

Take Me to Church

A Guide to Sacred Music Performance for Clarinetists

by Renee Muir

The holiday season is upon us. If you are an instrumentalist, it is likely that sooner or later you will be asked to play for a church service or event. This can be a daunting task if you are unfamiliar with religious settings or the events of the liturgical year. Personally, having been raised in the Christian faith and attended religious institutions from high school through my clarinet graduate work, performing in a sacred setting has been an ever-present reality. Through my participation in the church, I have become very comfortable with the selection of appropriate repertoire during each liturgical season. In an effort to share the knowledge I have acquired over the years, I have compiled a “how-to” guide for those unfamiliar with the events or the repertoire related to the liturgical year.

HOW TO START

When you agree to participate in a church service, you become a contributor and facilitator in the

congregation’s act of worship. It is thus important to select music that is:

- 1 fitting for the current liturgical season, and
- 2 appropriate for the sacred function and setting.

The portions of the service where special music is often required are the prelude, offertory, instrumental interlude, and postlude, which can be defined as follows:

Prelude: A generic title for music that precedes something else, just as its prefix indicates. Thus, it serves as an introduction to something: worship. The prelude prepares the atmosphere of the sanctuary, so that the arriving worshipers may be ushered into an attitude of worship.

Offertory: The “Offertorium” was originally part of the Mass in the Roman rite and was a psalm or chant sung while the “offering” of Communion was brought to the altar. Today, the “offering” consists of taking up the tithes and gifts of money from the congregation and is usually placed somewhere in the middle of the service. Music utilized during this time need not be simply transitional or background music, but should draw the listener to think on the goodness, beauty and provision of God.

Musical Interlude: A type of “musical offering” that should point the listener toward the Object of the offering – the Lord. It is for this portion of the service that it is important for the musician to be aware of the current liturgical season and should select music accordingly. The placement of the musical interlude in the service will vary from church to church; consult with the worship director for the specific service order.

As a performer, you should be aware that most high churches – Catholic and Protestant – have written guidelines regarding the appropriateness of the music that is performed in their churches.

Postlude: Music to come “after” the service. As such, it serves as a commentary, reflection or response to the preceding service. The postlude should be characterized by a spirit of joy, thankfulness and energy, although that may change depending on the nature of the service (e.g., in the case of a Good Friday service). The postlude usually follows the Dismissal and serves as a type of “exit” music, creating a mood that ushers the congregation into a new week.

THE CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT LITURGICAL CALENDAR

Advent (November – December 24)

The word *advent* means “coming” or “arrival,” and is the four-week period preceding the celebration of Christmas. It is a time of expectation, anticipation, preparation and longing for the coming Savior. Hymns performed during this season share the themes of hope, expectation and deliverance. (Advent pieces: “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus,” and “Of The Father’s Love Begotten”).

Christmas (December 24 – January 6)

Christmas (“mass on Christ’s day”) is the season celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. This season lasts from Christmas Eve (December 24) through the Feast of Epiphany (January 6). It is marked by themes of joy, peace and good will toward all. When performing for a Christmas church service, it is not appropriate to perform secular pieces (i.e. “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree,” “O Christmas Tree,” “White Christmas” or “Jingle Bells”). As a guest performer in the church, select pieces that reflect on the birth and deity of Christ. (Christmas pieces: “Away in a Manger,” “O Holy Night” and “Joy to the World”).

Lent (forty-day period, usually February/March – April)

Lent is the forty-day season that precedes and prepares for Easter. It is initiated on Ash Wednesday, continues through six Sundays, and ends on the evening of Holy Thursday at the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. Lent is a time of meditation, reflection and prayer. Because of the solemnity of this season, songs of praise (such as Alleluias, Glorias) are usually not performed in the Church. (Lent pieces: “O Sacred Head

Now Wounded,” “O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus” and “Were You There?”).

Triduum (the three days preceding Easter)

Triduum is Latin for “Great Three Days.” It calls to remembrance the events of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. This three-day period is characterized by a solemn remembrance of Jesus’ death on the cross. During this time the Church meditates on the passion and sufferings of Jesus Christ. (Triduum pieces: “What Wondrous Love is This?,” “Lead Me to Calvary” and “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”).

Easter (the Sunday that follows the first full moon after the vernal equinox)

Easter is the greatest feast within the liturgical year, as it celebrates the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Easter season begins with the celebration of the Easter Vigil on Easter Sunday and lasts for a fifty-day period until Pentecost Sunday. This fifty-day period is one of rejoicing in Christ’s victory over death and sin, and of thanksgiving for salvation. Pieces played during this time

should reflect the victory and supremacy of Christ. (Easter pieces: “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” “Christ Arose” and “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”).

