



CMP Teaching Plan Rhosymedre for Orchestra

revised 6/20/2015

Title: **Rhosymedre: Prelude on a Welsh Hymn Tune**

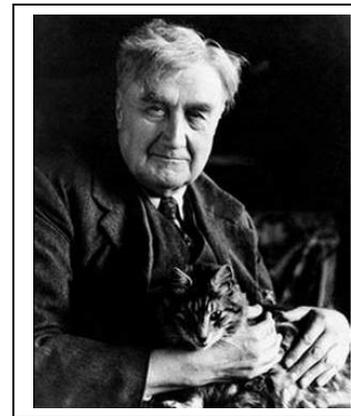
Composer: **Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)**

Orchestrated by **Arnold Foster**

Instrumentation: **String Orchestra with optional Woodwinds, Horns and Trumpet**

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Plan by: **Ray Ostwald** rostwald@elmhurst205.org



Reasons to perform the piece

- Performed often by professionals (organ)
- Musically and contrapuntally intricate, yet simple harmonically and beautiful
- Vaughan Williams as a major composer

Things to teach with the piece

- Technique of playing fast active lines softly and expressively
- Deceptive cadence
- 4/2 meter and associated rhythms
- Chorale Prelude

Prior student knowledge

- Required range and technique
- Phrase structure

Analysis

Broad Description: Lyrical String Orchestra Work (with optional winds) based on a Hymn Tune.

Type/Genre: Chorale Prelude (originally for organ)

Background Information:

The hymn tune known as *Rhosymedre* was composed by the Welsh Anglican parish priest John David Edwards (1805-1885). Edwards lived in the town of Rhosymedre for many years, and included this hymn in a collection published in 1836. The word Rhosymedre means “beautiful.” The text is sometimes “My Song is Love Unknown,” or “Our Father, by whose Name.” The Welsh associate the hymn with Easter as a celebratory hymn. A chorale prelude is a short composition for organ based on a hymn tune, often played as prelude music in a service where the hymn will be sung later. *Rhosymedre* was one of a set of three Welsh hymns for which he wrote chorale preludes. English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams composed the organ version of Rhosymedre in 1920, shortly after returning from service in World War I.

Composer and conductor Arnold Foster, a student of Vaughan Williams, orchestrated the work.

Additional Instrumental Information

The piece is fully effective with strings alone. All or some of the 2 flutes, oboe, 2 clarinets (B-flat), 2 bassoons 2 horns (F) and trumpet (B-flat) may be added as desired. The original organ score is also compatible with this orchestration, if desired.

Elements of Music

Form [8 bar **Intro**, **A** (hymn at “A”), **A'** (hymn tune at “C”), **B** (climax 5 before “D”), **Coda** (“D”=Intro)]

An 8 bar introduction introduces the flowing countermelody that Vaughan Williams will weave around the tune. The following 16 measures (at letter “A”) introduce the hymn tune in the violas (with horn and later, bassoon). The next 15 bars (letter “C”) state the theme more boldly in the violins (with flute, oboe and trumpet). A deceptive cadence 5 bars before “D” leads to three measures of musical climax, then more relaxing counterpoint is joined by a return of the final phrase of the hymn tune. This gently leads to a restatement of the 8 bar introduction (letter “D”) that leads to the final soft cadence. Rather than begin with the hymn tune, Vaughan Williams puts his own music (the countermelody) at the fore. The

form of the hymn tune itself is 6.6.6.6.8.8.8, signifying that the text is in four phrases of six syllables followed by three phrases of eight syllables.

Rhythm

The meter is 4/2 time. The fastest rhythm is eighth notes. The Hymn tune is in simple half notes. The countermelody is much more rhythmically active, and repeats the same rhythmic pattern five times before exploring something new. The countermelody features many ties over the bar line and empty downbeats which help allow the rhythmically simple hymn tune to retain attention and focus of the listener. Single quarter notes in the bass line (often “sol-do”) fill in many of the sustained notes, ties or empty downbeats in the higher voices.

Melody

The hymn tune has a range of one octave (Sol to Sol), and Vaughan Williams changes just one pitch from the original, the pickup to the final phrase. (Vaughan Williams chooses Sol, the original is Ti.). More interesting is Vaughan Williams’ countermelody to the hymn tune, which frames the piece alone as the Intro and Coda, and receives the climactic treatment without the presence of the hymn tune. The countermelody has ornamental eighth note figures (many lower neighbors), and it often follows the general shape of the hymn tune, harmonizing at times in thirds and sixths and occasionally at the octave. Vaughan Williams seems to have the countermelody overshadow the melody, like a young child showing off, running circles around a wise elder. For example, the first notes of the hymn tune include “do-re-mi,” while the countermelody expands all the way to “do-re-mi-fa-sol.”

