

THE KEY TO GOOD CANTORING

PART ONE: MEMORIZATION

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This article begins a four-part series on the various elements of animation. Animation is that element in cantoring that separates the beginners from the more advanced. Here is where we find a cantor who is prepared and confident, who can do more than simply sing the words on the page. A cantor who is able to animate the assembly effectively is able to communicate the meaning of the texts to the rest of the assembly and, therefore, encourage them to participate—to do their part. Knowing that the goal of liturgical renewal as defined by the Second Vatican Council is the “full, conscious and active participation” of the whole assembly (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14), we *must* do our part as cantors to help our assemblies to sing.

What is good animation? The dictionary defines the root word “animate” as “to give life to” or “to give interest or zest to.” This is the foundation of what we do as cantors in communicating the meaning of the texts that we are given. There are four basic elements to good animation. In this article we examine the first of those: memorization.

The ability to memorize music is the foundation of good animation. It is also the cornerstone for each of the other elements. Let us look first at how we can improve our memorization skills. Here are four steps that

should assist in memorizing music:

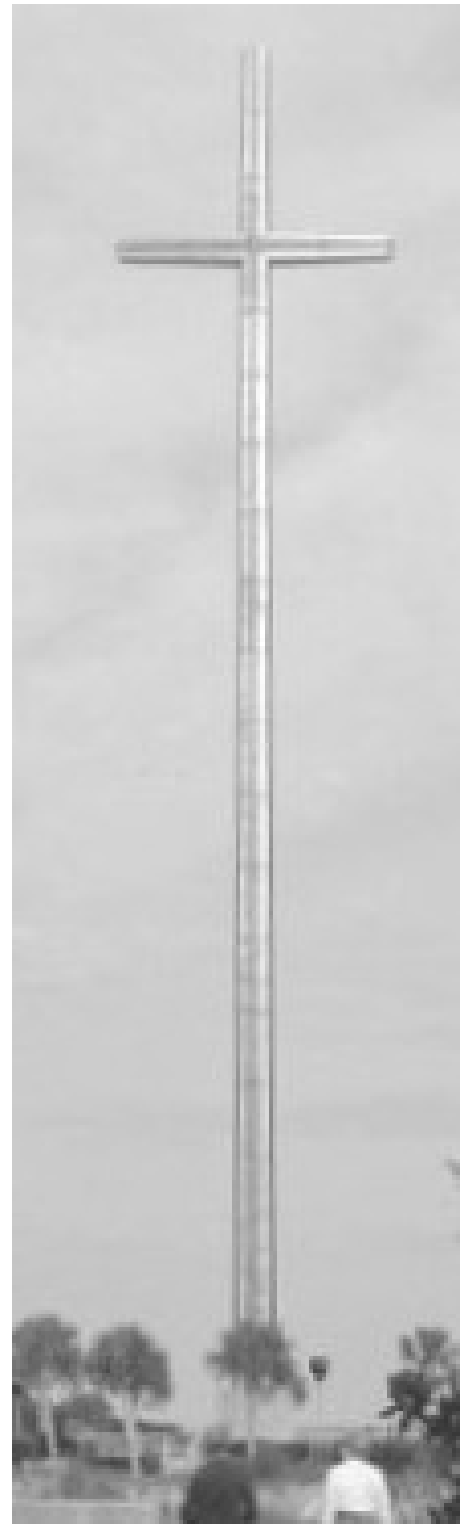
- Practice often and pay close attention when you practice.
- Read through (and understand) what you are singing.
- Isolate sections of the psalm or song and practice them individually.
- When you are ready, practice without the music.

It is not difficult to memorize music. However, it does take some amount of time and effort. Make a pact with yourself (and with God) that you will practice the music that you need to cantor for each upcoming Mass. When you think you have practiced enough, practice some more. Keep in mind that a good practice session does not necessarily mean just looking at the music. Go to a quiet place and concentrate on the task at hand.

Second, read through the words of the song. If it is a psalm, think about what the psalmist was experiencing when composing these lyrics. Do you understand the words? Read them, ingest them, and memorize them. If you do not understand them, how can you convey the meaning of those words to the congregation?

An important technique in memorization is to begin small. Begin by memorizing the refrain to the psalm or song. After all, in the refrain we are encouraging the rest of the assembly to sing. The next most important section to memorize is the end of the verses of the psalm or song. Knowing this part will enable you to look up prior to beginning the refrain. Once you become accustomed to memorizing this much, the final step would be to memorize individual verses.

As cantors, we can do so much more when we get our heads up and out of the music. We open a whole new world by introducing our face and eyes and smile to our congregations. More on this next time! ☺



Monument to the first Mass celebrated in Florida, St. Augustine, Florida.

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