

The art of choosing liturgical repertoire for performances overseas

THE CHALLENGE

When choirs travel overseas, the highlights of their tour are often the delightful venues in which they sing. They have the unique opportunity to perform in some of the world's most magnificent cathedrals and sacred spaces, which can include St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, Notre Dame in Paris, and even the Vatican!

Performing in these acoustically inviting spaces is a wonderful privilege and a musically enriching experience for everyone involved. The ongoing legacy of a 1,000-year-old tradition of the ensemble includes taking part in the sung liturgy in historical places of worship. In some cases, this

includes singing pieces that were written for the space.

However, planning appropriate repertoire for these performances can be both challenging and frustrating. Learning the protocol of the clergy and restrictions of literature in liturgical settings can be confusing and disorienting if you are not familiar with the traditions at hand. If the choir does not have experience singing a liturgical program, it can be extremely difficult to prepare them appropriately.

Here are some general guidelines for simplifying this task and creating the best musical experience for the singers.



STEP 1: KNOW THE RULES

If given the opportunity to sing in the context of a worship service, it is vital that the choir and director know the choir's place in the service. It is always important to know that if an ensemble is singing during the context of a worship service they are not performing or giving a concert. Concerts do not take place during the context of the Mass. For congregants, Mass is the time and place in which they recall their



Savior's life, death, and resurrection. In some traditions, such as the Orthodox and Catholic communions, the Mass is the representation of the one sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

In order to respectfully support the liturgy in the context of the Mass, remind singers that, in many traditions, they are actively serving a liturgical ministry. They support the written word of God in a musical form. If doing a setting of the ordinary in a different language, learn the translation. Refrain from chatting during the service and dress accordingly.

If you are unsure of what is expected of your group during a particular service, reach out to a local music minister in that faith tradition. Many are quite happy to assist you in learning more about their tradition, customs, and expectations. If you have a contact at the church you will be visiting, you may wish to contact them as well. They will be better prepared to help with the traditions of their particular faith community.

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE MASS

The ordinary of the Mass is a specific order the Mass adheres to 'ordinarily.' This structure is most commonly found in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church with a similar variation found in the Church of England or American Episcopal Church. Most ordinaries are set in Latin but there are a number of settings in the vernacular of the country in which they were written.

The ordinary of the Mass is comprised of the following five components:

I. Kyrie – the atonement of sins

II. Gloria – a celebratory setting for praising God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit

III. Credo – a setting of the Nicene Creed; this is the longest text of the mass and is typically spoken rather than sung

IV. Sanctus – a doxological text, praising the Trinity, taken from the Book of Revelation

V. Agnus Dei – often called a “fraction hymn,” the Agnus Dei is sung when the clergy breaks the host in half

In most worship services that employ a musical setting of the ordinary, only four of the components are normally used. As described above, the Credo is the longest text of the mass and it is a regular option to have a congregation speak, rather than sing, the Credo. However, many “high” churches will sing all five components, especially on holy days. For these



reasons, and depending on when you will be traveling, ensembles should be prepared to sing the Mass in its entirety.

To save time, many composers have created a *Missa Brevis*, which is typically a one or two-page setting of each component of the ordinary. An excellent example of a *Missa Brevis* is Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, which includes all five components of the ordinary. In other *Missa Brevis* compositions, the Gloria or Credo may be omitted.

STEP 3: **UNDERSTAND THE LITURGICAL SEASON**

As mentioned in Step 2, many *Missa Brevis* settings will omit the Gloria or Credo. During the two penitential seasons of the Church, Advent and Lent, the Gloria is also omitted. In some traditions, such as the Church of England or American Episcopal Church, some parishes will opt to use the Gloria regardless. If you are singing in a parish during a penitential season, it is best to reach out to your tour provider or the music minister and learn their customs regarding the Gloria.

Remember that during the season of Lent, the forty days prior to Easter, any settings containing the word *Alleluia* are not to be used. The season is one of penance and self-reflection while Jesus spent forty days in the desert denying himself in preparation for his coming death and resurrection. On Easter, *Alleluia* is joyously returned to the Mass, celebrating Christ's triumph over death.

