

MISSISSIPPI ACDA

SPRING CHORAL BLOG

Harlan Zackery

Ethnic & Multicultural R&S Chair (Featured Article)

It has been said that Mississippi is the birthplace of America's music. When we consider that Mississippi is the home of the Blues and follow the Blues lineage through Gospel music, Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, bluegrass, country, musical theatre and popular music genres we become hard pressed to refute this fact. Indeed many of our students have been singing gospel, blues, and popular music styles before they could read or write. While we spend a great deal of time preparing ourselves and our students to achieve a proper choral tone which follows many European traditions, as choral directors in the state of Mississippi we must also avail ourselves of tools and techniques to help our students safely explore other genres of music. The concern among many choral directors is the technique required to produce the sounds appropriate for other styles of music. Often, our students use improper technique to achieve the desired vocal timbre for these genres, which can be damaging to the voice over time. This post will highlight several articles and resources that can help the choral director better assist choristers in performing a wide variety of music genres while maintaining vocal health and agility.

1. Thomas Cleveland. "An examination of sixty-four voices of a seventy-voice gospel choir: implications for vocal health" [Choral Journal](#). Apr 2004, Vol. 44, p45-49.

Dr. Cleveland and Dr. Mark Courey, both of Vanderbilt University, examined and interviewed sixty-four singers of a Nashville Area gospel choir. They found signs of vocal damage on forty of the singers. Within the article they discuss the symptoms and hazards of singing gospel music without proper training. Most importantly, they discuss the anatomy of proper technique for gospel music and offer suggestions for singers and directors in teaching and learning the proper technique.

2. Tracy Bourne and Diana Kenny. "Vocal Qualities in Music Theater Voice: Perceptions of Expert Pedagogues" [Journal of Voice](#). Jan 2016, Vol. 30 Issue 1, p128.e1-128.e12.

Tracy Bourne and Diana Kenny, Ph.D. student and faculty member, respectively, at the University of Sydney have done a great deal of research into the teaching of belt voice in musical theatre. While this is not a musical theatre post, the belt voice is often used in a wide variety of multicultural/ethnic genres. Bourne and Kenny interviewed vocal pedagogues from the US, Asia, Australia and Europe about belt voice. As a byproduct, several of the pedagogues provided advice on teaching healthy production of belt voice.

3. Robert Edwin. "Singin' the Blues: A Pedagogic Tool. [Journal of Singing](#). May/Jun2015, Vol. 71 Issue 5, p613-615.

Mr. Edwin is Associate Editor of the *Journal of Singing*, and former voice professor at the University of Michigan. His article chronicles his teaching of blues technique to a classically trained opera singer. One of the most interesting facets of this article is his rationale that if one has a good foundation of classical technique, one can sing anything. This article is less on vocal technique than it is on techniques for improvising the blues, which is helpful for those of use who direct choir everyday and also for those of us teaching studio voice or general music.

4. Scott D. Harrison and Jessica O'Bryan, editors. *Teaching Singing in the 21st Century*. 2014 Springer Press.

This resource is one with universal appeal. Harrison and O'Bryan have collected writings from voice teachers, choral directors, pathologists and voice researchers from around the world. The writings cover a wide breadth of topics including, bel canto singing, choral singing, Gospel, Jazz, popular music and Musical Theater.

Scott Sexton
Children's Choir R&S Chair

Manx Lullaby- (Unison) arranged by Lori-Anne Dollof. This Celtic folk song has a hauntingly beautiful melody set in the Mixolydian mode. It alternates between English and Gaelic, the language of Ireland and Scotland, but it just has a few lines and these particular phrases are easy to pronounce. This is a great piece to work on legato singing! You may also work on lyrical singing and melodic lines, while also working in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. JW Pepper: 3092160

Let's Go Fly a Kite- (2-part) arranged Cristi Cary Miller. If you're looking for something fun and light for to sing at spring events, consider this gem! This piece is written perfectly for children's voices and proves that it is not hard to have a great choral sound on Broadway and Pop pieces. The 2-part can be optional- but does offer a lovely Part 1 countermelody that's perfect for working the head voice. This is a favorite that audience goers of all ages can relate to. JW Pepper: 3292042

Alleluia- (2-part) Telemann, arr. Liebergen. Don't be afraid of programming Baroque for your children's choir! This 2-part piece is a great introduction to the Baroque era for young choirs. Minimal text throughout (Alleluia). Seek out the stylistic patterns and sequences of the Baroque era and you'll find that this piece is doable and can be taught. It comes with 2 optional flute parts if you have instrumentalists in your community. If you need a reinforcement, you may also order a separate teaching CD that plays Parts 1 and 2 separately. JW Pepper: 10011723

