

# TEXT PRONUNCIATION IN *CARMINA BURANA*

by Wilbur Skeels

Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* employs a text derived from a 13<sup>th</sup> century manuscript containing secular medieval Latin, old German, and old French vocabulary, always a challenge to choristers. Even the experts cannot now determine with certainty what the *original* pronunciation might have been, given the huge variety of regional dialects in all three languages. Nor should a director be held in low esteem for modernizing the pronunciation at his discretion. But one might ask whether it is possible to know what sounds the *composer* had in mind.

It appears<sup>1</sup> that no written instructions on pronunciation have survived from the choirs that first sang this work in Munich. However there is one recording which is arguably authentic in this regard. It was made by Kurt Eichhorn in 1973 with the Bavarian Radio Choir.<sup>2</sup> Orff was ill at the time, but Eichhorn visited him frequently during the recording sessions, discussing every musical and technical question that might arise. In addition, many of these singers had participated in previous performances of the work in which Orff was directly involved. It is a fair assumption that this recording is the best evidence we now have of how Orff thought the work should sound. With few exceptions,<sup>3</sup> the pronunciation is consistent and easily discerned. The following guide is based on a careful listening to that recorded performance.

## 1. Secular Latin<sup>4</sup> vowels

American singers of ecclesiastical Latin (where accepted usage reflects the Italian pronunciation) will need to shift gears a little, both for the secular Latin vocabulary and—if there is any attempt to be really authentic (some might say pedantic)—to approximate German vowels, of which the long *e* vowel is the most crucial. This vowel, similar to the French *é*, sounds approximately like the *a* in “lane,” and occurs in stressed syllables: *enim, sedet, felix, serena, recedit, veris, retinera, reserat, millena, est, gremio, Phebus, Venus, Zephyrus*, etc. We will represent this vowel by *é*.

On the length of the vowel *-i-* there is more variation between short and long in secular Latin than in ecclesiastical Latin (where every *i* is long). Generally, in words of more than one syllable where the primary or secondary stress falls on *-i-* the vowel is long (represented as *-ee-* below). On unstressed syllables or single syllable words, the vowel is generally short (represented as *-i-* below). The most frequent example of the short vowel is the word *in*.

Other vowels are almost always the same as in ecclesiastical Latin. Diphthongs should always be avoided. Every Latin syllable has a single vowel sound.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Secular Latin consonants

**qu:** eccles. Lat. pronounced *kw*; sec. Lat. (in Germany) pronounced *kv*

<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
antiquus	an-tee-kvus	quesierit	kvé-si-e-rit
colloquia*	ko-lo-kvi-a	qui	kvee
equitavit	é-kvi-ta-vit	quid	kvid
liquescit	li-kvé-sit	quidam	kvee-dam
loquar	lo-kvar	quinqües	kvin-kvi-es
loquor	lo-kvor	quisquid**	kvees-kvid
nequeo*	ne-kveo	quisquis	kvees-kvis
nunquam	nun-kvam	quo	qvo
plerumque	plé-rum-kvé	quod	kvod
quamvis	kvam-vis	quoque	kvo-kvé
quando	kvan-do	sequitur*	sé-kvi-tur
quater	kva-ter	siqua	see-kva
quero	kvé-ro	undique	un-di-kvé
queratur	kvé-ra-tur		

\* However, the soloist used the pronunciation -kw-.

\*\* However, the soloist used the pronunciation kvee-kvid

**sc:** eccles. Lat. pronounced *sh*; sec. Lat. pronounced *ss*

<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
(de)crescis	(de)-cres-sis*	liquescit	li-kvés-sit*
decrecscis	de-cres-sis*	sceleris	sé-le-rees
descendo	de-sen-do	scitis	see-tis
lascivit (-vus/viens)	la-see-vit (-vus/viens)	suscrescente	sus-kre-sen-te
		Exception: scutella	sku-tel-la

\* Note that the sibilant is sounded both at the end of the second syllable and also at the beginning of the third. Sometimes the choir vocalizes this as *-crest-sees* to ensure that the first sibilant sounds. Another example is *sors imanis*, where the choir sings *sorst imanis*, which prevents the sibilant from becoming elided to the following *i* vowel as a *z*.

