

1. r m r d r m s f m r l d t d s t s ta ta

7 3. l s f fi s f m s d s m s d m d t l d

12 4. s lo s t fi s t r s f m r d t d r m d m r d

choir



CANON IN G - BRAHMS

USING THIS CANON

Compiled for the Presto project
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FOR DEVELOPING YOUR POLYPHONIC SKILLS

Use video 5 in the Presto resources to complete a harmonic analysis of the four-part texture, noting in particular the interesting and unusual chords created (outlined below).

Observe the differing rhythmic character at the start of phrase 2 relative to the other three phrases, all of which begin with a crotchet upbeat.

After you have mastered the sing-and-play task in two parts, increase the challenge using some or all of the following suggestions: play one part with your right hand and another part with your left; sing one part and play two or even three other parts; change the key; increase the tempo. Use a step by step learning process and break each challenge down into manageable sections for repeated practice.

WITH YOUR CHOIR OR SINGING GROUP

Close attention to details of harmonically informed intonation will greatly help in achieving a beautiful, resonant performance of this canon. When learning the melody in unison, encourage an energetic, well-tuned opening by shaping the long note, mi, on the first downbeat, and continue this momentum-focused shaping later at the long note, do, on the downbeat of bar 9, ensuring also that all subsequent do notes have the same accuracy of pitch.

Make a clear distinction between ti and the flattened 7th, ta, in phrase 2. In phrase 3, use momentum and harmonic awareness to sing a beautifully tuned 'so' each time the note occurs. Practise the opening of phrase 4, ti-fi-s, in isolation. Take care that the 'ti' is high enough and that the accented 'fi' resolves successfully up a semitone, then proceed with energy through the notes of chord V to the high so, a dotted crotchet at the start of bar 14 that will benefit from shaping and harmonic awareness, before descending by step to the tied minim do, where again shaping will help secure the consistency of the overall tonality.

IN THE MUSIC LESSON

Explore the distinctive chords that are created when the canon is sung in four parts, for example the raised IV⁷ (fi-la-do-mi; C#-E-G-B) at the end of the third bar; the diminished seventh chord vii⁷ in the final bar of each phrase (ti-re-fa-lo; F#-A-C-Eb); and the chord I⁷ in third inversion in the second bar of the phrase. Observe the approach to these chords and the nature of their resolutions, noticing the effective use of contrary motion in creating a sense of balance and good voice-leading.

When first singing in four parts, place singers according to their parts, so that everyone is beside other singers singing the same part. Then, increase the challenge by mixing up the parts, so that singers are not beside others singing the same part anymore. Encourage a balance of confident singing and keen listening in order to create a tuneful, blended sound.