

Welcome to the *Symphony of Psalms* Pronunciation Guide, by Richard Robbins

Dear Symphony Chorus:

Your Latin on the *Symphony of Psalms* sounds bad. Here are some things that will make it sound better.

- 1) **Never** make an American (“burred”) “R” sound. “R”s at the *beginning* of a word are rolled, and in the *middle* or *end* of a word are flipped. Treat it as a consonant, not a vowel.
- 2) Review this pronunciation guide, even if you have sung the *Symphony of Psalms* a lot. There are some rules of pronunciation that we all need to review from time to time, even if you are a pro.

Some controversies which I hope to lay to rest:

- 1) If “ti” is followed by “o,” it is pronounced “tsee” (“deprecationem”). If it is followed by a consonant, it is pronounced “tee” (“benesonantibus”).
- 2) **There is a misprint in the first movement. It should be “sicut.”** Both the Latin Vulgate and the Douay-Rheims Bibles agree on this.
- 3) “Eum” and “Ejus” are pronounced differently. There is no “y” sound between the vowels in “eum,” because there is no “j” between the vowels.
- 4) A combination of “ae” is pronounced “eh” in sung Ecclesiastical Latin.
- 5) Sometimes “c” has a “ch” sound. Sometimes it doesn’t. You have to look at the pronunciation guide to see which is which.
- 6) **“Mihi” is pronounced with a hard “k,”** or with a very hard “h” that almost like a “k.” Would you like to know why? Are you sure? Okay. I’ll tell you.

There are many Latin scholars in your ranks. Hot diggity! I have heard from many of you about how you studied Latin for decades, how you were raised in a convent, and how you pronounced certain things differently in school. That’s wonderful. Some of you were even angered when Dr. Hausmann asked you to pronounce “mihi” with a “k” sound. Really mad about it! Cicero would be proud of your defense of his language.

It seems funny, doesn’t it, to have such an arbitrary pronunciation of one word? Well, if you studied Latin in school, you studied what scholars call *Classical Latin*. There are lots of words that you pronounce differently in Classical Latin. Lots of “v” words get “w” sounds, for example. There are closed and open vowels in spoken, Classical Latin. We won’t talk about that here.

You also pronounce the letter “h” in Classical Latin. You do not pronounce “h” sounds in Ecclesiastical Latin. *What is Ecclesiastical Latin?* you may wonder as you read this note. Ecclesiastical Latin is the Latin of the Church, which followed the practice and pronunciation of the Italian (i.e., Roman Catholic) Church, unsurprisingly. The letter “h” is not pronounced in Italian, or in Ecclesiastical Latin.

The word “mihi” used to be spelled “michi,” but monks stopped writing down the letter “c” early in the Middle Ages (to save ink?). “Ch” is always pronounced as a “k,” so the word was pronounced “mee-kee.” Another word like this was the Latin word “nichil,” which was eventually spelled both “nihil” and “nil” (from which we get our words *nihilism*, and *nil*). Both spellings of this word are accepted, as they mean the same thing, and there’s a little leeway in terms of pronunciation. “Mihi” was a different matter, however, as the word “mi” already existed, and as “mihi” and “mi” are two different uses of the word “my” (one is vocative and one is dative, but I don’t remember which is which). So, the spelling remains, and the pronunciation is important in Ecclesiastical Latin. The missing “c” is called a *medieval gloss*, if that interests you (it shouldn’t). If this seems weird, remember that lots of world religions, and even varieties of Christianity, prefer older, “traditional” pronunciations and language to new ones—think of the importance afforded to the King James Bible in many churches in the southern United States, or to the Church Slavonic that is used in the Russian Church (that’s right, the language of the Rachmaninoff *Vespers* is not Russian, but instead this very closely-related cousin).

Austro-German Latin is another matter entirely, and applies only to a limited amount of historical repertoire. Specifically, it applies only to the composed Latin church music of Austria and Germany *in*

courts that were not governed by Italian nobility (as was often the case in southern Germany). Thus, lots of Mozart and Haydn (Bruckner too, I suppose) is more appropriately sung in the Latin dialect spoken by Germans and Austrians in the 18th and 19th centuries. You wouldn't use it in works written by German composers in the twentieth century or later. Bach wrote some of his Latin works for Italian courts—so they would not have expected Austro-German Latin pronunciation. Stravinsky was not a German at all. He wrote for a language that was not his own, to be premiered by an American symphony orchestra, who would have had no idea about Austro-German pronunciation.

You will notice that the letter “o” is transcribed as “aw” below. This reflects Roman usage, and is probably what Stravinsky would have expected from the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Dr. Hausmann often prefers closed “e” and “o” vowels, to better cut through the orchestra texture. At all times, follow his lead and make adjustments as he requires of you.

Do you want to know more about singing in Latin, and about the many, many regional varieties (Portuguese-Latin, for example)? If so, you're in luck! Buy Harold Copeman's "Singing in Latin." It is great. A book by Ron Jeffers, "Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire, Volume I: Sacred Latin Texts," is also popular, but much more limited.