**c- followed by e or i:** eccles. Latin is *che-* or *chi-*; sec. Lat. is *tse-* or *tshi-*

<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
aciem	a-tsi-em	certatim	tser-ta-tim
acies	a-tsi-es	cetera	tsé-te-ra
ancilla	an-tsee-la	cetus	tsé-tus
cedant	tsé-dant	cignus	tseeg-nus
cellula	tse-loo-la	cinis	tsee-nis
centum	tsen-tum	decies (un/duo/tre-)	dé-tsi-es

Decii	Dé-tsi-ee	lucem	lu-tsem
domicella	do-mi-tse-la	ocellis	o-tsel-lees
dulcedinis	dul-tsé-di-nees	parcite	par-tsee-té
dulcis	dul-tsees	pincerna	pin-tser-na
dulcisono	dul-tsee-so-no	principatur	preen-tsi-pa-tur
dulcissime	dul-tsee-si-mé	pudicitia	pu-di-tsee-tsi-a
ecce	et-tsé <sup>6</sup>	reducit	re-du-tsit
facias	fa-tsi-as	recedit	re-tsé-dit
facies	fa-tsi-es	saccis	sak-tsees
glaciem	gla-tsi-em	simplicitas	sim-plee-tsi-tas
iaceo	ya-tsé-o	socio	so-tsi-o
lacertis	la-tser-tis	species	spé-tsi-es
lucent	lu-tsent	vertice	ver-ti-tse

***ti-* : in both eccles. Latin and sec. Lat. is *tsi-* when followed by a vowel**

<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
octies	ok-tsi-es	presentialiter	pre-sen-tsi-a-li-ter
coniunctio	con-iunc-tsi-o	pretiosa	pre-tsi-o-sa
negatio	ne-ga-tsi-o	septies	sep-tsi-es
patiens	pa-tsi-ens	sevitia	se-vee-tsi-a

***gi-* or *ge-* : in eccles. Latin the *g* is soft; in sec. Lat. the *g* is hard (*gg-*)**

<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
argentibus	ar-ggen-ti-bus	plangite	plan-ggi-té
(e)gentes	(e)-ggen-tes	rege	ré-gge
egestatem	é-gges-ta-tem	reginam	ré-ggee-nam
fugit	fu-ggit	(re)girat	(re)-ggee-rat
gemma	gge-ma	sugit	su-ggeet
gentes	ggen-tes	tangite	tan-ggi-té
geriten	gge-ree-ten	virginea	vir-ggee-ne-a
gerocutis	gge-ro-cu-tis	virgines	veer-ggi-nes
legitur	lé-ggi-tur	virginitas	vir-ggee-ni-tas
niger	nee-gger	virginum	veer-ggi-num
piger	pee-gger		

**initial *h-* : in eccles. Latin the *h* is silent; in sec. Lat. the *h* is aspirated.**

<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
habitat	ha-bi-tat	herus	hé-rus
hac	hahk	hiemalis	hee-e-ma-lis
hec	hek	his	hees
Hecubam	Hé-cu-bam	hinc	hink
Helena	Hé-le-na	humus	hu-mus
hera	hé-ra	Hyemis	Hee-eh-meess
herilis	he-ree-lis	Hyrca	Heer-ka

### Miscellaneous words

<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
axe	ah-tsé	extiteram	ek-tee-ter-am
Blanziflor	Blan-tsi-flor	mihi	mee-chi <sup>7</sup>
Cytharizat	tsee-ta-ree-tzat	pulcher	pul-ker*
Cypridis	tsee-pri-dees	sexcente	sek-sen-te
Cupidinis	Ku-pee-di-nees	sexies	sek-si-es
eia	ah-ya		

\* but pronounced pul-sher by the soloist.

### 3. Old German

Some of the dialect is Old German and some is modern Bavarian (the two are not that far apart)! Perhaps the most useful approach is to simply cite the text with a pronunciation guide below. All standard German pronunciation applies unless otherwise noted. Thus *varwe* is pronounced *farve* as *f* and *v* replace *v* and *w* respectively; initial *s* becomes *z*; -ch as in *Bach* is represented by *χ*. The final -sh sound as in *mich* is very soft, and sometimes barely audible. Unstressed *e* is the schwa vowel as the vowel in *hurt*. All *gs* are hard.

#### Chorus 7:

nah mime ge-sel-len, ist mir wê.

*na meem ge-zel-len, ist mir vé.*

Gru-o-net der walt al-lent-hal-ben, wâ ist min ge-sel-le al-se lan-ge? [w/v very soft,

*Gru-o-né der valt al-lent-hal-ben, va ist meen ge-zehl-le al-seh lang-e?* almost absent]

der ist ge-ri-ten hin-nen, o wî, wer soll mich min-nen.

*der ist ge-ri-ten hin-nen, o vee, ver zoll mish min-nen.*

#### Chorus 8:

Chra-mer, gip die var-ve mir, die min wen-gel roe-te,

*Krah-mer, gip dee far-ve mir, dee min ven-gel roe-te,*

da-mit ich die jun-gen man an ir dank der min-nen-lie-be noe-te.

*da-mit ish dee yung-en man an eer dank der min-nen-lie-be noe-te.*

Min-net, tu-gent-li-che man, min-nec-li-che frou-wen!

*Min-net, tu-gent-lish-e man, min-nec-lish-e frau-en!*

min-ne tuot iu hoch ge-muot un-de lat iuch in ho-hen e-ren schou-wen. [tuot/gemuot

*min-ne tuot yu hoχ ge-muot un-de lat yoosh in ho-hen eh-ren shau-en.* rhyme with *quote*]

Wol dir, Werlt, daz du bist al-so freu-den-ri-che!