Resource:

Quick Starts for Young Choirs- by Cristi Cary Miller and Angie McKenna. This book comes full of resources to energize your rehearsal- games, ice breakers, ear training exercises, team building activities, and more! The activities in this book are generally designed to plug in at the beginning of our class session or as a tool for transitions in your lessons. My students have enjoyed many of the activities in this book and look forward to doing them over and over again. Hal Leonard: 00119268

Tammy Maxie
Middle School R&S Chair

Sing to Me
 Andrea Ramsey
 Santa Barbara Publishing 10031
 SATB/SA

Wow! I have this one on order! I heard this piece this weekend at the GMEA Sixth grade Honor Choir performance. The lyrics are inspiring and the melody is powerful! You will love the accompaniment! Perfect for any age!

Jambo
 Jacob Narverud
 Santa Barbara Publishing 1134
 SSA

This piece has lit a huge fire under my women's choirs this spring! Recorded by the music group Them Mushrooms, this arrangement is fun and easy! My girls love the part writing and of course the African text!

Kansas City Kitty
 Jacob Narverud
 Santa Barbara Publishing 1137
 TB

This arrangement takes a popular tune from the roaring 1920's and makes it adaptable for young and/or older singers! Adding stylistic harmonies, a fiddle, and upright bass, and a hoedown section this piece will be a concert favorite! Introducing this piece has opened my rehearsal up to many questions about style, history, and storytelling! You don't want to miss out on this one!

Claire Leeke
High School R&S Chair

The Pasture by Z. Randall Stroope
 (No. 2 from “Where the Earth Meets the Sky”)
 SATB Choir and Piano

Optional orchestration for flute, oboe, horn, viola, cello and double bass

*Listed as Grade 3 on the Texas list.

This piece is stunning. With the text coming from Robert Frost’s poem of the same name, the song’s simplicity allows for work on expression, musicality and phrasing. The accompaniment keeps the phrases moving along and allows the singer to feel supported. There is very little divisi. You do, however, need some tenors! It sits a bit high in sections.

Muie Rendera arr. C. A. Pinto Fonseca
 SATB Choir, unaccompanied

*Listed as Grade 4 on the Texas list.

This fun piece combines two popular folk tunes from Brazil. My students loved working on it! It alternates back and forth between longer, sustained lines and light, dance-like passages. There are a couple of exposed men’s entrances, so it requires a confident men’s section...and a group who likes to have fun.

Draw the Circle Wide by Mark A. Miller
 SATB Choir, soloist and piano

This is a very powerful piece that is super accessible and a favorite among singers and listeners alike. The text brings the message of inclusiveness and unity, a message that is especially important in today’s world. Because of this broad message, the song can be made to fit into a wide variety of concert themes. Musically, this piece is a quick learn, and accessible for singers of various experience levels. I have used it as a concert closer in the past, with all singers joining in together. Your students will love it!

Resource:

“I’m a Choir Director” Facebook Page

Though Facebook may be considered a “non-traditional” resource, this particular page has much to offer. For those who are not already subscribed, I recommend signing up asap! This page is a great forum for all things choir. You can ask questions about anything from rep choices to how to get your students more motivated about singing, and get replies from some of the 8,000+ current members. Though not all replies may be what you are looking for, you are bound to get some helpful advice. The site also notifies you when other posts are made, opening your eyes up to ideas and tidbits of inspiration that you may not have otherwise seen.

Vicki Blaylock
Two-Year College R&S Chair

Through the Dark
 SATB – Voices Accompanied
 Adapted from the writings of Helen Keller
 By Andrea Ramsey
 Pavane Publishing

Andrea Ramsey has masterfully combined her musical writings with the imagery of the textual writings which are based on the struggles of Helen Keller. There are accents strategically placed to emphasize the “pulses of God” and the crescendos to the text “God is in me” sets up the tension and release within the piece. There are times when the piece is dark and when the text indicates light and God, the music either changes meter, uses accent markings or dynamic markings to highlight the difference between the darkness of life and the brilliance of light in one’s life. A very moving and stirring piece.

How Can I Cry?

Words and music by Moira Smiley

www.moirasmiley.com

Moira Smiley is an independent composer and I happened to stumble along this piece on youtube as Florida State performed the piece. This piece is a “soul-searching” piece. A piece that is interpreted to say: “how can I cry about my freedom or pain or suffering when I have never had to fight for it as others before me have?” This selection has body percussion as well. The body percussion is optional but is very effective in pointing out a collection march toward freedom and peace. The mournful slides and humming add to set the tone of this piece.