Ordinary Time (periods of time between celebrations; for example, the time between Christmas and Lent)

The months during Ordinary Time are a period of growth for the Church as it meditates on the teachings of the Bible and applies its truth to their daily lives. As there is no certain festival celebrated during Ordinary Time, it is appropriate to select music that will direct the listeners to the holy character of God and the truths found in His word. (Ordinary Time pieces: “Be Thou My Vision,” “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” and “Great is Thy Faithfulness”).

WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

In addition to performing for regular Sunday services within the liturgical year, you may be asked to provide special music for events such as weddings or funerals. As a performer, you should be aware that most high churches – Catholic and Protestant – have written guidelines regarding the appropriateness of the music that is performed in their churches.

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Communicate with the wedding/funeral coordinator to determine whether such guidelines exist for the particular venue, and confirm that the music selected is in compliance with those guidelines.

For these special events, the task of selecting repertoire usually does not rest on the musician(s); most couples/families have already selected certain pieces that they wish to have performed. A possible exception may include wedding prelude music, for which the event coordinator may ask the musician to provide a certain amount of prepared music (e.g. 20-30 minutes).

As with any performing engagement, it is extremely important that the musician have a clear understanding of the wishes and expectations of the family, and be aware of the following information:

- 1 Payment:** Most musicians have a contract in place, outlining their rates and performance expectations (i.e. an hourly rate versus a set fee, attendance of the wedding rehearsal, or equipment provided or required). Having a contract is especially useful to ensure there are no misunderstandings between the performer and employer regarding payment, equipment and attendance.
- 2 Contact information:** The musician should secure the contact information of the event coordinator should any questions or emergencies arise.
- 3 Arrival times and location(s):** You should be sure to secure the exact times and locations for each event from the event coordinator.
- 4 Approximate performance time(s):** The musician should be aware of how much music they are to provide (i.e. length of time), and their placement in the ceremony program.
- 5 Attire:** You should communicate with the event coordinator regarding the appropriate dress. Do they want concert black, certain color combinations, or simply formal dress?
- 6 Equipment:** If you are providing your own equipment (i.e. music stand, amplification, or stand light), it should be communicated to the event coordinator before the event. If you need a chair, or any of the above equipment, this needs to be communicated as well.

If you are asked to provide wedding prelude music, possible pieces might include: "Be Thou My Vision," "Jesu, Joy

of Man's Desiring," "Panis Angelicus," the Adagio movement from the Mozart *Clarinet Concerto*, "For the Beauty of the Earth" or Pachelbel's *Canon*.

SACRED REPERTOIRE FOR CLARINET

Below is an annotated list of sacred clarinet collections. Each has been rated on a difficulty level of 1 to 5: 1 being elementary level; 5 being advanced.

Sacred Solos for B-flat Clarinet/piano, arr. Clair W. Johnson (Hal Leonard)

This is a compilation of eleven works and includes pieces such as "Adoration" (Borowski), "Agnus Dei" (Mozart), "Alleluia" from Exultate Jubilate (Mozart), "Meditation" (Massenet), "Panis Angelicus" (Frank) and "Where E'er You Walk" from Semele (Handel). This book would provide selections perfect for Ordinary Time. Level: 4.

Sacred Melodies for Clarinet Solo, arr. Norman Heim (Mel Bay Publications)

This simple and beautiful collection of solos (with piano) aims to provide repertoire from important composers of the 18th and 19th centuries: Bach, Handel and Mendelssohn. The variety and length of the works can be used during the prelude, offertory, instrumental interlude or postlude. Level: 3.

Instrumental Solotrax Vol. 13: Sacred Solos for Clarinet and Saxophone, arr. Ed Hogan (Lillenas)

Arrangements of classic hymns, praise and worship choruses, and gospel songs. Contains keyboard accompaniments plus solo part(s). Appropriate for Ordinary Time or Easter. Level: 2.

Hymns for The Master, arr. Stan Pethel (Hal Leonard)

Fifteen favorite hymns for solo clarinet with piano. This collection includes "Be Thou My Vision," "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," "For the Beauty of the Earth," "Amazing Grace" and "All Creatures of Our God and King." Even though the arrangements are quite simple, they could be easily developed with some very simple improvised variation, and used during Ordinary Time, weddings or Easter. Level: 1.

