

## 1 A BOOK OF CANONS

### INTRODUCTION

The process of investigation in this research has required that I find and use a large amount of vocal repertoire. In this appendix I choose to create an anthology for other teachers to use.

#### **What is required of such a collection?**

Based upon my initial investigation into the currently available material and, through practice, discovering the ways in which simple vocal material can be used in a lesson, the following criteria have been formulated.

A large amount of repertoire with many examples that address a particular problem. That problem could be for developing a skill, such as sight-reading, or that will provide a good example that will connect with repertoire.

Repertoire that is musical. That is to say that it is worth performing (with text, fun to do). There is a certain quality that encourages students to want to sing.

Repertoire that covers a range of styles, historical periods and composers. This suggests that the repertoire should be original pieces rather than exercises that are written for a particular purpose.

Repertoire that is singable. Vocal repertoire will have to be the starting point in any lesson based upon singing. Instrumental music can be reached through this.

The repertoire must lend itself to developing musical skills through the performance, such as part singing, as well as other skills such as sight reading and dictation.

The difficulty of the repertoire should range from the most simple to very advanced with enough material in between. In fact, the majority of the material should be simple.<sup>18</sup>

In the end, I chose to create a collection of canons for this anthology. I find that canons satisfy the above criteria very well. In Hansen's article (2005), he writes that he has found that 'singing canons in class is a great way to help students grow individually and also to join a larger external context of harmony and rhythm as they sing.' Over several months of searching and collecting, I have found that there is a very large body of canons from across the musical spectrum that is easily accessible to all. I chose to bring together and edit three

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<sup>18</sup> Many learning theories advise that in the beginning stage there should be the most material. Kodály's own series of exercises from the *Choral Method* starts with 77 simple exercises, then 66 more difficult through to only 22 of the most advanced exercises. See also Solity, *The Learning Revolution* (2008)

hundred and twenty of these pieces into one volume for the use of students. This book has turned out to be very popular, both among students and other teachers.

### **Why have these been successful?**

Students will often know some canons themselves, which can serve as a starting point for any work in the lesson. Prior knowledge can encourage students who are uncomfortable with singing.

There is an immediate satisfaction with being able to singing in harmony.

Part singing leads the student to reach to the group rhythmically and in intonation. The singing of canons leads the student to experience all parts of the harmony. And to experience how the parts interact with each other.

Stylistically they are easy ways into a particular composer's work or historical period as they are 'real' examples rather than composed in order to mimic a style.

As opposed to Molnár book of canons<sup>19</sup>, which is commonly used in sight-reading lessons, these include texts and so lend themselves to more interesting performances. In addition, I returned many canons to origin forms (traditional clefs and keys) so that students can gain better understanding of the tools used in different historical performances.

The availability of an easily printed edition gives students plenty of material to practise both in the lesson and at home. Homeworks are easy to give – sight-reading practice, memory work, singing and playing in canon, analysis.

### **What can be done with these canons?**

Sight reading practice

Short passages for dictation

Short repetitive sequences to hear and to memorise a particular sound such as a harmonic sequence.

Dictations may be more interactive. For example, the teacher can start a phrase and the students have to follow behind while listening to the next phrase at the same time.

Pieces can be used for small performances

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<sup>19</sup> Molnár, A., *Classical Canons* (1955)

Sing and play. Students can practice playing canons with themselves, for example, sing and play in canon on an instrument or sing and clap in canon. Thus improving two-part thinking.

Improvisation. As a student becomes familiar with a concept or style, they can begin to improvise. For example, if the group continues to sing the canon, giving harmonic support from a short, repeated sequence, an individual can improvise a new melody over the top or a student could find a fundamental bass to the sequence. Alternatively, there can be opportunities to change or extend a pattern (for example, in *Dis-Moi* by Lassus, students can continue each melodic pattern several more steps thus continuing the cycle of falling fifths)

In terms of practicing sight-reading these canons offer possibilities that are not always found in other sight-reading books. In examples such as Palestrina's *pleni sunt coeli*, we see that the lack of clef allows the singer to choose a clef or key. For example, the first note could be *do* or *re*. This would then mean that the student can practice reading different modes and imagining what the clef and or key signature would be. In fact, this was Palestrina's intention. The solution to this canon is to start singing after two bars but one note higher. The result is that the two voices are reading from the same score but with different solutions. A third voice enters yet one tone higher.