A Red, Red, Rose from Four Robert Burns Ballads

By James Mulholland

Hal Leonard Publishing

A Red, Red, Rose is a beautiful love song with lots of emotion within the text and movement within the vocal lines. The inner voices move together throughout the piece as the outer voices sing together in longer lines. A beautiful selection with lots of impact.

Phillip Stockton

College/University R&S Chair

Missa Pro Defunctis by Francesco Brusa

SMN Press

3841 Linden Lane

El Sobrante, CA 94803

510-222-0564

SSA choir with SSA soloists and string orchestra/continuo accompaniment

This setting of the requiem text is a great piece for women’s choirs that are often not included in the masterwork repertoire. The writing is challenging, but approachable with many interesting dissonances. The piece has been recorded by the San Francisco Girls’ Choir recording “Music from the Venetian Ospedali.”

“Gaudete” arr. Michael Engelhardt

Walton Music

SATB, SSAA, or TTBB with industrial percussion

I programmed this piece for the holiday concert and it was the highlight of the concert. Engelhardt uses a syncopated industrial percussion (brake drum, metal tubes, etc.) to create a unique sound and energy. While the style is modern and dissonant, the chant remains fairly true to the medieval setting. I highly suggest it as a concert opener next year!

Resource:

I have been looking for a choral literature textbook that is updated and readable, and may have finally found it. There are excellent resources regarding choral literature such as the Dennis Shrock “Choral Literature,” but I was in search of something that my students could read like a text, not just reference. “A History of Western Choral Music” by Chester L. Alwes (ISBN: 978-0-19-517742-8) seems to fit this need. I have not read the book in entirety yet, it is not an easy read, but am enjoying his writing style and method of organization with choral literature. Request an exam copy and let me know if you agree.

Alwes, Chester L. A History of Western Choral Music Volume I. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Jabarie Glass
Men's Choir R&S Chair

Keep Your Lamps; arr. Timothy C. Tikach; TBB a cappella; TB soli; percussion; www.timothyctikach.com

This is fresh arrangement of this spiritual that will serve perfectly as a closer for any program. It begins with a subdued duet between the basses and baritones and layers in voices and solos as the song progresses to its dynamic conclusion. This song is accessible to advanced high school/collegiate men's ensembles. You will need a good tenor soloist to pull off this piece.

Beati Mortui; Felix Mendelssohn/ed. Weber; TTBB a cappella; Alliance Music Publication, Inc.

This piece is a staple in the male choir repertoire. Allow your men to enjoy this work by a historically relevant composer.

Carrickfergus; arr. Mark Sirett; TTB piano; Boosey & Hawkes

This is a beautiful arrangement of this traditional Irish tune. This is a great piece for teaching musicality and phrasing to your male singers. This accessible for high school men's ensembles of all abilities.

Resource:
 Progressive Sight Singing; Carol Krueger; Oxford University Press

As an organization, we are on the verge of enacting changes that will move choral music in Mississippi in a positive direction. Because of these changes, our ability to teach literacy to our singers is becoming increasingly important. This resource outlines a systematic and comprehensive approach to teach aural skills to our singers and provides over 500 pages of music examples to use in teaching literacy skills. Challenge yourself and challenge your students. We are your students' aural skills teacher, theory teacher, as well as their ensemble conductor; therefore, we must commit to developing and implementing a plan to grow our singers into strong musicians—they need and deserve that commitment from us.

Holly Beck
Women's Choir R&S Chair

Shenandoah (SA)
 arr. Laura Farnell - Kjos Music Company 6357

Publisher Description - The broad arch of its melody and the timeless appeal of the lyrics make this one of America's favorite folk songs. This arrangement's accompaniment provides a rich and somewhat ethereal background for the singers. The music moves to a Maestoso section (with the soprano line acting as a descant) before ending peacefully, as if reminiscing.

This two part arrangement includes a lovely flute that acts at the third voice. Beautiful and easily accessible for a developing choir, the arrangement mirrors the flow of a river. This piece is great to work on breathing and phrasing.

Heart, We Will Forget Him (SSA)
 James Mulholland - Colla Voce Music 12-50890

Publisher Description - This lovely setting of a romantic poem by Emily Dickinson is a favorite with SSA choirs, and has become a popular choice for state contest lists and regional festivals.

Not much of a description there, but it is a beautiful piece. From "Three Love Songs", this piece includes a horn in F and some tremendously bold dissonant chords. It definitely takes a group with a good ear, deep emotions, and passionate 'heart'. It is available in other voicings, but I believe the original women's arrangement is the most sensational. It has been around since 1998, but if you haven't taken a look at it for your women, I encourage you to do so. I count the years until my ladies have cycled out so that we can perform it again!