Harmony

The piece stays in G Major throughout, with only a few chromatic harmonies in the second verse. These chromatic harmonies build tension throughout the verse. The early tonal simplicity and building chromatic tension serve to bring attention to the dramatic deceptive cadence (5 before rehearsal D) that sends the climax into motion.

Timbre

With strings alone, the timbre will be consistently homogeneous. Adding winds will create extra variety. The wind orchestration adds to the build in the second verse towards the climax.

Texture

The texture is polyphonic throughout, thicker in the second verse with *divisi* in all string parts (except bass). At rehearsal “B” and “D” the countermelody and/or bass line take a break for long enough to clear the air and remind the listener and performer of the significance of the hymn tune, while it is less ornate and rhythmically active. The placement of the hymn tune in the inner voice early on contrasts with the move to the high instruments for the second verse. Then, the return of the hymn tune fragment returns to the inner voices, for symmetrical closure.

Expression

The piece is largely tranquil and *semplice*, with the second verse being more expressive in mood, harmony and dynamics. The highest notes of the piece occur at the climax after the deceptive cadence when the final burst of counterpoint interrupts the end of the final verse, and this intense drama quickly fades back into flowing reverence.

Additional Considerations:

This work is also available in a simplified string orchestra arrangement by Douglas Wagner (in 4/4), published by Alfred, #31530, (2009) and for Band (in F), transcribed by Walter Beeler.

Music Selection

This piece is performed and enjoyed by professionals and non-academic audiences in many settings. It transcends the simplicity of the hymn tune and key. The balance of interwoven counterpoint is masterful and creates an ongoing struggle between the simple melody and complex yet tranquil accompaniment. The orchestration is flexible and effective.

The Heart Statement

The heart of *Rhosymedre* is the deceptive cadence when the countermelody seemingly overpowers the melody and ventures to a climax on its own before returning to the hymn tune.

Outcomes

Skill Outcome: Students will play lightly yet expressively on active contrapuntal lines and fast rhythms.

A. Strategies

1. Playing fast scale warm-ups with light arm weight, tilted bow and distance from the bridge.
2. Having one group play a loud slow scale or melody while others play the light fast scale/melody.
3. Having three or four students perform a scale or phrase, after they decide who will play louder with a focused tone, while the others accompany with a light tone. The rest of the class must guess who is the chosen louder player.

B. Assessment: Listening to individuals and groups of students play both slow/loud and fast/soft.

Knowledge Outcome: Students will recognize and understand *deceptive cadence* as an example of musical surprise.

A. Strategies

1. Define music as “sound that sets up expectations, then meets them or surprises the listener.”
2. Playing or singing a major scale, ascending and descending, leaving out the final “do.”
3. Playing cadences on the piano, having students rate them as predictable (V-I) or surprising (V-vi).

B. Assessment: Students will identify examples of deceptive cadences and other musical surprises.

Affective Outcome: Students will hear, identify and describe the increased intensity of the climax of a piece, performing accordingly with tone, dynamics, phrasing and emotion. Students will explore the desire for freedom, the exhilaration of freedom, and the return to or longing for the return to comfort or familiar surroundings as this can relate to the overall shape of a piece of music.

A. Strategies

1. Students will describe feeling freedom, only to be drawn back to home, to family, etc. What in life might make you feel a sense of exhilarating freedom? What might make you feel a longing to return to the past comfortably normal circumstance, or to return home after being away? Journal, discuss, share.
2. Students will draw and examine the larger formal arc shape of the form, applying other life situations that might mimic that intensity or climactic shape. (see addendum: formal shape)

B. Assessment: Students will share stories and feelings, speculating about those that can parallel musical shape.

Introducing the Piece: I will teach the hymn tune by rote prior to the distribution of music or sight reading. Students will play and sing the tune. I will review the G Major three-octave scale. I will review, introduce, clap and speak rhythms in 2/2, 3/2 and 4/2 time as part of warm-ups over time prior to the sight reading day.

“Take out the piece”

1. based on a hymn tune
2. in 4/2 meter
3. by the British composer
4. with Welsh origins
5. that includes [--sing hymn tune: sol-do-do-re-re-mi...--]