

ACHIEVING VARIETY WITHIN AN ARRANGEMENT

Part 3

by Vince Corozine (ASCAP)

Although a “chorale” can be described as a hymn tune of the German Protestant Church, you as an arranger need not think of it in terms of having to be monotonous and mundane. *Chorale* by Robert Schumann in G major is written in slow all breve time and in conventional four-part harmony.

The most obvious way you can approach the arranging of this chorale for brass instruments is to allocate the four parts among four brass instruments such as two trumpets and two trombones. If you approach it this way, the four brass instruments will sound perfectly satisfactory in the chorale. However, this simplified approach to scoring of brass instruments can be classified as “distribution” and not “arranging.”

A creative arranger will view the chorale more innovatively by attempting to figure out how to develop added colorful effects using the given instrumentation of two F.Horns, two B flat trumpets, two trombones, and a tuba.

As an arranger, let’s look at a few problematic scenarios you might ask and my recommendations for possible solutions.

- *Is the original key of G major a comfortable key for the ability level of my players?* At the slow tempo of Largo, the concert key of G major should not be a problem for most of your players. In addition, the half notes and whole notes, that comprise most of the notes in the chorale, move slowly enough to be played in this key.
- *I realize Schumann used only four notes; therefore, what notes can be doubled, now that I have seven instruments at my disposal?* I suggest the safest notes to select for doubling with other instruments are the scale root, fourth, and fifth. In the key of G major, the notes would be G, C, and D respectively. The doubling of these notes will provide the most sonority to the sound of the chorale.

- *Should the piece sound full and thick all the way through or can I achieve variety in tonal quality in some way?*

In that the piano version is a bit boring, go with your artistic instinct to develop rhythmic and tonal variety.

- *How can this variety of sound be realized with the instruments I have?*

Continue to be innovative. You may want to achieve an effective compositional technique by using pedal points to anchor the sound. Or, you can use sustained notes in place of repeated half notes. Perhaps, you can consider using duet sound occasionally to lighten the texture and provide diversity of sound.

As you see, arranging involves a high degree of problem solving. Here are some proven orchestration tips that I have used successfully in solving some of the same problems most of which can be applicable to enhancing variety to this chorale.

Before you begin to write, decide ahead of time what tonal colors you want—full sound, duets, solos, pedal points, and so on.

Avoid awkward passages or anything that is impractical to play.

Try to achieve smooth voice leading. Look for places to sustain common notes between chords. Remember to resolve raised notes up a half step and lowered notes down a half step.

It takes two F. horn to equal the volume of one trumpet and one trombone in forte or fortissimo passages. With this in mind, notice in the loudest section of the chorale (four measures from the end), the F. horns are doubled at the unison to achieve a more weighted sound.

Be mindful of the rhythmic effect of the original piano version of the chorale is smooth, regular and expected with few harmonic or melodic surprises. It greatly lacks variety and color.

Despite having the capability of great power, brass instruments can play with delicacy and diversity.

Lastly, “wall-to-wall” sound can be arduous to the listener and devoid of instrumental color and shading.

Rest passages ventilate the texture, and give the player a chance to rest his or her lip. When an instrument reenters after being silent for a time, the entry kindles a renewed interest much to the listener’s pleasure.

If I were going to use this arrangement for elementary or middle school students, I would transpose the parts a step lower into F major. By doing so, I will place my student musicians in a more comfortable key. Additionally, the lower key would be less taxing on the first horn during the horn duet.

This short excerpt for two F. horns provides us with an alternative for measures 9 through 12 in the chorale arrangement.

1. Adds rhythmic variety and movement to the chorale.
2. Lowers the range of the first horn so he or she does not have to ascend to a high F sharp.
3. Adds contrary motion between the two voices in every measure.
4. Gives the second horn a chance to play the melody.

The image shows a musical score for two F. Horns, labeled 'F. Horn 1' and 'F. Horn 2'. The music is in 3/4 time and the key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). Both staves begin with a dynamic marking of *mf*. In measure 9, Horn 1 has a quarter rest followed by a half note G4, while Horn 2 plays a quarter note G3. In measure 10, Horn 1 plays a half note G4 with a slur over the next two notes, and Horn 2 plays a quarter note G3. In measure 11, Horn 1 plays a half note G4, and Horn 2 plays a quarter note G3. In measure 12, Horn 1 plays a half note G4 with a slur over the next two notes, and Horn 2 plays a quarter note G3. The piece ends with a double bar line.

There are many ways to approach the arranging of a piece of music. The most important thing to remember is to always look for ways to add variety in your scoring by not merely accepting the obvious.

Chorale

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Largo
(Sustained binder)

Horn in F *p*

Horn in F *p* (Sustained binder)

Trumpet in Bb *mf*

Trumpet in Bb

Trombone

Trombone *p* *mp*

Tuba (Adds depth at cadence)

Largo

Piano *p*

This musical score is for a chorale by Robert Schumann, marked 'Largo'. It is written in the key of D major (two sharps) and common time (C). The score is arranged for a brass ensemble and piano. The brass instruments include two Horns in F, two Trumpets in Bb, two Trombones, and a Tuba. The piano part is written in a grand staff. The tempo is 'Largo', and the dynamics range from piano (*p*) to mezzo-forte (*mf*) and mezzo-piano (*mp*). The score includes performance instructions such as '(Sustained binder)' for the horns and '(Adds depth at cadence)' for the tuba. The music features a mix of sustained notes and moving lines, with a cadence at the end of the piece.

6 (Horn duet, striking and colorful effect)

The musical score is arranged in a system with seven staves. The top six staves are for Horns (Hn.), Trumpets (Tpt.), and Trombones (Tbn.). The bottom staff is for Piano (Pno.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 6. The Horns play a melodic line in the first two staves, with the second staff starting in measure 4. The Trumpets and Trombones play a sustained bass line, with the first Trombone staff marked '(Sustained binder)'. The Piano provides harmonic support with chords and single notes. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) for the Horns and Trombones. The score ends at measure 11.

Hn.

Hn.

Tpt.

Tpt.

Tbn. (Sustained binder)

Tbn. *mf*

Tbn.

Tba.

Pno.

Vince is the author of the highly successful music arranging book: ARRANGING MUSIC FOR THE REAL WORLD (with CD) published by Mel Bay Publications.

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(Unison for added strength with forte trumpets)

Hn. *f* *mf*

Hn. *mf*

Tpt. *f*

Tpt. (Filled in part) *f*

Tbn. (Sustained binder) *f*

Tbn. *f*

Tba. (Adds depth at cadence) *f*

Pno.