

10 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR OWN INSTRUMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS

1. **Choose a few choral octavos from your library.** Think of anthems that have great melodies and programmatic titles (or familiar tunes) that will match the theme of the day. Look up contact info for the publisher/copyright holder and make a quick phone call with your arrangement request.
2. **Pull a few pieces from vocal collections you have on hand.** Often, these pieces are already “arranged” (see no. 5 below) with piano interludes and places for the soloist to drop out. Check the copyright and ask permission, if needed.
3. **Look for vocal music in the public domain.** There are lots of (printable!) sacred music selections for high, medium, and low voice. Start with a quick search on [IMSLP](#). Vocal music works great for lyrical wind instruments like saxophone, flute, clarinet, or oboe or string instruments.

Here are a few examples:

- Ave Maria ([Schubert](#) or [Bach-Gounod](#))
- Panis Angelicus ([Franck](#)) - optional duet with piano accompaniment
- Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child ([arr. Burleigh](#))
- Were You There (arr. Stith in a collection called [“13 Alternate Hymn Harmonizations”](#))

4. **Go through your solo piano music.** Look for Christmas carol or hymn arrangements, lyrical melodic lines, and interesting settings of familiar tunes. Often, the melody is woven into the right hand and is easy to pull out for a solo instrument (with permission, mind you). Double the melody in another octave or leave it out when the instrumentalist is playing.
5. **Keep the range of the instrument in mind.** Remember, you may use only part of the anthem or vocal piece, so for now, as long as most of it is in a good key, don’t worry about key changes that happen right at the end.
6. **Don’t forget about your hymnal.** If you’re feeling extra creative, there are lots of hymns (numerous in the public domain!) that lend themselves to easy, last-minute arrangements. Consider using hymn harmonization books (with permission) and think about ways to vary each verse to keep it interesting.

Have a high school trumpet player in your congregation? Have them play the melody on the introduction of a hymn like “Joy to the World” or double the [soprano descant](#) on the last verse of a hymn like “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Better yet, choose a hymn with a great tenor line and make that the descant for the last verse.

Here are a few public domain hymns well-suited for instrumental arrangements:

- Amazing Grace
- Be Still and Know
- Fairest Lord Jesus
- I Surrender All
- I Wonder As I Wander
- In the Bleak Midwinter
- It Is Well With My Soul
- Joyful, Joyful
- Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence
- Of the Father's Love Begotten

And here are a few ready-made hymn arrangements in the public domain:

- St. Theodulph [All Glory, Laud, and Honor] ([arr. Stith](#))
- Greensleeves ([arr. Stith](#))
- Adeste Fideles ([arr. Vogel & Guérout](#)) - cello/piano
- O Waly Waly (arr. [Dyson](#) or [Sharp](#)) - voice/harp, voice/piano

7. **Think about instrumental music that might work.** What about an arrangement of "Largo" from Dvorak's Symphony No. 9? Available as a [free PDF printable](#) for voice and piano or violin and piano on [IMSLP](#).
8. **Determine how long the piece should be.** Is it a prelude or postlude? Three to four minutes is probably a good length. Will it fall in the middle of the service? You might be able to get away with something in the 4-5 minute range. Does it need to be flexible in length, like something you might play for Communion? Plan a shorter version and a longer version (look for places to go back to and repeat, as needed).
9. **Think about ways to "arrange" the piece.** Perhaps the instrumentalist will play the first verse, you'll play the second verse and you'll play together on the third verse, with one of you playing a descant line. Depending on the instrument, you may opt to have them play the melody down an octave and/or double one octave up with your right hand.
10. **Make an instrumental part.** Once you have a piece and a plan in place to present it in worship, use a music notation software to create an instrumental part ([Finale NotePad](#) is free and works great in a pinch!). Add in dynamics, phrase markings, optional repeats, etc.

Happy arranging!

A note about copyright: If the original music is copyrighted, you must obtain permission to arrange and play it in any other way than it was originally composed. This includes but is not limited to: adding a part, playing a vocal line on an instrument, making a cut, changing melodic lines (even just displacing the octave), etc. If you do not intend to sell or publish your arrangement, the process of requesting permission may entail only a quick email or phone call to the copyright holder. Of course, if the original music is in the public domain, you're free to start creating!