

The Rev. Bruce H. Forman is Pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Church in St. Louis. In 1974 he founded The Young Catholic Musicians, an orchestra and choir of young people ages 10 - 21 which rehearses and leads liturgical music in a different church each month. The ensemble takes two concert tours each year as well as performing local concerts in St. Louis. Rev. Forman graduated from Rockhurst College in Kansas City and from Kenrick Seminary.

## A Study Plan for Bruce H. Forman's

# HEAR ME, LORD!

(CGA-578)

Elements of this anthem to explore during rehearsals are 1) Text; 2) Role of Cantor (soloist); 3) Choral Support. Three rehearsals should be sufficient to prepare the music for performance. How much time each of these areas requires at rehearsals depends on the strengths and weaknesses of the choir.

### Text

The Psalms are the musical literature of the Bible. They explore and express the gamut of emotions: praise, joy, anger, suffering, longing, peace, exhilaration, fear, etc. Mere vocal speech will never allow the emotional content of the Psalms to be set free. Only music will expose the true feeling of the Psalmist.

Psalm 27 expresses the lament of an individual who is in dire straits, calling out to God for help. What might be the reasons for this person's pleading? Perhaps unjust treatment, abandonment, bodily illness, sin, death. Members of the choir might share examples—perhaps personal examples—of situations in life when the emotion expressed in this Psalm would be appropriate. The question might also be asked, "In what circumstances in his life might Jesus have prayed this Psalm?"

Lead your choristers to empathize with the feeling of the Psalmist. Psalm 27 expresses the fervent pleading of a person

who is confident in God's mercy, kindness, and providence. If the choir touches the emotional content of the Psalm, the music will be much better able to set free that emotion.

### Cantor

The Cantor (soloist) is chosen from among all the members of the choir as the person most able to communicate the emotion of the Psalm. The Cantor recognizes the phrasing of the Refrain as an upward movement of prayer, reaching out for a compassionate God, pleading for a hearing; and the downward movement as a return in all humility to life-as-it-is, trusting in God's answer. The Cantor communicates the lifting up of a needy heart, calling to God for help, and a settling down (repose) in assurance that an answer will be given.

I recommend that the Cantor sing the refrain alone the first time and have the choir enter after verse 1. If you are inviting the congregation to join in on the Refrain, this plan will allow them to hear the melody before the choral harmony is added. The congregation would join in on the melody at the same time the choral harmony is added.

### Choral Support

Once the choir empathizes with the Psalmist and the emotional content of the Psalm, have them sing the entire refrain on various vowel sounds ("oo" and "oh," for example) to see if they can express the emotional content without using the words. Ask them if they think they have captured the sense of pleading and trust. Then add the text.

Dynamics are most important to communicating the emotional surging of Psalm 27. Practice will be needed in the Refrain on measures 1 and 9 "oh" and "ah." These sounds should enter quietly under the Cantor and increase in volume to "hear me" and "I cry out." This will add strength to the Cantor's pleading. Measure 8 provides an opportunity on "sympathy" for the choir to relax, trusting in God's compassion. Soften the sound, but only to build it up in measure 9 again as the Psalmist experiences the sharp pain and cries out. The sound (and the emotion) quiets again in measure 16 and in the Coda as Cantor, Choir, and Congregation rest assured that God will answer their cry.

The wave of emotion which envelops the Psalmist will also be communicated in the Tempo variations. Measure 8 (Refrain) calls for a *rallentando*, a slowing, relaxing on the word "sympathy"; and then, without breaking the smooth movement and connection proceed into a *tempo* (measure 9). Measure 16 and Coda again call for *rallentando*, a resting in the assurance of God's response.

Once the choir identifies with the emotion of the Psalmist, the dynamic and tempo alterations will be recognized as the musical language needed to communicate those emotions.

. . . Bruce H. Forman