

Bill Hunt's notes on the music

In the usual 5-part scoring of music of this kind and period, the highest line is often named Cantus and usually equates to mezzo soprano range rather than soprano. The next two lines down are often written in a range from Tenor d up to g' or a' above middle c', which can make them quite awkward to deal with in the modern disposition of the SATB choir. In church repertoire of the period they are usually named 'contratenor' (though these lines in our pieces may have different part names) but they do not equate either to the modern female Alto or to the modern falsettist countertenor. The inescapable conclusion is that they were written for high Tenor voices - Tenors who were somehow able to sing up in that high register one way or another. In performance today, a solution sometimes adopted is to pair female altos with male tenors on the same line in a sort of 'pantomime horse' arrangement, so feel free to try that, if you feel like it. Lines named 'Tenor' are usually equivalent to the modern baritone, and 'Bassus' means a low bass.

In this workshop, verses will be treated sectionally and emphasis will be given to integrating chorus sections into the drama, so that all singers can expect to be fully involved.

I will give laud

This is a 'consort song' with a chorus section at the end of each verse. Although the verse section is always scored in the mezzo range of the second line of the score (Cantus), since it's a very jolly piece we can try it with each voice section singing a verse, for example: v1 Altos, v3 Sopranos, v5 Tenors, v7 Basses, v9 Altos again. (In the chorus sections at the end of each verse, everyone reverts to their normal line).

O Lord, rebuke me not

This is an early consort verse anthem with a typical Byrd scoring, whereby the top line (cantus) singers are split into two, so that cantus 1 sings the verse and cantus 2 sings the top line of the following chorus, with the two coming together only in the final Amen.

Look and bow down

This is also strictly a consort song, but on a larger scale, so that each verse section is more equivalent to that of a verse anthem.

Christ rising

Here the two solo voices, Superius and Sextus, are to be split between the upper voices, but we may try some of the verse sections sung down the octave, to let the Tenors and Basses have experience of verse singing. In these earlier verse anthems, such as Byrd's, the verse writing is usually in the upper voices, but with later composers there were more verses for the lower voices.