

PSALM 24

Epilogue

When I visited the library of the Mennonite Church in Haarlem – in order to consult *De Melodiën der Christelijke Kerkgezangen* by G. W. Derx dating from 1853 – the archivist and librarian, Mechteld Gravendeel, showed me a theoretical treatise by Jacob Bijster: *De grondslagen van het Protestants orgelspel*, Amsterdam: De Nieuwe Muziekhandel, [1937]. It is wholly concerned with the harmonization of modal psalms and hymns, and I must confess that I did not know the book when I wrote Part one and Part two of Psalm 24. Therefore all credit to the archivist and librarian!

The book is exclusively meant for organ students – Bijster was an organ teacher at the Amsterdam Conservatory – and his harmonizations presuppose instruments with equal temperament. Therefore I restrict myself to one example of his four part writings, in order to demonstrate that a sung version will face comma shifts. It is the following harmonization of the first line of Psalm 107.

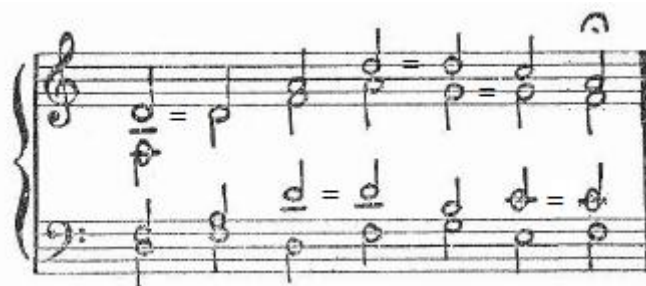


The notes between brackets indicate an alternative for the second inversion of a C major chord. In this way comma shifts are avoided. But let us consider the first version:



	-a		-e		b					
-f		-c		g		d		a		e
							f		c	+g

At first sight, he enlarged tone matrix may surprise the reader, but the reason becomes clear if it is assumed that no comma shifts occur when the same notes are sung a capella:



	-a		-e		b			
-f		-c		g		d		a
							f	

In this case the whole choir will have go down about a comma at the end. In order to avoid this, the alto's should raise the g^1 :



	b						
g		d		a		e	
			f		c		+g

We have seen that Bijster avoided comma shifts with his alternative for the forelast chord. Here is another solution, given by the unknown composer of the nineteenth century manuscript, although I have my doubts about the g in the third bar:



This *g* can be replaced by an *e*, and the first chord can be repeated instead of the written second chord. What matters is the use of the chords of G major, A minor and D minor at the end of the line. It is interesting to see and hear that in this place Goudimel used the chords of G minor, A minor and D major, also without comma shift problems.

The moral of the story is that composers of psalm harmonizations for a capella choirs should (1) work out their four part writings in such a way that there are no comma shifts between successive tones, and (2) take care that the choir does not go down or up.