A Choral Conductor’s Approach to *Messe “Cum Jubilo”* by Maurice Duruflé

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**ABSTRACT**

This is a choral conductor’s perspective of Maurice Duruflé’s *Messe “Cum Jubilo.”* A brief biography of the composer is included, as well as a history and brief analysis of the piece, identification and possible solutions of pedagogical problems found in the Mass, and a discussion of principle conducting difficulties inherent in the work.

**Introduction**

Maurice Duruflé’s *Messe “Cum Jubilo”* is a unique and striking work for baritone chorus and orchestra. The “*Cum Jubilo*” sits among Cherubini’s Requiem in D Minor and Liszt’s Mass for men’s voices as one of the few liturgical works scored for men’s chorus. The uniqueness of Duruflé’s “*Cum Jubilo*” is magnified, when it’s scoring for unison chorus and its basis in Gregorian chant are considered. For all of its engaging qualities, there is remarkably little written about the piece.

**A Biographical Sketch**

Maurice Duruflé was born in Louviers, France, on January 11, 1902. In 1912 his father enrolled him at Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Rouen as a chorister under Jules Haelling until age 17.

In 1919 Duruflé moved to Paris and was appointed assistant to organist Charles Tournemire at Saint-Clotilde. The following year Louis Vierne selected him to be assistant organist at Notre-Dame-de-Paris. The same year he was accepted as a student at the Paris Conservatory, where he studied under Vierne and Gigout (organ), Gallon (harmony), Estyle (accompaniment), Caussade (fugue), and Dukas (composition). Duruflé earned first prizes in each area of study at the Conservatory.

Duruflé was named organist at Saint-Étienne-du-Mont of Paris in 1930, a position he held until his death. Also in 1930, *Amis De l’Orgue* awarded him a compositional prize, and in 1936 the *Fondation Blumenthal* awarded a similar prize. In 1942 Duruflé was selected by Marcel Dupré to
assist him in organ instruction at the Paris Conservatory, and in 1943 he was appointed professor of harmony at the Conservatory.

Duruflé was an active concert organist throughout Europe, the Soviet Union and North America. He also recorded works of J.S. Bach, Messiaen, Tournemire, Vierne, and his own organ works.

In 1975 Duruflé and his wife Marie-Madeleine Duruflé-Chevalier were critically injured in an automobile accident, which essentially ended his musical career. He passed away in his apartment at Place du Pantheon, Paris on June 16, 1986.

Maurice Duruflé’s compositional style reflects ideas passed on to him by his organ instructors Vierne and Tournemire, as well as their teacher, César Franck. To this foundation Duruflé incorporated Gregorian chant and modal harmonies to create an impressionist style within his pieces. Duruflé’s œuvre includes: a trio for flute, viola and piano; a piece for piano; six pieces for organ; two works for orchestra and four choral pieces, including two choral-orchestral works.

**Messe “Cum Jubilo”**


The work gets its name from the Gregorian chant upon which it is based, Mass IX “*Cum Jubilo*”². The liturgical context of this chant cycle is the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The chant cycle comprises four of the five musical portions from the Ordinary of the Mass: *Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus et Benedictus,* and *Agnus Dei,* which Duruflé set in his Mass; and the *Ite* and *Benedicámus,* which Duruflé did not set.

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¹ The Composer noted: “Il est également possible de faire chanter la 1ère version par un ténor solo jusqu’à 18. Ce soliste aurait avantage à être pris dans le choeur et à s’y maintenir, l’effet de distance devant être recherché. (It is also possible for a tenor to sing the solo until rehearsal 18. This soloist should be selected from the choir, and should perform the solo while standing within the choir, in order to preserve the effect of a voice coming from afar [translation by Matthew Faerber]). Maurice Duruflé, *Messe “Cum Jubilo” A Une Voix pour baryton-solo, choeur de barytons, orchestre et orgue: Reduction pour chant, orgue et quintette a cordes (harpe, trompettes et timbales ad libitum)* (Paris, France: Durand, 1971), 21.

Duruflé scored three versions of the “Cum Jubilo”: the original version for full orchestra (1967), a version for organ solo accompaniment (1967), and a reduced orchestral version (1971). Duruflé noted in the score his justification for writing a reduced orchestral version.3

Authors note: This reduction for choir, organ and strings is a practical alternative. In practice, it is difficult to assemble a choir, organ and a complete orchestra in a church. On the other hand, the organ only reduction may be inadequate for certain portions of this Mass where the expressive timbre of the strings is essential. This intermediate version allows the organ to be incorporated in the overall texture, or to be used in contrast with other instruments.

The scoring of this reduced version may be adopted completely or in part, prioritized as follows: a harp, 3 trumpets and 3 or 4 timpani depending on the situation.

In general, it will be necessary to have at least a double string quintet. The number of the violins, violas and violoncellos should increase in proportion to the size of the organ, and even more if trumpets and timpani are used.

The string dynamics were notated with an ensemble of 22 players in mind (6-6-4-4-2). If no trumpets are used, alternative notes are provided in the organ part (translation by Matthew Faerber).