*Vol dir, velt, dass du bist al-zo freu-den-riχ-e!*

ich will dir sin un-der-tan durch din lie-be im-mer si-cher-li-che.

*ish vill dir zin un-ter-tan dursh din lie-be im-mer-zish-er-liχ-e.*

Seht mich an, jun-gen man! lat mich iu ge-val-len.

*Zeht mish an, yung-en man! lat mish yu ge-fal-len.*

**Chorus 9:**

Swaz hie gat um-be das sint al-les me-ge-de  
*Zva tzee gat um-beh dass zint al-les me-ge-de*  
 die wel-lent an man, al-le di-sen su-mer gan! Sla!  
*dee vel-lent an man, al-le dee-zen zumm-er gan! Zlah!*

Chu-me, chum, ge-sel-le min, ih en-bi-te har-te din.  
*Koo-me, koom, ge-zel-le min, ee en-bee-te har-te din.*  
 Su-zer ro-sen-var-wei<sup>8</sup> munt, chum ñ ma-che mich ge-sunt.  
*Zu-tser ro-zen-far-ver munt, koom oon maχ-e mish ge-zunt.*

**Chorus 10:**

We-re diu werlt al-le-min von deme me-re\_un-ze\_an den Rin,  
*Veh-re diu velt al-le meen fon dém meh-runts an dén Reen,*  
 des wolt ih mih dar-ben,  
*des volt ee mee dar-ben,*  
 daz diu chü-ne-gin von En-gel-lant, le-ge an mi-nen ar-men.  
*dass diu kü-ne-gin fon Eng-el-lant, lé-gé an mee-nen ar-men.*

**Chorus 18:**

Man-da liet, man-da liet, min ge-sel-le cho-met niet.  
*Man-da lyet, man-da lyet, min ge-zehl-le komm-et nyet.* [liet/niet as in Russian nyet]

**4. Old French**

The baritone solo *Dies, Nox et Omnia* has a mixture of medieval Latin and French.

<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
me fay planszer	mé fé plau-sé	grand ey dolor	grahnd é do-loor
oy souvenz suspirer	oi sou-vent <sup>9</sup> su-spi-ré	per voster honor	pehr vo-ster o-noor <sup>10</sup>
plu me fay temer	plü m' fé te-mehr <sup>11</sup>	per un baser	pehr ün ba-zeh <sup>12</sup>
a remender	a re-men-dé		

We hope this analysis of a benchmark recording of *Carmina Burana* will prove useful to directors and singers in determining their preferred pronunciation of the text. I am grateful to composer Graham Lack of Munich, who had worked at the Orff Zentrum, for his assistance in making the Eichhorn recording available.

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## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Following inquiries to (1) Andreas Herrmann, Director of the Munich Philharmonic Chorus and former director of the Orff Choir; (2) The Orff Zentrum in Munich.

<sup>2</sup> Authorized Carl Orff / Carl Orff 100 Years Edition / Münchner Rundfunkorchester / Kurt Eichhorn / Regie: Carl Orff / BMG / RCA Classics 74321 24790 2 (5 CD).

<sup>3</sup> Experienced choristers will not be surprised to hear that the soloists sometimes follow their own ‘rules’, even when that puts them at odds with the pronunciation of the chorus!

<sup>4</sup> No representation is made in the following material to describe all secular Latin, or even medieval ecclesiastical Latin. The guidance offered relates only to *Carmina Burana*. Indeed, ecclesiastical Latin usage in northern Europe often is similar to the secular usage indicated hereunder. Slavic and German pronunciations of Latin are very similar and are distinct from other European usages, notably in the pronunciation of qu- as kv- .

<sup>5</sup> With a very few exceptions in choral music as, for example, when some composers set *Dei* as one syllable instead of two. Special cases are *e-lei-son* for *e-le-i-son* (a Greek word, but normally found in a Latin context), and *al-le-lu-ia* where the *i* is the half-vowel often represented by *j* or *y*, becoming a consonant for the purposes of syllable division. See also *coniunctio*, *gaudia*, etc. Another exception in *Carmina* is *sua-ve*.

<sup>6</sup> One of the occurrences on the recording sounds more like et-shé.

<sup>7</sup> With a very soft, German-style *-ch*, almost mee-hi, where eccles. Lat. usage is mee-ki. On accented notes, the *ch* sound is more audibly palatized.

<sup>8</sup> The Schott edition has the apparent misprint “roservarwer”. We note also (in *Circa Mea Pectora*) a misprint “puchritudine” for “pulchritudine.”

<sup>9</sup> As in modern French with the second syllable nasalized.

<sup>10</sup> The vowel in *voster* like that in English *most*.

<sup>11</sup> As in modern French *plus*. The apostrophe indicates the *schwa* vowel as in English *earth*.

<sup>12</sup> As in modern French *une*.