

TEN INTONATION STUDIES AND CHORALES

for String Orchestra

Brian Balmages

Instrumentation

1 - Conductor's Full Score
16 - Violin
5 - Viola
5 - Violoncello
5 - Double Bass



The Composer

Brian Balmages (b. 1975) is an award-winning composer, conductor, producer, and performer. The music he has written for winds, brass, and orchestra has been performed throughout the world with commissions ranging from elementary schools to professional orchestras. World premieres include prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and Meyerhoff Symphony Hall. His music was also performed as part of the 2013 Presidential Inaugural Prayer Service, which was attended by both President Obama and Vice President Biden. He received his bachelor's degree in music from James Madison University and his master's degree from the University of Miami in Florida. He is a recipient of the prestigious A. Austin Harding Award from the American School Band Directors Association and in 2016 was awarded the James Madison University Distinguished Alumni Award from the School of Visual and Performing Arts (the first year the award was given). In the same year, he was commissioned by his other alma mater, the University of Miami, to compose music for the inauguration of the institution's 6th president, Dr. Julio Frenk.

As a conductor, Mr. Balmages enjoys regular engagements with all-state and region bands and orchestras, as well as university and professional ensembles throughout the world. Notable guest conducting appearances have included the Midwest Clinic, Western International Band Clinic, College Band Directors Conference, American School Band Directors Association National Conference and others. Additional conducting appearances have included the Kennedy Center and Meyerhoff Symphony Hall as well as engagements in Australia, Canada and Italy. Currently, he is Director of Instrumental Publications for The FJH Music Company and Assistant Director of Bands and Orchestras at Towson University.

USING THE INTONATION STUDIES AND CHORALES

This set of intonation studies and chorales was written as a result of my work with honor orchestras around the country. Many orchestra directors told me they needed a set of practical exercises like this as they typically must resort to scales in rounds or something similar (which are wonderful, but do not expand basic harmonic awareness) to develop these skills. These exercises are meant to help students hear harmony in a logical and progressive way while allowing them to focus on intonation. Each chorale is divided into two parts for each section. Basses may opt to play only the lower line if necessary.

I consider this set of 10 studies to be loosely broken into 4 separate sections. I advise directors to consider playing one exercise from each section daily as part of the ensemble warm-up. As concert time approaches, this can be scaled back as necessary.

Section 1 – Exercises 1-3. These are good warm-up exercises designed to get students thinking about intonation, scales, and simple finger patterns while using only very basic harmonies. All chords are tuned to open strings. This is an ideal set of chorales to teach students about the importance of lowering the major 3rd of a chord so it is perfectly in tune.

Section 2 – Exercises 4-5. These studies introduce more passing tones and melodic content while still keeping finger patterns very basic, allowing students to focus on the open string harmonies that occur throughout.

Section 3 – Exercises 6-7. These chorales are harmonized to an open string drone (not written, but called for in the music). While musicality is important in all of these exercises, I view this section as an opportunity to stretch phrasing and musicality a great deal. That said, I also caution directors against conducting a few measures quite fast and the next few measures quite slow, etc. (often done to get students to watch). I always prefer that everything be in a greater musical context to prepare students for the music to come. More subtle changes are just as effective in getting students to watch, but can be extremely musically rewarding at the same time.

Section 4 – Exercises 8-10. The final three chorales are not based on open string harmonies. They require a higher level of awareness as students adjust to each other and tune without the presence of open strings. Harmony plays a richer function and the chorales as a whole offer the opportunity for a rich, musical experience as part of the ensemble warm-up.

In addition to the broader concepts stated previously, each individual study / chorale has a more specific and detailed purpose.