3 Maurice Duruflé, Messe “Cum Jubilo” A Une Voix pour baryton-solo, chœur de barytons, orchestre et orgue: Reduction pour chant, orgue et quintette a cordes (harpe, trompettes et timbales ad libitum (Paris, France: Durand, 1971), Author’s note.
Analysis of Work

Plainchant

Gregorian chant is the essence of Duruflé’s organ and choral music. Matthew Faerber writes regarding the composer’s well-known Requiem, “Duruflé’s passion for plainchant may have come from years he spent in French cathedrals, first as a choirboy in Rouen, and later as organist at Saint-Etienne-du-Mont. The influence of chant is evident throughout Duruflé’s Requiem in his use of modes, chant-like rhythms, and direct quotations.” A similar compositional approach may be seen in Duruflé’s “Cum Jubilo” Mass.

Each of the five movements contains direct quotations of the plainchant in the instrumental, vocal, or organ parts. For example, in the Kyrie, the first two phrases of plainchant are directly quoted in the first violin part at measures 1-6 (see example 1). The first violins again quote the same two phrases of plainchant later in the movement in measures 42-47.

Example 1. Duruflé, Messe “Cum Jubilo,” Kyrie, mm. 1-6.

The Gloria begins with a direct quotation of the first phrase of the plainchant in the choral part in measures 5-9 (see example 2). The plainchant is then interrupted for two measures with original material, then

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5 All references to the “Cum Jubilo” in the following discussion will refer to the reduced orchestral version.
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continues again with direct quotations of five phrases of plainchant in measures 12-27.

Example 2. Duruflé, Messe “Cum Jubilo,” Gloria, mm. 5-9.

The Mass concludes as it began, with a direct plainchant quotation, this time in the organ at measures 42-53 of the fifth movement (see example 3). The plainchant quotation comes from the first four lines of the Agnus Dei. These same excerpts of plainchant appear earlier in the movement in the choral part in measures 10-17, and the violoncello solo in measures 29-38.

Compositional techniques such as paraphrase and canon are used throughout the Mass to incorporate the chant. For example, in the Sanctus, the organ line paraphrases the third and fourth phrases of plainchant in measures 19-27 (see example 4). The plainchant is altered intervalically beginning in measure 19. Rhythmic alteration is evident in measures 23-24, where augmentation is employed.

A canon based on plainchant motives is found in measures 83-96 (see example 5) of the Gloria. Occuring between the vocal soloist and viola soloist, the canon is at times rhythmically disguised in the style of hidden canons of the Flemish masters of the Renaissance, Obrecht and Ockeghem.⁶

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Impressionism

Duruflé’s compositional style incorporates impressionistic ideals. Jesse Eschbach writes regarding the character of Duruflé’s music: “Built solidly on the tonal and harmonic accomplishments of Franck, Tournemire and Vierne, Duruflé’s style augmented this compositional palette with techniques borrowed from impressionism, modality (doubtlessly influenced by his love of Gregorian chant) and the emerging neoclassical aesthetic in composition and organ building in France.” Impressionistic techniques such as ostinato, polytonality and parallelism are found throughout the Messe “Cum Jubilo”.

The beginning of the Sanctus provides an example of at least two impressionist techniques (see example 6). First, an ostinato appears in the organ pedal line, which continues throughout the majority of the movement. Second, added tones are found in the organ harmonies. For example, in measure 1 an E major chord occurs with added tones of C and D, followed by a D major chord with added tones of C and E. These added tones alone seem to suggest a dual tonality, although with the addition of the pedal line centered around C, the example of dual tonality between the keys of C and E major becomes even more convincing.

The impressionist technique of parallelism can be seen in the Gloria (see example 7). In measures 142-149, root-position harmonies in the harp, organ, viola, violoncello, and bass parts all move in parallel motion.

Pedagogy

The Messe “Cum Jubilo” presents vocal and musical difficulties to the choir that will need to be addressed during the rehearsal process. In the following section, particular challenges in the score will be identified and discussed, along with possible solutions for each problem. Three potential problem areas that recur throughout the “Cum Jubilo” include vocal tessitura, melismatic singing, and complex meters and rhythms.

One of the major difficulties found in the Mass is the tessitura of the vocal line. The tessitura lies high in the baritone range throughout much of the work. For example, in measures 7-10 of the Sanctus, the notes are located above the passaggio of the baritone voice (see example 8); a piano dynamic marking compounds the difficulty of this excerpt. Untrained baritones may project a strained quality, which likely will result in poor intonation and tone quality as well as vocal fatigue.

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7 Eschbach, 44.
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Example 7. Duruflé, *Messe “Cum Jubilo,”* *Gloria,* mm. 142-149.

Using the warm-up to build vocal technique is an approach that will help choruses in general, but particularly in the preparation of the “Cum Jubilo.” A vocal sigh will help the chorus develop a smooth transition between the vocal registers. The singers should start at the top of their falsetto and *portamento* down through the vocal break into their lower register. The choir may need to be reminded to lighten up on their vocal quality as they approach the *passaggio*, to facilitate a smooth register transition. Frauke Haasemann and James Jordan recommend, “When sighing downward, make an upward motion with your hand. That gesture will remind you to think upward during the descending lines, which helps mix the registers.”