Great Is The Lord, arr. Keith Christopher (Hal Leonard)

Fifteen arrangements for clarinet and piano. This collection includes choruses such as "Give Thanks," "As the Deer," "He

is Exalted," "All Hail King Jesus" and "I Love You Lord." These arrangements are very simple, but could be enhanced by adding some additional embellishments. Some pieces would be fitting for Ordinary Time or Easter. Level: 1.

Sacred Solos for Clarinet, William Bay (Mel Bay Publications)

This is a collection of seven clarinet solos with organ and piano accompaniment. Includes both original compositions and new arrangements of sacred pieces such as "Blessed Assurance" and "O Sacred Head Now Wounded." Appropriate for Ordinary Time and Lent/Triduum. Level: 3.

Meditative Solos for Clarinet, arr. Ed Hogan (Lillenas)

Ten solos for clarinet and piano. Includes a CD with accompaniment, piano parts and rhythm parts. Includes "Higher Ground," "It is Well With My Soul" and "Trust Medley." This collection is perfect for the prelude during Ordinary Time. Level: 2.

Twenty Sacred & Spiritual Solos, arr. Daniel Kelley (Resort Music)

This wonderful collection includes familiar classical works such as "Sheep May Safely Graze" (Bach), "The Heavens are Telling" (Haydn), and "Mediation" from *Thais* (Massenet), along with spirituals such as "Deep River," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and "Give Me That Old-Time Religion." This collection can be used during the seasons of Advent, Christmas or Ordinary Time. Level: 4.

Encores and Pieces For Clarinet and Organ, arr. Fritz-Georg Holy (Kunzelmann)

This collection was created for sacred occasions for which there is very little clarinet and organ music. There are eight pieces by Bach, Handel, Schumann and Mozart. The arrangements are easy and can be performed by most pre-college students. Level: 3.

Great Hymns – for Clarinet, arr. James Curnow (Curnow Music)

This beautiful collection includes ten well-loved hymns: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," "All Creatures of Our God and King," "Be Thou My Vision," "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," "O Worship the King" and others – perfect for Christmas and Ordinary Time. Level: 4.

Creative Hymns for Clarinet, arr. Ed Hogan (Lillenas)

An audio CD is included along with piano accompaniment, PDF files, rhythm/piano parts for live accompaniment, and demo tracks. Includes: "Nearer, My God to Thee," "There is a Fountain," "My Savior's Love" and more. Good choice for Advent, Easter and Ordinary Time. Level: 4.

Classical Highlights, arr. Beliebt Klassiker (Schott Music)

Classical Highlights presents several of the best-known pieces from the classical repertoire arranged for clarinet and piano: Bach's "Air" and "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," Handel's "Largo," Schubert's "Ave Maria," Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," Schumann's "Träumerei," Wagner's "Bridal Chorus," and many others. Perfect for prelude or postlude music, or to be used for wedding ceremonies. Level: 5.

INDIVIDUAL SOLOS

Not to be forgotten is our slow-movement repertoire from clarinet concertos such as Mozart (either the original in A or the B-flat arrangement), and concertinos by Camilleri and Tartini. Other slow movements from our clarinet and piano repertoire can also sound wonderful with organ accompaniment.

TRUMPET REPERTOIRE

Trumpet arrangements are another excellent source for sacred repertoire, as they are already in B-flat. There are many sacred collections and solos for trumpet that are beautifully arranged and easily performed on the clarinet. A few collections to consider are: *Great Hymns* and *More Great Hymns* arranged by James Curnow, *Trumpet Solos for Worship* by Brant Adams, and *Sacred Solos for Trumpet and Organ* arranged by Lani Smith.

OPERA ARIAS

If you have been requested to play an offertory during the months of Ordinary Time with no specific "theme" for which to select a piece, it may be perfectly appropriate to play an arrangement of an aria from an opera. However, even though there are no lyrics when playing an instrumental piece, avoid those arias that contain lyrics or connotations inappropriate for this sacred setting, as it is possible that some in the congregation may know the words and/or setting of the aria, and thus be distracted from worship.

ONLINE RESOURCES

More works can be found online by searching "sacred clarinet solos/works,"

or visiting sheet music sites such as MusicNotes.com or VirtualSheetMusic.com. Ordering electronic music files online enables you to purchase and print music without having to buy (and ship) an entire collection, and can prove very convenient for short-notice events.

