

**O Magnum Mysterium Conductor Comments**  
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**CMEA 2009 Clinic**

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### General Concepts

1. Employ a choral concept. We performed the composition entirely from memory standing in choir formation.
2. Chorale style requires committing to every note, with direction on melodies and accompaniments using note grouping principles. “Play the accompaniment like it is a melody.” Energize long tones, weak beats, upbeats.
3. Song style or chorale style requires *rubato* (to rob). Stretch the anacrusis (arsis) beats 2,3,4 leading to beat 1; beat 2 leading to beat 3; and 4 leading to 1. Speed up or energize some phrases. (Rob Peter to pay Paul.)
4. Conducting concepts for the Lauridsen:
  - a. Sculpt the music; don’t beat the pattern.
  - b. Shape the sound with your gestures.
  - c. Hold sound with palm up in left hand.
  - d. If the air (or bow) is to continue moving, the conducting motion should continue moving.
  - e. Conduct passive beats with horizontal pattern. No vertical impetus to beat.
  - f. Utilized a “diffused” ictus instead of a “pointed” ictus.
5. Sacrament – a visible sign of inward grace, one of the solemn Christian rites considered to have been instituted by Jesus Christ to symbolize or confer grace.
6. Determine if composition employs the Golden Ratio:  $(a + b)/a = a/b$  (1.60)
7. Enter the words from the choral score into the band transcription.
8. Latin pronunciation
  - ae = i as in aisle
  - a = ah as in father
  - e = a as in they
  - i = ee as in machine
  - o = o as in clover
  - u = oo as in rude
  - y = ee as in machine
  - r = flipped
  - c = hard

### Specific Concepts

9. Employ Laban movements float or glide—primarily float.
10. Have ensemble breathe and move together for a beautiful, precise beginning.
11. Give direction to the melody line in the flutes and clarinet I singing “O.”
12. Left hand release at end of measure 4.
13. Place Caesura (//) after measure 4 to follow the vocal score approach. This clearly delineates the repetition of the “O Magnum Mysterium” text.
14. Be sure the brass are blended into the woodwind sound.
15. Choose a curvilinear pattern that allows the use of float. Use a flat, horizontal plane for the ictus. Avoid central ictus or focal point pattern in chorale style.
16. Right hand: Small, primarily horizontal beats. Passive beat on beat 2, measure 2—keep beat 2 COMPLETELY horizontal. Otherwise, conduct all the active beats with the right hand.
17. Left hand: Sustain the sound of the accompaniment by keeping left palm up and show direction. Show the active beats in the accompaniment parts. Release fermata at end of measure 4.
18. M. 8. Beats 2,3,4. Encourage a feeling of direction for anacrusis quarter notes.
19. M. 9, 10, 13. After beat 3. Pause for ensemble to breathe, thus matching the text.
20. M. 10. Beat 4. Cue trumpet entrance and show crescendo.
21. M. 11, 12. Allow pattern to increase in size to show *mf* dynamic.
22. M. 13. Fl, ob, bsn, sx, hn play through beat 3 (full value on 3) before breath.

- 23.M. 17, 18. Allow phrase to “settle” and relax from the earlier tension at M. 11.
- 24.M. 18. Beat 2. Passive beat, completely horizontal.
- 25.M. 18. Fermata on beat 3. Keep hands moving somewhat to keep the air flowing.
- 26.M. 18. After Beat 4. Left hand release.
- 27.M. 18. Beat 3. Ensure a clear articulation on repeated notes.
- 28.M. 18. Beat 3. Balance and tune the Bb chord first, then mix in the added 4 tone (concert Eb) in Clarinet II, Alto Saxophone II, and Horn II.

### Insights from H. Robert Reynolds

One of the first decisions is whether to use the breath marks that are in the choral original. You can hear contrasting examples on iTunes recordings:

Original with breath marks: Robert Shaw Chorale

With breath marks: Northwestern University – Mallory Thompson, conductor.

Without breath marks: University of Michigan – Michael Haithcock, conductor.

I asked the transcriber, H. Robert Reynolds, to comment on the breath marks:

*There were actual two printings of this publication. In the first one, I put in the breath marks that were in the choral score. In performances which I heard, the breath marks were overemphasized so greatly that the overall flow of the composition was greatly interrupted. When the second printing was made, I decided, along with the composer, to eliminate all breath marks. Wind ensembles interpret breath marks quite differently from choral ensembles.*

Regarding the omission of the *poco piu mosso* in measure 19:

*Yes, that's true. If you feel that it should be put in, by all means do it (but only slightly). I always feel that if a piece has been transcribed, the interpreter has every right to change what he/she feels would better represent the composer's wishes.*

Regarding the slight truncation of the euphonium solo “alleluia” in measures 63-68:

*I actually used several versions of the composition when making the wind ensemble version. Morten (“Skip”) Lauridsen made versions for SATB Choir, TTBB (Men's Choir), Medium solo voice with either piano or organ, and a version for Brass Ensemble made for the San Francisco Bay Brass. In the one with solo voice, the line does not extend past what I have written for Euphonium. On the other hand, I inserted a fermata in meas. 69 where none was indicated in any of the versions. I also doubled the note values in the Horn solo in measures 69 & 70 and eliminated the *meno mosso*. You will also note that the words “like tolling bells” (at the suggestion of the composer) is inserted. All these details were approved by the composer, and he attended several rehearsals (as well as the concert) while this piece was in preparation.*

General comments:

*I should say that the one compromise I made was scoring the solo at letter C for Trumpet. My preference was to have it an Oboe solo, but I could hear in my head all the . . . bands performing this with (less than wonderful) oboists. Perhaps I should have cued it in Trumpet and given it to Oboe.*