There are so many melodies that can be used and played with in some way. For example, if learning about modes, there are enough canons in a particular mode for practicing the sound and it could then be possible to transform other known or new melodies into that mode.

The range of styles and patterns gives opportunities to study and hear, tonal and real answers in a fugue; 20<sup>th</sup> century techniques; harmonic sequences such as falling fifths and Romanescas. There are even possibilities to try to imagine an inversion of a melody (Mozart – *Laß immer in der Jugend Glanz*). And many more...

Below, I give a brief summary of some analyses of these canons. Of course there are many more possibilities and I encourage any teacher or student to analyse the canons in the way that is appropriate for his or her lesson. There are also many more examples of each categories to be found in this book. Later in this research, I will include some of these canons in some model lessons.

## Historical periods

Medieval	Summer is a-coming in
Renaissance	Palestrina – Pleni sunt coeli
Baroque	Bach – Thematis Regii
Classical	Mozart – Ach! Zu kurt ist unsres Lebens Lauf
Romantic	Brahms – Mir lächelt kein Frühling
20 <sup>th</sup> Century	Ligeti – Ha folyóvíz volnék

## Types of canon

Intervals	Brahms – Ans Auge Cherubini – Guarda bene Franck – Da pacem, Domine Des Près – Benedictus Mozart – Auf das Wohl Palestrina – Pleni sunt coeli
Crab	Bach – Thematis Regii
Inversion	Bach – BWV 1075-1077 Brahms – Zu Rauch Mozart – Laß immer in der Jugend Glanz Scheidt – Vater unser
Double	Brahms – Zu Rauch Mozart – Ach! Zu kurz Sweelinck – Miserere mei

## Modalities

Aeolian	Bárdos – Ősz-Kánon Britten – Old Abram Brown Krumm – Misty Morning Poor Tom
Dorian	Bárdos – Ave Maris Stella Gumpelzhaimer – Cantate Domino Holst – Water Clear
Phrygian	Benji met a bear Gesius – Benedicamus Domini
Lydian	Bartók – Ne menj el! Come Away
Mixolydian	Byrd – Non nobis, Domine

## Different Clefs

Bach – BWV 1073-1076
Palestrina – Pleni sunt coeli

## Harmony

I (Tonic chord)	Beethoven – Ars longa, vita brevis
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I V	Cherubini – Ha! Ha! Ha! De Bezem Mozart – Dona nobis pacem Ah, poor bird ( <i>minor</i> ) Frère Jacques A Ram Sam Sam Click, Stamp Kyrie The little bells of Westminster Yabadaba
I IV V	Beethoven – Im Arm der Liebe Down the River Prisoners ( <i>minor</i> ) I Love the Mountains
I V/IV VI II V	Nice but naughty
I II V	Bravo All things shall perish Jazz Canon Jolly Red Nose
Neapolitan 6 <sup>th</sup>	Caldara – Al povero d'amore
Augmented 6 <sup>th</sup>	Caldara – Caro bel idol mio Caldara – Ancor non son content Caldara – Filen, mio bene
Mediant modulations	Salieri canon p.61

### Partimento patterns

Passamezzo	Gedenck-Clanck – Neemt mij in der hand Hey ho, nobody home
Romanesca	Purcell – Fie, nay, prithee, John Alleluya Ding Dong Bell I cannot sing this round
Monte	Kuhlau – Musik von Cherubini
Cycle of 5ths	Caldara – Che gusto Josquin – Verbum supernum Lassus – Dis-moi

### Other Modalities

Pentatonic	Bartók – Kánon Hotaru Koi
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Acoustic Scale  
 Whole Tone Scale  
 Octatonic Scale  
 Pandiatonic

Land of the Silver Birch  
 Ligeti – Ha folyóvíz volnék  
 Bartók – Kánon  
 Bartók – Kánon  
 Little Child

### Unusual time signatures

7/4  
 5/4  
 8/4  
 3/4+6/8  
 3/8+3/4  
 8/8  
 Mensuration

Britten – Old Joe  
 Holst – Water Clear  
 Kubizek – Können und wollen  
 Golpe  
 Bells are ringing  
 New Year  
 des Près – Agnus dei

### Conclusion:

The result of this book has been that, over the last few years, students have engaged with singing as an integral part of a lesson. This has led to an increase in confidence in singing – something that will often hinder a student's progression. Each and every lesson starts with something from this book which then sets up the rest of the lesson. And, activities such as sight-reading and dictation have become much more joyful.