

Score Analysis, Exploration and Preparation

A method (in development) combining techniques and viewpoints of René Clausen, Drew Collins, Kenneth Jennings, Ann Howard Jones, Jameson Marvin, Daniel Moe, Weston Noble, Robert Shaw and Howard Swan.

It has been asserted that the final product of score study is to have become so intimate with and knowledgeable about a work that the conductor not only knows it better than any of the performers, maybe even better than the composer. This checklist is designed to provide a framework for analysis that will lead the conductor to know the music well enough so that, in a pinch, the piece could even be rehearsed memorized.

Kenneth Jennings recommends that the conductor “schedule a regular time for practice--alone and uninterrupted.” For some of us, though, score study is done piecemeal as time allows. However much time you are able to give, using this checklist can be a quick reminder of what needs to be done, and in what order. In this way, it is designed to optimize your time.

Feel free to photocopy these pages at will. It is recommended that this method be used for “short” works as opposed to extended or multi-movement works. If used for the latter, the conductor may prefer to photocopy a checklist for each movement. I prefer to make a copy of pages 2-5 for each piece or movement conducted. Feel free to skip any items that are not applicable to the piece or movement you are studying.

Before we delve into the intricacies of exploring a score, it must first be determined if a score will withstand the scrutiny of analysis. Tastes and biases aside, the following may be used to objectify our programming process, thus ensuring that our singers’ time will be well spent.

This method assumes that four scores will be used: Study Score, Rehearsal Score, Singer Score, and Performance/Concert Score. This is not always practical or useful. Use your best judgement.

This method is incomplete. It is a compilation of techniques of various well-respected conductors and pedagogues. The order was devised solely by me, however, and does not necessarily reflect the original intentions of the source conductor.

-Drew Collins

Determining a score’s inherent worth

Before anything else, read through the **text** to determine the quality of the poetry. Good music set to bad poetry rarely yields a worthwhile composition.

In your opinion... Does the music fit the text? Is the text “presented” or “commented upon” by the music? Does the music *augment* the text? Are the text and music “married?” Does the composer seem to have a correct understanding of the poet’s intent?

Does the composer employ good part-writing techniques? Determine if tessitura and range are appropriate for each part. Does the composer demonstrate a knowledge of writing for the chorus, or is the composer writing “instrumentally”?

Does the composer avoid using “effects for effects sake?”

Is the text painting - if any - imaginative or distracting?

Does the piece have any unifying elements (fugue, canon, a specific harmony, motives, etc.)? Is this the product of a composer, or a “song writer?” Is this simply a pretty melody with a pretty harmonization? Is this art or entertainment? Does the piece play on the emotions (“tug on the heart-strings”)?

Is there anything about the piece that is trite? Is the audience talked down to?

What, if anything, makes this piece imperfect?

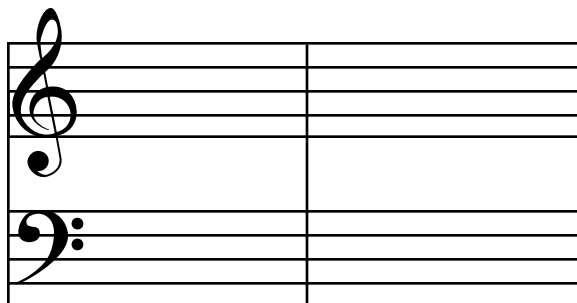
If early music, is this the best edition available?

If an arrangement of a folk song, hymn, or spiritual, does the arranger maintain the original intention of the text, and the style(s) of the originating culture? If not, is it intentional (such as a fantasia or theme and variations)? Is there anything that might be construed as disrespectful of the original culture?

MACRO - Getting Acquainted With the Piece

As you work, it is recommended that you have a metronome going at the piece's tempo (or, if there are more than one, the beginning tempo) in the background. As you complete these tasks, keep a list of questions you need to find answers for.

