

Johann Sebastian Bach

Air from Suite #3 for Orchestra

Arranged by Klaus Smedegaard Bjerre 2013 for saxophone quartet with optional guitar

These two settings for saxophone quartet are offspring of my recent setting for 14-piece brass. A saxophone player asked for additional versions of my arrangements of the Beethoven duets. Working with these saxophone settings told my ears that this Air from the 3rd suite for orchestra would sound very well for saxophone quartet.

The 4 quartet parts cover the string parts in Bach's score and provide a full representation of the chord progression, yet the implied continuo instruments of the score are not represented. My remedy has been the addition of an optional guitar part written in standard notation as well as in tablature. My personal choice would be a classical guitar, but a western guitar would work well also. The guitar will contribute to the steady pulse around which the solo part may flow a bit more freely.

There are two versions: one with the tenor saxophone as the soloist, which reflects my approach in the arrangement for the brasses. Will sound very well, but demands the soprano and alto players to stay back in the balance. The other version has the soprano saxophone as the soloist in a more traditional adaption of Bach's score. Both versions have the same ornaments and embellishments reflecting my reading of Bach's score seen in the light of baroque performance practices. Only the second last bar is different between the soprano and the tenor soloists. Letting the soprano end on a high note would break up the ensemble sound.

The baritone saxophone parts and the guitar parts are identical between the two versions. Bach's original bass line goes lower than the range of the baritone sax. The original bass line is written in full size notes all the way, whereas the necessary octave displacements have been written in cue notes.

In the version for tenor soloist the soprano sax plays the 2nd violin line. One note, written low A, is out of the soprano range. That A has been written in full size. An octave displacement is not possible here. The workarounds is an eight rest plus an eight note D. The reason for the rest is about avoiding an octave parallel with the bass line. In quartets where one or more players double on other sizes it might be relevant to substitute the soprano with an alto. There is a part made ready for that option.

It is left entirely to each quartet to choose between the tenor solo or the soprano solo version. Both versions were provided to add flexibility in programming.

With concerts in churches it will be possible to add the organ part from the version for organ and soloist to either of these two quartet settings. The organ will have to be discretely registered, and the non-soloists may have to back off a bit on their dynamics.

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