

CMP Teaching Plan: Fantasy on “Sleepers, Wake”

Title:	Fantasy on “Sleepers, Wake”	Composer:	Johann Sebastian Bach
Ensemble:	String Orchestra or Full Orchestra	Arranger:	Vernon Leidig
Performance level:	8th grade	Publisher:	Alfred, 1991

Music Selection

- Opportunity to play a piece by Bach that is not one of the Brandenburg concertos
- Has connections to choral literature
- Contains a familiar melody
- Example of music from the Baroque period

Analysis

Type of piece

Two movements from Cantata Nr. 140 arranged for strings

Musical elements

Form: The piece contains two sections, the first one a homophonic hymn in four parts and the second a chorale prelude. The Leidig arrangement has an AB form for each section of the piece. (Bach’s original contained a repeat of the A section, making it AAB form.)

Melody/Harmony: The melody is from the hymn written by Philip Nicolai. The arrangement uses Bach’s harmonization of the hymn tune in the first section, with the melody in the 1st violins. In the second part of the piece the arrangement places the melody as a cantus firmus in the 2nd violins and violas with an obbligato part in the 1st violins and the continuo in the cello and bass parts.

Expression: There are not many dynamic changes in the piece and no expression marks which is consistent with the terrace dynamics of the Baroque period.

Timbre: There are great contrasts in timbre between the first and second parts of the piece. In the chorale section, first violins are in their bright register on the A and E strings, with 2nds and violas on the D and G strings. Cellos and bass cover the continuo line which covers a wider range. The fantasy section pairs the 2nd violins and violas in strong middle to upper registers on the cantus firmus (in octaves). The obbligato line in the 1st violins ranges from the D string up to the E string. The cello and basses are in their middle to low range.

Texture: The texture is full and homophonic in the first section, with movement provided by the continuo line. The voices are more independent and create a multi-layered texture in the fantasy section.

Other compositional devices

- use of suspensions and passing tones to create tension/release in measures 7, 10, 23, and 29.
- use of moving quarter notes in the basso continuo line to create movement within the homophonic section.
- use of sequences in measures 37-40, 43-44, and 49-52

Musical/cultural traditions and historical connections

- The Baroque Period: Bach was a composer during the high Baroque period whose life reflected the way most composers of the time made a living—as composers, musicians, and teachers who worked for the church or for a wealthy patron.
- The text of Cantata No. 140, and the Niccolai hymn that was its basis, contain Biblical connections (Matthew 25:1-13). This text is also linked to the calendar of the Protestant church year falling within the season of Advent (which means ‘waiting’), a penitential season prior to Christmas.

What is the “heart” of this piece?

The musical contrast both between the sections (homophonic/polyphonic) and within the sections (chords/moving bass line; obbligato/cantus firmus)

Outcome #1

Students will investigate the role of the chorale in a chorale cantata.

Strategies

- A. Students will read the biblical story of the wise and foolish wedding guests in Matthew 25:1-13 and compare it to the text of the hymn (see Appendix B). They will work in groups to create a Venn diagram which shows the similarities and differences between the texts.
- B. Students will listen to excerpts from each of the movements of Cantata No. 140 and read an English translation of the text for each movement (see Appendix B). Students will compare this to the text of the original hymn, noting where and how the Niccolai hymn text was used. The students will write their observations in their journals.

Assessment

- journal writing
- observation during discussion
- diagrams created

Outcome #2

The students will analyze the role of each of the parts in the chorale: cantus firmus, continuo, inner voices. Students will compare and contrast these roles in each of the two parts of the arrangement.

Strategies

- A. Students will sing a verse of the hymn and identify which instruments play the tune in both parts of the arrangement.
- B. Students will be assigned to look up the definitions of ‘cantus firmus’, ‘continuo’ and ‘obbligato’. They will report back to the class. The whole class will then try to discover which instruments play each of these in both sections of the arrangement.
- C. The class will play the opening chorale section without the 2nd violin and viola parts (measures 1-16). Students will describe what they heard and try to explain what they didn’t hear. The same measures will be played with all parts. Students will write in their journals about the differences between the two versions they played.

D. The 1st violins, cello, and bass will play measures 49-58. As above, students will describe what they did and didn't hear, and write their comparisons.

Assessment

- check for understanding through questioning or comments made during rehearsal
- written work in journals
- participation in discussion

Outcome #3

Students will examine how different settings of the same tune can alter the response in the listener.

Strategies

- A. The students will listen to a recording of the two movements of the original cantata on which their arrangement is based. The students will write at least three descriptive words about each of the movements. In small groups, they will share one of their descriptive words and attempt to explain what it is in the music that evokes this description. Each group will report back to the large group. The teacher will create a column for each movement and list the descriptive words in their final form.
- B. Over the course of several days, students will listen to the Niccolai tune arranged by other composers. The students will be given a sheet with columns. Two of the columns will contain the descriptive words generated above and the other columns will be blank. As the students listen to each new arrangement, they will add descriptive words for that composer's piece.
- C. Students will work in small groups to create a physical movement or set of movements which they feel reflects the mood of one of the arrangements that they have heard and described above. They will perform their movements for the class and the students watching will try to guess which arrangement the group is interpreting.

Assessment

- observation during class discussion
- written comments in journal
- performance of their group work