CREATING STRING REDUCTION PARTS

by David Winkler

In a typical church orchestra, there are only a few string players, if any at all. So often a keyboard playing a "string reduction" part is used to support the string players present, or to substitute for those who aren't there. Fortunately, the string sounds on modern electronic keyboards are quite good, although it still takes a skillful player to make the sound blend in realistically (note that learning to articulate the notes idiomatically and using a volume pedal are key playing techniques to incorporate in order to obtain a more realistic effect).

A common problem in published string reduction parts is that they tend to be too complex. The part should be easily playable with two hands. The string reduction should not include every note from the string parts in the orchestra score, but rather should be distilled down to the most essential parts in order to give the general impression intended by the orchestrator. The editor of the part must do more than just paste in parts from the score. He needs to think a bit like an arranger and shape the part so that it works well technically for the player.

Having created literally hundreds of string reductions for publication over the last several years, and being a keyboard player myself, here is the procedure I usually use when creating string reduction parts:

1. Starting with a grand staff, **copy the violin part** from the orchestra score into the treble clef, and **the string bass part** into the bass clef (if in the score, the violin parts are divided into two staves, just copy in the Violin 1 part). I prefer to use the string bass part in the bass clef rather then the cello; first, because it provides for a solid bass line, and secondly, because the cello part often tracks with the upper strings, and having that line in the left hand staff can make the keyboard part rather difficult to play. One other thing you'll need to do in this step ... delete any dynamic markings or "hairpins" that may be in the lower staff from the pasted-in string bass part, as those are not needed for both staves.

2. Remembering that the string bass part actually sounds an octave lower than written, **transpose the bass staff part down an octave.** Then run "Check Range" using the range for Cello (the lowest note being C below the staff), which will bring some of the really low notes up an octave. There's no hard and fast rule on this ... sometimes it's fine to have some of the left hand notes go below the low C (although this could be a problem if an 88-key instrument is not used). After all this, check to make sure that the moving bass lines "make sense," i.e., that there aren't any weird or awkward leaps from note to note, or that the rare melodic figure has not been disrupted by the octave displacement.

3. Occasionally there are places where string bass doesn't play, but cello does. So go back and **paste in the cello lines** for those measures.

4. Returning to the treble clef staff, if the violins in the score are split between two staves, **add some of the Violin 2 notes** where appropriate.

5. Notes from **the viola part** may be copied into the treble or bass clefs as appropriate, particularly to fill in the harmony during "pad" sections. Occasionally when there is a triad

which is scored in an "open" voicing, you may want to reorder the notes into a "close" voicing to make the chord sound fuller.

6. A common figure seen in violin and viola parts is a sweeping "run" in octaves. This is impossible to do on the keyboard, so **delete the lower octave in those runs** (in Finale, TG Tools/Process Extracted Parts works well for this). Likewise, for any fast moving lines (e.g., 8th notes in a faster tempo), a single line part will be much easier to play than octaves.

7. That just about covers it, but now, go back and double check everything. You may want to print out the part and play through it yourself, or play it back on your computer, just to make sure that what you've come up with works well.

If you follow these basic principles, you should have a very nice and playable string reduction part!