1. Warm-up: Tuning Exercise. Written as a simple listening exercise, students tune to open strings. Directors may choose how many students to put on the open string part (enough that it is clearly audible). Students should listen carefully to the harmonies and tune the open fifths and major chords. In addition, special attention should be given to the role of the 3rd in a major chord. This is an excellent exercise to teach students how they need to slightly lower the pitch of the 3rd so the chord is perfectly in tune. Students should be encouraged to use a full bow, especially in the last 3 measures so as to sustain through the entire duration of each measure. Students should alternate parts regularly.
2. D Major Scale Intonation Study. This exercise harmonizes a D Major scale with open strings. While it is important to have students practice both lines, the study is written so all students play an ascending or descending scale. It is important to take time on each note to truly tune the interval (directors may put a fermata on any, or every, note as needed). Chords are simple to help students listen carefully to the harmony (focusing only on perfect 4ths, 5ths, and major chords).
3. G Major Scale Intonation Study. Similar to the previous study, this exercise focuses on the key of G Major. Directors should take the same approach.
4. Minor Scale Intonation Study. This exercise cycles through D minor, A minor, and G minor. As before, everything is harmonized to open strings using simple harmonies. This is an ideal way to get students used to a minor modality and locking in intonation, particularly on minor 3rds within a minor chord. Of particular note are 4th fingers in violin and viola - make sure students are stretching enough that these notes are in tune with the open strings sounding in those measures. Finally, this study introduces major second intervals. While they are treated as passing tones, I strongly encourage directors to put a fermata on them (e.g. measure 1, beats 2 and 4). This will help develop students' ears and get them listening past major and minor chords.
5. Whole Note Bow Distribution / Intonation Study. This study allows students to focus on bow distribution, particularly with a whole note. Students should strive for an even, sustained sound on each whole note. The sound should match the sustain of the moving parts (which have the luxury of 2 bows in each measure). In addition, the moving lines use small intervals (2nds and 3rds) so students can focus on intonation.
6. Chorale on a D String Drone. Directors may choose any number of students from any section to sustain an open D string drone throughout this entire chorale. This helps give students a "home base" to refer to when playing and tuning each chord. Directors may even choose to start the drone ahead of the chorale itself so students can get the D tonality in their ears.
7. Chorale on a G String Drone. Similar to the previous chorale, this one makes use of an open G string drone that should be sustained throughout the chorale. Again, the director may use any number of players as long as the drone is audible. This particular chorale also introduces a minor 2nd interval (measure 2, beat 1). As before, I encourage directors to put a fermata on this note and tune it in order to expand the types of tonalities students are able to hear. This chorale also experiments with major to minor harmonic shifts. I do much of this type of writing in my own music, so it was important to me to write a chorale where students can focus on these types of intervals outside of performance music.
8. Chorale in E Minor. This chorale also alternates between minor and major throughout. This is the first chorale without a drone and is also not based on open strings. Directors may need to spend some additional time on this, and the following chorales, to focus on intonation in the absence of open strings.
9. Minor Modal Chorale. Written primarily in D Dorian (D-E-F-G-A-B-C), the chorale also incorporates secondary harmonies including B \flat Major, A Major, and G minor (all introducing either the note B \flat or C \sharp). Directors may need to put fermatas on certain chords and build slowly so each section can hear how they fit into the chord.
10. Chorale in C Major. This final chorale exposes students to C Major tonality. Students should focus on the bottom cello part (using almost entirely open strings). If students struggle with intonation, consider isolating viola bottom line, cello bottom line, and all basses. Once that is in tune, add all instruments that play half notes only (they can rest during measures with quarter notes). Finally, play as written.

TEN INTONATION STUDIES AND CHORALES

for String Orchestra

1. Warm-up: Tuning Exercise

BRIAN BALMAGES
(ASCAP)

top line use open strings always

Violin

div. 4

top line use open strings always

Viola

div. 4

top line use open strings always

Violoncello

div. 4

top line use open strings always

Double Bass

Vln.

Vla.

Vcl.

D.B.

2. D Major Scale Intonation Study

[illegible]

3. G Major Scale Intonation Study

Preview

This image shows a musical score for a string ensemble, specifically Violins (Vln.), Violas (Vla.), Cellos (Vcl.), and Double Basses (D.B.). The score is written for 10 measures. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The Violin parts are in treble clef, the Viola parts are in alto clef, the Cello parts are in bass clef, and the Double Bass parts are in bass clef. The score is overlaid with a large, diagonal, semi-transparent watermark that reads "Preview".

4. Minor Scale Intonation Study

Score for '4. Minor Scale Intonation Study' in 4/4 time. The score is for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vcl.), and Double Bass (D.B.). The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The Violin and Viola parts feature a melodic line with fingerings (4, 0, 4) and a sustained harmonic accompaniment. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts provide a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and moving lines. A large red watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid diagonally across the score.

5. Whole Note Bow Distribution / Intonation Study

Score for '5. Whole Note Bow Distribution / Intonation Study' in 4/4 time. The score is for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vcl.), and Double Bass (D.B.). The key signature is one sharp (F-sharp). The Violin and Viola parts feature a melodic line with a bow distribution mark (v) and a sustained harmonic accompaniment. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts provide a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and moving lines. A large red watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid diagonally across the score.

6. Chorale on a D String Drone (select players should drone on open D throughout)

Score for 'Chorale on a D String Drone' (4/4 time, key of D major). The score is for a string ensemble with Violins (Vln.), Violas (Vla.), Cellos (Vcl.), and Double Basses (D.B.). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The music features a drone on the open D string for select players. The score is divided into four systems, each with four staves. A large red watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid diagonally across the score.

7. Chorale on a G String Drone (select players should drone on open G throughout)

Score for 'Chorale on a G String Drone' (4/4 time, key of D major). The score is for a string ensemble with Violins (Vln.), Violas (Vla.), Cellos (Vcl.), and Double Basses (D.B.). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The music features a drone on the open G string for select players. The score is divided into four systems, each with four staves. A large red watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid diagonally across the score.

8. Chorale in E Minor

Score for '8. Chorale in E Minor' in 4/4 time. The score is for Violins (Vln.), Violas (Vla.), Cellos (Vcl.), and Double Basses (D.B.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is written in E minor. The score consists of 8 measures. The Violins and Violas play a melody of eighth and quarter notes. The Cellos and Double Basses play a bass line of quarter and eighth notes. A large red watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid diagonally across the score.

9. Minor Modal Chorale

Score for '9. Minor Modal Chorale' in 4/4 time. The score is for Violins (Vln.), Violas (Vla.), Cellos (Vcl.), and Double Basses (D.B.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is written in E minor. The score consists of 8 measures. The Violins and Violas play a melody of eighth and quarter notes. The Cellos and Double Basses play a bass line of quarter and eighth notes. A large red watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid diagonally across the score.

4

Vln.

Vla.

Vcl.

D.B.

10. Chorale in C Major

4

Vln.

Vla.

Vcl.

D.B.