Here is a pronunciation guide. I did not add accents, because Stravinsky didn't care about them, and you shouldn't either. I can share them with you if you like. Perhaps we can set up a private meeting. I am free in late 2009.

If there are any mistakes below, please forgive me.

Lots of love, RICHARD

Movement I: Psalm 38:13-14

Exaudi orationem meam, Domine,

ehks – ah(oo) – dee aw – rah – tsee – aw – nehm meh – ahm daw – mee – neh

et deprecationem meam.

eht deh – preh – kah – tsee – aw – nehm meh – ahm

Auribus percipe lacrimas meas.

ah(oo) – ree – boos pehr – chee – peh lah – kree – mahs meh – ahs

Ne sileas

neh see – leh – ahs

Quoniam advena ego sum apud te

kwaw – nee – ahm ahd – veh – nah eh – gaw soom ah – pood teh

et peregrinus, sicut omnes patres mei.

eht peh – reh – gree – noos see – koot awm – nehs pah – trehs meh – ee

Remitte mihi, prius quam abeam

reh – mee – teh mee – kee pree – oos kwahm ah – beh – ahm

et amplius non ero.

eht ahm – plee – oos nawn eh – raw

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and with Thine ears consider my calling: hold not Thy peace at my tears.

For I am a stranger with Thee: and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.

O spare me a little that I may recover my strength: before I go hence and be no more seen.

Movement II: Psalm 39:2-4

Expectans expectavi Dominum,

ehks – pehk – tahns ehks – pehk – tah – vee daw – mee – noom

et intendit mihi.

eht in – tehn – deet mee – kee

Et exaudivit preces meas;

eht ehks – ah(oo) – dee – veet preh – chehs meh – ahs

et eduxit me de lacu miseriae,

eht eh – doo – kseet meh deh lah – koo mee – seh – ree – eh

et de luto faecis.

eht deh loo – taw feh – chees

Et statuit super petram pedes meos:

eht stah – too – eet soo – pehr peh – trahm peh – dehs meh – aws

et direxit gressus meos.

eht dee – reh – kseet greh – soos meh – aws

Et immisit in os meum canticum novum,

eht ee – mee – seet een aws meh – oom kahn – tee – koom naw – voom

carmen Deo nostro.

kahr – mehn deh – aw naw – straw

Videbunt multi, videbunt et timebunt:

vee – deh – boont mool – tee vee – deh – boont eht tee – meh – boont

et sperabunt in Domino.

eht speh – rah – boont een daw – mee – naw

I waited patiently for the Lord: and He inclined unto me, and heard my calling.

He brought me also out of the horrible pit, out of the mire and clay:

and set my feet upon the rock, and ordered my goings.

And He hath put a new song in my mouth: even a thanksgiving unto our God.

Many shall see it and fear: and shall put their trust in the Lord.

Movement III: Psalm 150

Alleluia.

ah – leh – loo – yah

Laudate Dominum in sanctis Ejus.

lah(oo) – dah – teh daw – mee – noom een sahnk – tees eh – yoos

Laudate Eum in firmamento virtutis Ejus.

lah(oo) – dah – teh eh – oom een feer – mah – mehn – taw veer – too – tees eh – yoos

Laudate Eum in virtutibus Ejus

lah(oo) – dah – teh eh – oom een veer – too – tee – boos eh – yoos

Laudate Eum secundum

lah(oo) dah – teh eh – oom seh – koon – doom

multitudinem magnitudinis Ejus.

mool – tee – too – dee – nehm mah – nyee – too – dee – nees eh – yoos

Laudate Eum in sono tubae.

lah(oo) – dah – teh eh – oom een saw – naw too – beh

Laudate Eum in psalterio et cithara.

lah(oo) – dah – teh eh – oom een sahl – teh – ree – aw eht chee – tah – rah

Laudate Eum in tympano et choro,

lah(oo) – dah – teh eh – oom een teem – pah – naw eht kaw – raw

Laudate Eum in chordis et organo;

lah(oo) – dah – teh eh – oom een kawr – dees eht awr – gah – naw

Laudate Eum in cymbalis benesonantibus.

lah(oo) – dah – teh eh – oom een cheem – bah – lees beh – neh – saw – nahn – tee – boos

Laudate Eum in cymbalis jubilationis.

lah(oo) – dah – teh eh – oom een cheem – bah – lees yoo – bee – lah – tsee – aw – nees

Omnis spiritus laudet Dominum.

awm – nees spee – ree – toos lah(oo) – deht daw – mee – noom

Alleluia.

ah – leh – loo – yah

Alleluja.

O praise God in His holiness: praise Him in the firmament of His power.

Praise Him in His noble acts: praise Him according to His excellent greatness.

Praise Him in the sound of the trumpet: praise Him upon the lute and harp.

Praise Him upon the strings and pipe.

Praise Him upon the well-tuned cymbals.

Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.

Alleluja.