Koudjay (SSA)

Sydney Guillaume WW1434

Publisher Description - This piece features Haitian rhythms and challenging harmonies. The treble setting uses a text about harmonizing life's activities - dance being one. A great festival or concert piece for developing choirs well worth the preparation efforts. While sung in Haitian Creole, it has an English translation and IPA transcription. Audio pronunciation guide and practice tracks are posted by the composer at www.sydneyguillaume.com.

This piece can be a challenge. A cappella, LOTS of Creole, numerous key changes, tempo changes, modulations from major to minor... BUT it is also a lot of fun!

Resource:

Beyond Singing: Blueprint for the Exceptional Choral Program

Stan McGill & Elizabeth Volk

Publisher Description - Excellence is not something stumbled upon by accident. You won't achieve great things while flailing about in paperwork nor partake of true musical artistry by folly. Success requires a concrete plan of action: a big-picture plan followed by all the little details that, together, create a complex mosaic that forms a beautiful and intricate picture of choral excellence. This practical text offers a wealth of information for running a choral program. The two successful veteran teachers offer advice for dozens of solutions to issues facing the choral director. Includes a CD-ROM of bonus material.

This book is GREAT! Most have probably already been told about it, but I had to mention it just in case someone has not yet read it! My choral department handbook came directly from the CD-ROM! There are so many incredible ideas, concepts, & helpful tips! This is not the kind of book you purchase at a conference and then never use. You will be hooked as soon as you crack the cover.

Debbie Wolfe

Showchoir R&S Chair

“Boogie Shoes” arr. By Mac Huff is a fun song to sing and perform. I have used it with my middle school group this year, and it’s one of their favorites. This song allows for some great and cute choreography. I can only imagine what a high school group could do with this piece!

“Change in the Making” an original piece by Jeff Bowen is a piece with a great message. Instead of doing the typical guy number and girl number, I chose to do a piece that still allows for some guy time/girl time on the stage while one group is changing costumes, but ends with the whole choir singing together. My students have really enjoyed this piece and the message within the piece.....Be the change you want to see in the world!

JR Marlow’s arrangement of “Make It Last Forever/Elevate” is a fun –filled energetic closer! This piece even includes a snippet from *High School Musical* and *Aladdin*, and who doesn’t love a little Disney?!! My students, as well as the audience, love this selection.

Resources:

Music Arrangement Services, JW Pepper, Custom Arrangements, and Technology in the Music Classroom

Slater Murphy

Music in Worship R&S Chair

Shout Glory! by Byron Smith, Paula A. Smith Choral Series, Gentry Publications, JG2285/SATB, piano accompaniment This selection works well as a closer for your spring concert, upper level high school or college chorus. Highly energetic, with a driving R&B feel, it demands precision throughout. Toward the end of the song each vocal part is highlighted individually, then all parts join back together for a strong finish. I usually add a high Ab for a few first sopranos on the final three chords. There is a medium range solo lead at the beginning of the song.

Psalm 23 by Paul Basler, Jo-Michael Scheibe Choral Series, Colla Voce, 36-20118, piano and horn accompaniment
Appropriate for advanced high school or college choirs, utilizing a fairly wide vocal range for Bass II and Soprano I. It is set in the style of a multi-movement work with much interesting and delightful contrast over the course of its 15 pages. I have successfully used a trombone soloist at one time when a horn player was unavailable; your instrumentalist must be highly skilled to tackle this one. This piece was dedicated to Andre' Thomas and the Florida State University Singers.

By Our Love by Christy Nockels, arranged/orchestrated by Phillip Keveren, LifeWay, 6-34337-253480, piano or full orchestra accompaniment

This SATB (expanded SSAA at a few points) is an artfully crafted, gorgeous, truly choral presentation of an outstanding and important contemporary text and tune. I've personally witnessed high school groups discover a unity of spirit and cooperation during the process of working on this selection. It calls for much dynamic contrast with many nuanced points scattered throughout the song. There is a short solo, then solo/duet in the middle (soprano/tenor) that sets up the final section. I linger a long time on the final Eb major 7 choir chord, then finally resolve it to the Bb piano chord in the next measure. I usually eliminate the last measure of accompaniment.

Resource:

God's Singers, A Guidebook for the Worship Leading Choir in the 21st Century, Dave Williamson, in:ciite media, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-615-40632-9

You will quickly ascertain that Dave's perceived mission is to rescue the church choir from extinction! As the role of the choir in worship now is being renewed and validated on many fronts, Dave Williamson provides for the choir leader a helpful text that can be used to impart Scriptural foundations, wisdom, and practical application for the enhancement of the total worship experience. Many of our state's music/worship leaders have purchased this book for each one of their choir members to study. It is not a hard read and is well organized in its progression.

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