

German composer and music educator Carl Orff (1895-1982) spent much of his working life in Munich, where he was conductor of the Munich Bach Society and later taught composition at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik. He first encountered the *Carmina Burana* text in 1934 at the Bavarian State Library.

*Carmina Burana* is a manuscript containing 254 poems, written mostly in Medieval Latin, that date from the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries. The authors were mainly Goliards, student clergy who satirized the Catholic Church. In content, the text ranges from morality and spirituality to celebration of drinking and carnal pleasures. The collection of texts was found in 1803 in Benediktbeuern Abbey in Bavaria, Germany and transferred to the Bavarian State Library where it still resides. The title *Carmina Burana* is Latin for “Songs for Beuern,” referring to Benediktbeuern.

Orff chose 24 poems for his musical setting for choir and orchestra, completed in 1935. “O Fortuna” is the opening movement, and is also reprised as the final movement. Throughout *Carmina Burana*, Orff used simple materials and straightforward tonal harmony, without much counterpoint, to achieve a directness of effect. The accessibility of expression has helped *Carmina Burana* to become one of the most frequently programmed pieces of the twentieth century repertoire. Orff’s original intent for the piece was a staged, theatrical production featuring dance and movement, and it was presented as such in the premiere production at Oper Frankfurt in 1937. However, for decades it has almost always been performed as a concert cantata. “O Fortuna” has been widely used as a stand-alone piece in film, television, and other media.

*Carmina Burana* has been such a massive success that it has overshadowed Orff’s considerable output and legacy as a music educator. Orff’s pedagogical experiments led to published exercises and improvised structures in a collection called *Musik für Kinder*, which in turn became the basis for his comprehensive teaching approach called Orff-Schulwerk. The overall theme of his pedagogy is that any child can, with very little training, learn the basics of rhythm, pitch, and musical form.

# O Fortuna

from *Carmina Burana*

Carl Orff  
1895–1982

**Pesante**  
 $3/\text{♩} = 60$

**ff** **poco stringendo**

Soprano  
O For - tu - na, vel - ut Lu - na sta - tu va - ri -

Alto  
O For - tu - na, vel - ut Lu - na sta - tu va - ri -

Tenor  
O For - tu - na, vel - ut Lu - na sta - tu va - ri -

Bass  
O For - tu - na, vel - ut Lu - na sta - tu va - ri -

**Pesante**  
 $3/\text{♩} = 60$

**ff** **poco stringendo**

Piano

8vb

4

$3/\text{♩} = 120-132$

**pp**

- a - bi - lis, sem - per cres - cis

- a - bi - lis, sem - per cres - cis

- a - bi - lis, sem - per cres - cis

- a - bi - lis, sem - per cres - cis

$3/\text{♩} = 120-132$

**pp**