- _____ Number all measures
- _____ Play the vocal parts through together (in open score).
- _____ If accompanied, play through the accompaniment.
- _____ Read text aloud, dramatically and poetically. Discover the composer's reaction to the text ("Study the music as a setting of poetry"). Make sure to explore the text in context, if applicable (such as surrounding bible verses, etc.).
- _____ Analyze the piece structurally/formally discerning the broad outlines of the piece: the main sections, repetitions, rhythmic and melodic patterns.
- _____ Determine the key(s) or mode(s) the piece is in.
- _____ Analyze the piece harmonically.
- _____ Gain an understanding of the "dynamic landscape" by creating an image on graph paper. Note differences between terraced vs. shaped/tapered dynamics. Discover the overall shape of the piece.
- _____ Whisper through the piece, speaking the text rhythmically. Use a metronome to maintain metric and tempo accuracy. In polyphonic sections, jump from part to part as needed.
- _____ Emphasize the following markings using the indicated colors
- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Blue hi-lighter | Dynamics and dynamic changes (<i>forte</i> , <i>decrescendo</i> , <i>etc.</i>) |
| Pink hi-lighter | Meter/tempo changes (<i>Allegro</i> , <i>rit.</i> , <i>a tempo</i> , <i>etc.</i>) |
| | Repeat signs, <i>coda</i> , <i>segno</i> , <i>etc.</i> |
| | Cessura and <i>fermati</i> |
| Yellow hi-lighter | Expressive markings (<i>dolce</i> , <i>espressivo</i> , <i>cantabile</i> , <i>etc.</i>) |
| Orange hi-lighter | Articulations (<i>Tenuto</i> , <i>Marcato</i> , <i>Staccato</i> , <i>etc.</i>) |
- _____ Determine the following, and mark as indicated
- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Red felt-tip | Cues: important entrances |
| Green hi-lighter | Themes/subjects, important balance notes |
| Green felt-tip | Vowels that might need modeling |
| Blue felt-tip | Syllabic stresses |
- _____ Note the range of each voice part:



MICRO - General Preparations; Background

- _____ When was the piece written?
- _____ When was the text written?
- _____ WHY was the piece written? Under what circumstances? For whom?
- _____ What building or hall was the piece premiered in or written for?
- _____ Are there biographies or other print sources - for either the composer or the piece - to be explored?

MICRO - Study Score Preparations

During this time, the conductor should feel free to mark up this score with sketches and ideas about phrasing, et. al.

- _____ If in a foreign language, write the literal translation word-for-word in the score
- _____ Note the contour and articulation of the musical phrase; its musicality or lack thereof (especially alto parts).
- _____ Does the piece have a categorization (Opus, BWV, or Köchel number)?
- _____ Are there general performance practice considerations?
- _____ Are there particular places where tessitura is a significant factor (either from a compositional/interpretive standpoint, or from a rehearsal standpoint)?
- _____ Determine a tempo range (spanning about 10 bpm) if one is not provided.
- _____ Analyze the piece melodically. Are there times when the melody “illustrates” the word or text?
- _____ Are there times when the harmony “illustrates” the word or text (“tone painting”)?
- _____ Mark the main sections, repetitions, rhythmic and melodic patterns. Complete bar form analysis.
- _____ Listen to and evaluate recordings, if available. (*Note: To avoid inadvertent mimicing, this should be reserved as a final step.*)

MACRO: Stepping back

- _____ Choose some descriptors that summarize the character of the piece.
- _____ Is the piece's texture (homophonic/polyphonic) linked to the text in some way?
- _____ Are there balance, scoring or voicing considerations that would warrant a change in the formation of the ensemble?
- _____ Be able to state the general idea(s) of the text.

MACRO: Making sure you're ready for rehearsal

- _____ Be able to play the accompaniment (or reduction) in rehearsal if necessary.
- _____ Be able to play the vocal parts in a rehearsal setting. (In hard, polyphonic sections, be able to play at least two parts together at the same time.)
- _____ Sing through each part *a cappella*. With a pencil, circle any intervals or rhythms you miss or have difficulty with. Repeat 2 or 3 times, distinguishing what clears up with some exposure, and what remains a difficulty.
- _____ Be able to sing each part *a cappella* from beginning to end perfectly.
- _____ Determine and mark breaths, lifts, added rests and no-breaths/carries (based on textual line, musical line, harmonic implications, etc.) using a blue or black felt-tip pen. Consider marking the singers' scores with these decisions as well to save rehearsal time.
- _____ If alive and available, consider contacting the composer to clarify his/her intentions. (Have a list of questions prepared ahead of time!)
- _____ Make written notes of any errors in the score (being sure to compare the reduction against vocal parts).
- _____ Memorize structure.
- _____ Memorize order of entrances.
- _____ If accompanied, are there any harmonic, melodic or rhythmic conflicts between the vocal parts and the accompaniment?
- _____ Are there any times when a rising line or interval needs to be unstressed syllabically? Where is/are the climax(es)?
- _____ Conduct through the piece practicing gesture and cues. At this stage, there is no need to conduct anything besides correct meter and tempo. Use a metronome, subdividing in head. Note measures that pose technical conducting problems. Use a mirror, checking your response to yourself as if you were a singer. If there are any meter changes, practice them until the changes are effortless.
- _____ Some people find it helpful to copy the piece by hand onto scratch staff paper (not necessarily from memory).

