

Simple Tools and Techniques for Effective Hymn Arranging

Branches Band

❖ **Choosing Chords**

- Types of chords - I/IV/V structural (e.g. in C Major: C, F, G), ii/vi secondary (e.g. in C Major: Dm, Am), iii infrequent (e.g. in C Major: Em), vii* rare (e.g. in C Major: B diminished)
- Frequency of chords - generally one or two chords per measure, many hymns can be completely harmonized by I, IV, and V.
- Inversions, extensions, substitutions - Inversions can be used for more stepwise bass lines or for variety; Extensions can add harmonic color, like 7th chords (e.g. G-B-D-F), 9th (add2) chords (e.g. C-D-E-G), etc.; Substitutions can add chord variety to your basic harmonic structure: ii can be subbed for IV, vi can be subbed for I, iii sometimes takes the place of I or VI.
- Creating alternate harmonizations - for hymns with more stanzas, having a second harmonization adds variety

❖ **Matching the Mood of the Text**

- Changing the harmonization - if a generally joyful text has a stanza that has a more subdued mood (or vice versa), consider altering the harmonization to match the mood change for that stanza (e.g. How Great Thou Art, stanza three more subdued than the rest)
- Changing the musical style - if a stanza or phrase momentarily shifts mood, consider suspending the overall style momentarily for one that matches the momentary change in mood (e.g. In Christ Alone, line one of stanza three: play simple chords without rhythmic drive momentarily)

❖ **Interludes**

- Purpose: continued rhythmic/metric flow, breathing, speaking (prayers, gathering rites, confession/absolution), time to stand, musically smooth ending at the hymn's conclusion
- Types: just one chord, chord progression, portion of the melody, other
- Length: varies depending on purpose

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❖ **Treatments of the Melody**

- Lengthening - sometimes the final portion of the phrase may be lengthened to accommodate a chord progression or breathing between otherwise immediately back-to-back phrases (e.g. last two phrases of How Lovely Shines the Morning Star)
- Altering the rhythm - for variety or to achieve a particular style/mood; usually altering the rhythm is not advised if the arrangement is intended to be used with congregational singing

❖ **Varieties within the Harmonization**

- Octaves - move what you are playing up or down an octave
- Chord voicings - particularly on guitar: play alternate chord formations, or capo and play in a different key
- Arpeggiation vs. rhythmic Arpeggiate or pick-style chord formations vs. full chords struck rhythmically or according to a strum pattern
- Rhythm/support vs. solo/free improvisation - consider who amongst your players will carry the full chord/rhythmic function and who will play solo lines or improvise freely
- Layering - consider starting with one or two instruments and adding an instrument with each stanza (e.g. guitar only stanza one—add piano stanza two—add percussion stanza three—etc.)
- Building in intensity - increase the rhythmicity, add instruments, double the bass octave on piano, etc. for a fuller sound

❖ **Ostinatos and Drones** (pedal tones)

- Often involve the first, fifth, and/or second scale degree
- Ostinato: a repeating figure
- Drone (pedal tone): repeated or sustained note(s) throughout

❖ **A capella**

- Hymn harmonization - consider singing a capella the harmonization written in the hymnal for the first stanza or as a musical “break” for one of the middle stanzas
- Write your own