A second exercise can be adapted from the *Sanctus*. Transposing measures 7-8 up and requiring the chorus to sing the exercise in falsetto on a neutral vowel will train their voices to sing the phrase, which spans an entire octave, with a similar tone production (see example 9). It may be helpful to begin the exercise with an upper octave pitch to ensure that the chorus begins in falsetto. The exercise should be transposed down one half step until it matches the score. The choir should be reminded to sing each exercise with uniform tone. The development of head tone and register consistency will lead to a more efficient vocal production, better tone and intonation, and, consequently, a better performance.

Example 9.

![Example 9](image)

Melismatic singing is another problem that appears throughout the “Cum Jubilo.” Singers may have the tendency to use an aspirate on each note value, creating a percussive effect, which may detract from the plainchant chant style inherent in the piece. For example, in the opening of the *Kyrie* (see example 10) care must be taken so that the vocal line is sung legato and that no aspirates are added.

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![Example 10. Duruflé, *Messe “Cum Jubilo,” Kyrie*, mm. 3-4.](image)

An exercise that can be added to the daily warm-up to encourage legato singing is an ascending then descending five-note scale (see example 11). This can be sung on one vowel or with a different vowel on each descending pitch. This will develop the technique that will allow the choir to change notes on one vowel without an aspirate, glottal stop or diaphragmatic thrust.

Example 11.

![Example 11.](image)

Another exercise can be created from the vocal line of *Kyrie*. Replacing the text with a neutral vowel or the vowels of *Kyrie* [i-i-e] will enable the choir to develop the legato singing without interference from consonants (see example 12).

Example 12.

![Example 12.](image)

The metrical notation of the Gregorian chant rhythm may cause problems for the inexperienced chorus. The meters change frequently as does the subdivisional content of the beats. The *Gloria* in measures 5-13 (see example 13) exemplifies the challenges of changing meters and shifting from simple to compound subdivisions within the same measure.

Possible solutions to this problem include count singing and subdividing. For efficient count singing in an inexperienced choir, the conductor may want to prepare a manuscript of particularly challenging passages with the desired counting style notated (see example 14). This will save time and avoid the confusion of the chorus having to notate the exercise themselves.
Another approach to strengthen the choir rhythmically is syllabic subdividing. When subdividing, the choir should sing the syllable [du] on each subdivisional pulse in the measure. This encourages musical singing; provides a sense of legato and connection in the melismas; and can greatly help choirs stay together amidst the shifting meters and subdivisions.

**Conducting**

The challenge of shifting meters and subdivisions may also be the principle conducting challenge in performing the *Messe “Cum Jubilo.”* This problem may be defined in two parts: first, identifying the beat patterns within the larger structure of changing meters and subdivisions; second, clarity of gesture in communicating the meters to the choir and orchestra.
As previously noted, Duruflé’s application of modern rhythmic notation to Gregorian chant creates a variety of changing meters throughout this work. Effective score marking can help the conductor quickly identify the changes of meter. Some conductors prefer using shapes to represent conducting beat patterns; for example, using a square, triangle, or check mark to symbolize a four pattern, three pattern, and two pattern, respectively. If shapes are being used, another notational technique will be necessary in order to notate the subdivisional groupings of each beat. One such technique is to bracket the simple and compound divisions of the beat so that the macro beat is noticeable by sight (see example 15).


Another method for marking the score is to write the number of the desired beat pattern above the specific measure in the score. The subdivisions may also be notated at the top of the score in superscript to the beat pattern number. For example, when notating a 7/8 measure which is subdivided as a simple-simple-compound, the marking above that measure would be 3\( \frac{2}{3} \) (see example 16). The individual conductor must choose which method of score marking they prefer and which one would best suit their needs.
The conducting gesture must clearly differentiate between simple and compound subdivision. The *snap* and *roll* are techniques that the conductor may use to indicate the changes in subdivision. The *snap* technique is used when conducting a simple subdivision. The hand/baton should accelerate out of the ictus and slow slightly when reaching the top of the rebound. The *snap* rebound should be more vertically oriented, although generally traveling in the opposite direction of the ictus placement of the following beat.

The *roll* technique is used for conducting compound subdivisions. In the *roll*, the hand/baton should slightly slow down immediately after the point of ictus. To contrast visually with the *snap*, the rebound of the *roll* should be more horizontally oriented; this also facilitates the inclusion of a third subdivisional pulse.

**Conclusion**

The *Messe “Cum Jubilo”*, for unison baritone chorus and orchestra, is a unique setting of the Mass Ordinary that encompasses the spirituality of Gregorian chant and the aural beauty of impressionism. Accessible to both performers and audience, the “Cum Jubilo” would be a striking and satisfying addition to the repertoire of men’s choruses.
Works Cited


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