Singer Score Preparation

- _____ Replace all *decresc.* and *cresc.* markings with handwritten “alligator” symbols.
- _____ If not done by the publisher, write in rehearsal letters of each main section.
- _____ Determine the following, and mark as indicated

Green hi-lighter	Themes/subjects, important balance notes
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- _____ Mark standing and sitting cues as necessary
- _____ Make notes of any errors in the score.
- _____ Mark the tempo range
- _____ Determine and mark breaths, lifts, added rests and no-breaths/carries (based on textual line, musical line, harmonic implications) using a black felt-tip pen. Consider marking the singers’ scores with these decisions as well to save rehearsal time.

Performance Score Preparation

- _____ Replace all *decresc.* and *cresc.* markings with handwritten “alligator” symbols.
- _____ Highlight the following markings in the indicated colors:

Blue	Dynamics and dynamic changes (<i>forte</i> , <i>decrescendo</i> , <i>etc.</i>)
Pink	Meter/tempo changes (<i>Allegro</i> , <i>rit.</i> , <i>a tempo</i> , <i>etc.</i>)
Orange	Expressive markings (<i>dolce</i> , <i>espressivo</i> , <i>cantabile</i> , <i>etc.</i>)
- _____ Mark themes/subjects and important balance notes with green hi-lighter
- _____ Mark only necessary cues in red felt-tip pen (there should be a lot fewer in the performance score than the rehearsal score.)
- _____ Mark standing/sitting cues and formation changes as necessary.
- _____ Prepare a list of people to acknowledge (Concertmaster, soloist, accompanist, et al.)

Information Sheet

This is a sheet intended either for distribution to the singers, or for future instances when the conductor might choose to conduct the piece again (saving research time).

Include the following information:

Create a brief biography of the composer.

The text/poem in verse form.

In what year was the piece written?

Under what circumstances, and/or for what reason was the piece written?

If this piece is part of a larger work, what movement is it?

If this piece is part of a larger work, in what ways does it relate to the rest of the work?

Note range/tessitura of each part.

Conductor's thoughts.

Composer quotes about the piece

Final Checklist

The conductor should know be able to address these issues from memory before taking the Self-Quiz.

Does the composer choose one emotion for the entire piece/movement, setting the basic meaning of the poem? Or does the composer set individual words programmatically? Or both?

What unifies the piece or gives it its character: harmony, melody, rhythm, form, dynamic usage...?

What compositional methods does the composer use to achieve contrast (if any)?

Does the composition subscribe to a compositional school or device (such as 12-tone, Impressionist, etc.)?

What's the tempo marking at the beginning of the piece (if given)? _____

Describe the texture of the piece: Monophonic, Homophonic, Polyphonic (fugal, canonic....?)

Describe the style of the piece (lean, programmatic, objective/subjective, etc.)

During what epoch was this piece written (Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Post-Romantic/Neo-Romantic, 20th Century, Contemporary)? Is this piece typical for the period?

Self-Quiz

Composer: _____

Title of work: _____

List the composer's birth and death dates:

In what epoch(s) did the composer work?

In what year was this piece written?

Under what circumstances was it written? For what purpose/event?

In what key does it begin?

What, if any, tonal modulations occur?

In what meter does the piece begin?

What, if any, metric (mensural) shifts occur?

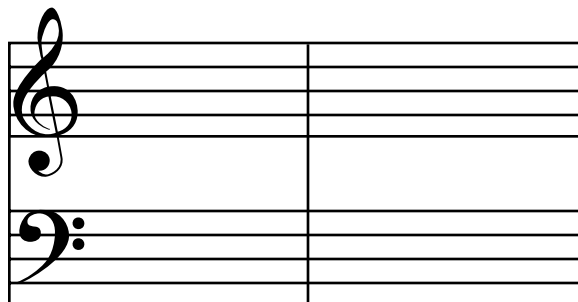
Describe form/texture (ABA, Rondo, Fugal, Through-Composed, etc.)

What are the tempo/expressive markings at the beginning of the piece?

What, if any, tempo changes occur?

What is the source of the text (Poet, Bible, Mass, Hymn text, composer, etc.)?

What is the range of each voice part?



Write out as much of the score as possible from memory (including notes, rhythms, text, accents, dynamic markings, etc.) on scratch staff paper.