PLAYING FROM A BOOK OF HYMNS

If you have the ability to transpose from the key of C, you can purchase a standard hymnal (the author recommends the *Sing To The Lord* hymnal), or use the hymnal at the church where you are performing and simply transpose the melody into the appropriate key. If you are not comfortable transposing while performing, it is possible to purchase a B-flat (trumpet) hymnal. When playing out of a hymnal, there are several techniques that can be employed to add melodic variety and color:

- 1 Vary the verses by taking the melody up (or down) an octave.
- 2 Improvise an obbligato part to one of the verses while the piano/organ plays the melody.
- 3 Add arpeggiation between intervals or an occasional grace note or mordent before or between notes to add melodic variety.
- 4 Instead of simply ending the hymn on the last verse, attach an ending "tag" by repeating the last phrase, and adding a *ritardando* to the end.

TUNING WITH THE ORGAN

When performing with an organ, it is very important to check the organ's intonation

before the performance. Michele Gingras, an experienced performer and distinguished professor of clarinet at Miami University, states in her book *More Clarinet Secrets* that "the organ's intonation can vary drastically depending on its construction, temperature, and humidity. Sometimes an organ can be much flatter than A=440 Hz." She goes on to provide solutions to these tuning problems, such as using a longer barrel and pulling out, using an A clarinet with a shorter barrel, or switching to a C clarinet and pulling out all of the joints.

If possible, try to arrange a rehearsal with the organist sometime during the week before the performance, or earlier in the morning on the performance date. Check the tuning of the organ and make sure to bring along the necessary equipment (i.e. reeds, extra barrels, A clarinet) in order to make any necessary adjustments. A general rule of thumb is to be prepared to adjust to any degree of flatness or sharpness. Remember, "blessed are the flexible, for they shall not break."

ATTIRE

When performing in a church, keep in mind that you are there to serve the needs of the church service: to enhance the experience of worship. Therefore, it is vital to be aware of appropriate attire and conduct, and be willing to accommodate the expectations for dress. These expectations are not meant to restrict personal freedom or styles of choice, but are simply standards of professionalism associated with this particular setting.

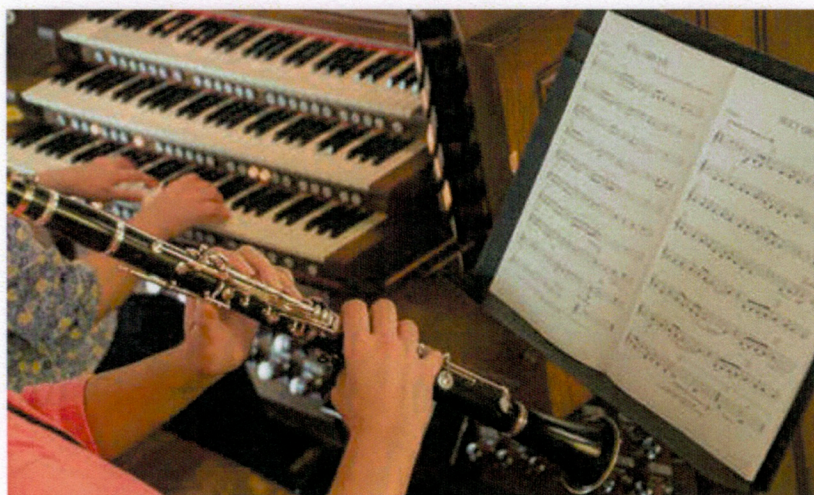


Photo Credit: Shane Muir

If you have any doubts regarding expectations or appropriateness of attire, simply consult the church music director.

PARTICIPATION DURING THE SERVICE

Even if one is not religious or a member of the particular denomination for which one is playing, there is still a certain attitude of respect that is required. During the service while not performing, it is appropriate to sit and pay attention to the proceedings of the service, and participate in the singing and responsive reading if you wish. Visitors and non-members of the church should feel no obligation to give during the offering portion of the service or participate in Communion. In general, refrain from checking or texting on your phone during the service, reading or looking at other material not pertaining to the service (e.g., books, tablets, magazines, grading papers), or sleeping during the service.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The attitude towards providing music for a church service is very important: it

should not be taken lightly, or viewed as just another "gig" in your busy schedule. It is important for a guest musician to be aware of the current liturgical season, its significance and the appropriate repertoire. Being asked to provide special music for a church service attests to your obvious musical ability and influence in the musical community. Therefore, consider it an honor, and approach this opportunity with the same level of preparation and professionalism as when performing a solo recital or concerto. ♦

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ABOUT THE WRITER



A native of Fairbanks, Alaska, Renee Muir holds a dual bachelor's degree in music education and clarinet performance from God's Bible School and College in Cincinnati where she studied with

Carmin Campione, and a master's degree in clarinet performance from Miami University of Ohio as a student of Michele Gingras. An experienced church musician, Renee is passionate about quality repertoire and performance in the church, and providing helpful information for those who wish to be involved in church music. Contact her at reneemuir.com.

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