELOPING YOUR POLYPHONIC SKILLS

This is an intricate melody with a wide vocal range, a mixture of diatonic and chromatic movement, challenging leaps, and unexpected harmonic turns, but with the right preparation and practice, we can experience a rewarding and harmonically remarkable canon composition.

Keen attention is needed to the shaping of notes and phrases right throughout, as well as to harmonically and theoretically informed pitching of intervals, in order to achieve the most musical results both as a standalone melody and in a polyphonic context.

After securely completing the sing-and-play task in two parts, proceed to the next level of challenge by adding a third and even a fourth part, using suitable step-by-step processes, and for very advanced musicianship training, change the key.

WITH YOUR CHOIR OR SINGING GROUP

Even in unison singing, every note and motif needs to be cared for, nurtured and nourished to give sufficient momentum through these substantial, nuanced phrases. Good vocal technique will greatly help the musical quality.

Crescendo a little through the two fa notes in bar 1 to give shape and momentum from the start, and then place the ti and di carefully so that they lead to re on beat 3 of bar 2. Place an accent on the downbeat of bar 3, where Mozart has deliberately placed the ti, and make sure that the la throughout bar 4 is securely related to the mi that began the phrase, being a perfect 5th apart.

In phrase 2, the descending chromatic line can be aided by firm placement of the diatonic notes la, si/so, fa, mi, re, do, with the chromatic steps leading to and/or away from these in each case. In other words, ensure every melodic step is understood as part of a broad tonal context rather than simply as an individual interval. Towards the end of the phrase, 'lift' and give energy to the returning re, which eventually leads to the fifth degree, mi, at bar 7.

Phrase 3, in a lower tessitura, can be helped by a consistently tuned keynote, la, and well-shaped longer notes in particular; and in phrase 4, we meet a melodic minor motif, reaching m-fi-si-la before turning to a scale downwards from fa to the lower home note to conclude. With a great deal of care, informed by knowledge of tuning and harmonic background, perfect the unison and then add a second, third and fourth part to experience the astonishing harmonic world of the piece.

IN THE MUSIC LESSON

Analyse the melody to identify all diatonic and chromatic notes, and tonalities such as harmonic and melodic minor. For advanced groups, use Presto video 5 to undertake a harmonic analysis and observe the ingenuity of this remarkable composition.