STEP 4: UNDERSTAND THE PARISH'S RESTRICTIONS

For purposes of planning repertoire for worship, most major cathedrals will dictate that a choir can sing the following:

- **The Entrance processional or Introit** – taking place at the beginning of the service while the priest processes to the altar.
- **Kyrie**
- **Gloria** (except during Advent and Lent)
- **Offertory** – typically more flexible than other parts of the ordinary, any text appropriate to the season will work. However, a good practice would be to match your repertoire to the Gospel reading for the day.
- **Agnus Dei**
- **Communion** – a hymn is sung during the distribution of Holy Communion to the congregants. Keeping in mind the belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist

in the Catholic, Orthodox, and LCMS traditions, choose texts that emphasize the words “body and blood” rather than “bread and wine.”

- **Blessing or Sending Forth** – at the end of the Mass, the priest blesses the congregation and sends them out into the world. In some traditions, the choir will sing a recessional and then a benediction. The final blessing can be an extended *Amen*, i.e. Seven-Fold Amen, The Lord Bless You and Keep You, or *Dona Nobis Pacem*.

STEP 5: UTILIZE THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Choir directors should always utilize the available resources to help choose repertoire that is appropriate. You should ask the advice of colleagues or the church’s music minister. If the choir has the benefit of working with a travel operator who specializes in performance tours, they will be able to provide guidance in choosing appropriate repertoire.





Below is a short list of recommended settings of the ordinary for consideration, organized by period:

Renaissance

Guillaume Dufay – *Missa l'Homme Armé*

Johannes Ockeghem – *Missa pro Defunctis* (this is a Requiem Mass, not appropriate for regular Sunday services)

Jacob Obrecht – *Missa de Sancto Donatiano*

Josquin des Prez – *Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales*

William Byrd – *Mass for Four Voices*

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina – *Missa sine nomine*

Classical

Joseph Haydn – *Lord Nelson Mass, Little Organ Mass & Mass in Time of War*

W.A. Mozart – *Coronation Mass & Sparrow Mass*

Romantic

Franz Schubert – *Mass No. 2 in G Major*

Charles Gounod – *Messe Solennelle de Sainte-Cécile*

Gabriel Fauré – *Requiem in D Minor*

20th Century

Francis Poulenc – *Mass in G Major*

Frank Martin – *Mass for unaccompanied double choir*

Maurice Duruflé – *Requiem Mass* (not appropriate for regular Sundays)

Igor Stravinsky – *Mass*

Jean Langlais – *Messe Solennelle*

Ralph Vaughan Williams – *Mass in G Minor*

Herbert Howells – *Requiem Mass* (not appropriate for regular Sundays)

Arvo Pärt – *Berliner Messe*

Ariel Ramirez – *Misa Criolla*

STEP 6:

BRING IN A LITTLE PIECE OF HOME

When creating a repertoire for worship services it is important to have a healthy balance of American literature. Audiences want to hear something different.

When creating an overseas performance tour repertoire for worship services, it is important to be mindful of varied repertoire with a healthy balance of composers from home. In a performance setting, audiences love hearing something different.

For example, people who reside in Salzburg would probably prefer to hear an American setting of the ordinary, or a lesser known composer, rather than a work by Mozart.

Here are a few suggestions of American contemporary composers and their sacred works appropriate for the context of the Mass:

Carol Barnett – *The World Beloved; A Bluegrass Mass*

René Clausen – *Mass*

Libby Larsen – *Missa Gaia: Mass for the Earth*

Glenn Burleigh – *Alpha Mass* (Gospel)

Moses Hogan – *Arrangements and Anthology* (African American Spirituals)

Randall Thompson – *Alleluia, The Last Words of David,*
& *Mass of the Holy Spirit*

Robert Ray – *Gospel Mass*

Leonard Bernstein – *Mass*

John Leavitt – *Requiem Mass*

Dave Brubeck – *To Hope! A Celebration*

Additional British contemporary composers and their works:

John Rutter – *Requiem Mass and Mass of the Children*

Karl Jenkins – *The Armed Man: A mass for peace*

David Fanshawe – *African Sanctus*



STEP 7: MAXIMIZE PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to the scheduled program, it is important to have the choir memorize two or three separate sacred, a cappella pieces to be sung individually. There are many opportunities for informal and impromptu performances overseas and the choir should be prepared to sing in these settings also. With a few memorized pieces, a pitch pipe, and permission from a church employee, music can be created within minutes in the most unexpected places, resulting in lasting musical memories.

Singing for Masses and worship services can be a tremendously rewarding experience and knowing the expectations of required repertoire helps eliminate the frustrations that can come with coordinating logistics of your performance.

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