

Laudes Organi – Alternate Translation by H. Christian Floyd

*Audi chorum organicum
instrumentum musicum
modernorum artificum
documentum melicum
canentem ludere amabiliter
ludentem canere¹ laudabiliter
docens² breviter,
leniter utiliter,
dulciter, humiliter.
Ideo persuadeo
hic attendere
jubeo commoneo
haec apprehendere,
mentifigere humiliter.*

Listen to the instrumental chorus,
the musical instrument
of modern artists,
paragon of melody,
celebrating playing lovingly,
imitating singing laudably.
Instructing concisely,
gently, beneficially,
pleasantly, humbly,
I therefore persuade
paying attention here;
I entreat, I put in mind
these things to embrace,
to fix the mind humbly.

*Musice! milites
te habilites
Usum exercites
artem usites
habilem corpore
te prebeas
facilem pectore
te exhibeas
Follibus provideas
bene flautes³ habeas
Istare⁴ praetereas
diligenter caveas
His praehabitis
sonum elice
doctis digitis
modum perfice
neumis⁵ placitis.*

Musician! be a soldier;
train yourself.
Train hard at practice;
use often the art;
fit in body
render yourself;
ready in heart
show yourself.
See to the bellows;
well perform the inflations.
Standing upon them leave out,
diligently avoid.
With these things done in advance,
sound draw out
with skilled fingers;
the melody perform
with tone breaths pleasing.

*Gravis chorus succinat
qui sonorus buccinat
vox acute concinat
choro chorus succinat
diafonico modo
et organico.
Nunc acutas moveas
nunc ad graves redeas
modo lyrico
nunc per voces medias
transvolando salias,
saltu melico
manu mobili,
delectabili⁶,
cantabili.*

Let the low chorus sing along
which, resounding, trumpets;
let the voice in high key sing in concert;
to chorus let chorus sing
in melody diaphonic
and instrumental.
Now the highs stir;
now to the lows return,
in the manner of the lyre;
now through the middle voices,
as though flying over, leap,
with leap melodious
by hand nimble,
agreeable,
flowing.

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*Tali modulo,
mellis aemulo
placens⁷ populo;
qui miratur et laetatur
et cantatur et laudatur⁸
Deo⁹ sedula
qui regnat in saecula.
Huius artis praeceptor
secum Deus det Guidoni
Vitam aeternalem.
Fiat Amen.*

With such a little melody,
rival of honey,
you pleasing the people,
who marvel and rejoice
and sing and praise
God zealously,
who reigns for the ages.
To the master of this art
may God, along with himself, grant to Guido
life eternal.
Let it be done. Amen.

¹ This role inversion of *ludere* and *canere* between participle and object infinitive struck me as deserving translation more subtle than simple redundancy. Given the rich variations of meanings possible for these two verbs (see my vocabulary), I played around with them a lot and eventually came up with a play-on-words interpretation that I find both fitting and charming - see my translation; try other variations of your own!

² If this participle were to be read as additional praise of the organ, following the standard translation, it ought to be in the accusative form *docentem*; in its nominative case, it should be read as modifying the subject of a sentence, and the closest that fits is the first-person subject of the verb *persuadeo*. When this connection is made, all the adverbs following *docens* go from odd in the standard translation to suitable, for describing how Guido teaches. The right connection is hard for a modern reader to see because of the period after *humiliter*. I wonder who first put that period there; I doubt that it was Guido; consider it moved to *laudabiliter* for my version. Given the musical cohesiveness at this point, I also wonder how Kodály himself understood the parsing of this text.

³ See my vocabulary for my speculative translation of this unknown word. I once thought it might be the Italian for the "bellows operator"; but *calcante* (from *calcare*; *trample*) is the multilingual word for that.

⁴ I struggled the longest time to fit a documented meaning of this word (actually *instare*) into its context in the text; most meanings have interpersonal aspects at odds with the "standing still" of our standard translation. This once made me think it described interaction between player and bellows operator. But in our case, the player is the operator, who must avoid "standing upon [the bellows treadles]" (documented meaning).

⁵ Unknown word, speculatively interpreted; see my vocabulary. Rejecting "blasts," I was tempted briefly to use "toots" in my translation. Maybe the organists have a dignified technical word for what I have called "tone breaths."

⁶ An open question for me is whether *delectabili*, *cantabili* better modify *manu* or *salto* (the latter choice then making *manu mobili* a nested ablative of means within the protracted ablative of manner phrase beginning *salto*).

⁷ Another nominative participle, remote from its modified subject, in this case the second-person subject of three subjunctive verbs directing you the musician how to play; I note that explicitly by insertion of the word "you" in front of the participle in my translation. The whole passage here, beginning with *Tali modulo*, comes across as a sentence fragment without main clause.

⁸ These passive forms, which should be instead the active *cantat* and *laudat*, poetically echo the ring of the properly passive forms of the deponent verbs in the preceding line.

⁹ Since *laudare* takes accusative for its object, I was thinking that dative *Deo* ought to be replaced by *Deum*. But then I considered the familiar phrase *hosanna in excelsis Deo* and felt more comfortable. Also, the poetic-license use of the passive *laudatur* may invoke some syntactic rule I don't know about.