

# Great Choral Treasure Hunt VIII

## HISTORICAL MUSIC FOR YOUNG CHOIRS

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### Why a “Historical Music” Session?

This is not a historical vs. jazz, vs. multicultural, vs. 20<sup>th</sup> century, vs. *anything*, but rather a look at some music that is generally given lots of lip service and good press by music teachers, but rarely is more than a token selection or two for many young choirs.

Most people concede that there are certain pieces and composers that everyone should know. But *why*? Take a minute to think about a piece that transformed the way you thought about music, really inspired you to want to know or do more musically or exposed you to a level of beauty that you were previously unaware of.

Our theory is that behind every music teacher on a mission to reach kids there is a great historical piece of music (or maybe many) that helped to shape their ear, mind and imagination in a significant way.

- Cesar Franck: *Panis Angelicus* (2 part)

### •Developing a Musical Palate, Growing a Musical Mind

#### •Programming a Concert = Writing a Curriculum

- Michael Praetorius: *Singt dem Herren* (canon)

### •The Quality Question: Why is this piece still here?

#### •Connections to the Past

Why do we look at art, literature, architecture, family stories, local, state, national and world history or *anything* from the past? What difference does it make to us in the present?

- *Stella Splendens* (variable voicing)

## Why Is Historical Literature Not Often the “Norm?”

### •Perceived Difficulty and Real Difficulty

- Palestrina: *Pleni Sunt Coeli* (canon)

### •Teaching As We Were Taught

#### •Been There, Done That...

But have our students? We are sometimes tempted to skip over the solid stepping stones that helped us develop a sharp musical mind because we want a new experience.

#### •Fear

The fear that they will be bored, hostile, unreceptive, not like the piece, not like the teacher, perceive choir as unpopular or uncool and we'll lose 'em.

- Henry Purcell: *For Love, Every Creature* (2 part)

## What About A Compromise?

Choosing the right piece matters, of course. Sometimes, well-intentioned small steps can backfire. When it comes to choosing the best possible music of any time period and style, it can be unhelpful to go “half way.”

### •The Token “Historical Work”

With a program of shallow literature, too much literature, or “educational” pieces for young choirs”, the one token “classical” piece can seem like the lonely, overcooked piece of cold broccoli on the side of the plate. Who can see the real benefit of choking it down?

#### •Faux-Historical

The text is Latin. It is ABA form. The poetry is flowery and doesn't make a lot of sense. One of the tunes is said to be by Handel. Why are elements of great works processed, re-packaged and marketed to look like classics?

- *Alle Psallite Cum Luya* (3 part)

• **Issues of Authenticity:** The continuum between authenticity/composer's intent on the one hand and our freedom to interpret on the other hand. What does this mean for arrangements, revoicing, excerpted tunes, re-texted tunes, etc...? When is it worth it and what are the alternatives?

- Michael Praetorius: *Anima mea* (3 part)

• **The Classical Concert** or The "Serious Music" Concert, The Festival Concert, and Other Well-Intentioned Concerts that Give the Subtle Message that Historical Music is Not Fun, Funny, Entertaining or Truly Enjoyable

## Thinking and Rethinking Music Selection

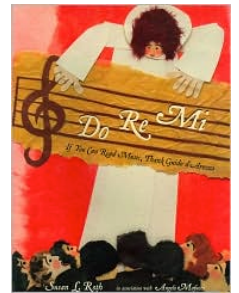
Finding the right great literature is often one of the most time consuming parts of the teaching process, but the impact on students of a well-chosen piece is worth it. Whether you have always been committed to finding and performing historical literature, or are just getting started, here are some tips that will help you sell the idea that exploring great choral treasures is well worth the effort.

### • Know the Score

The notes, the text, the background, the controversies, the stories... Then distill what is at the heart of *your* love of the piece.

- *Ut queant laxis* (chant)

*Do Re Mi: If You Can Read Music, Thank Guido D'Arezzo* by Susan Roth  
©2007 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt



### • How Will You Introduce the Piece?

This may be the most important strategy decision that you make in the teaching of this piece. You only get one chance. No pressure...

- *Viva La Musica* (canon)

### • Uncovering, Discovering and Uncoding

Look for ways to get the students to speculate, figure out and imagine, versus simply looking only at their own notes and text. Imagination is the key to motivation. Students can work relentlessly when their own creativity is invested.

### • Questions to Ponder

Finding the right questions and knowing how to invite responses (when to write, when to verbally share, when to just think about it) is key. A well-phrased, well-timed question can unlock the depth and richness in a great piece (often in a more effective way than simply presenting all the answers).

### • Build the Bridges of Relevance

Imagination and knowledge of the music and your students are the keys to constructing meaningful connections across centuries of time.

### • Don't Forget to Communicate with All Stakeholders

Parents, other teachers, administrators, audience members and students need to be let in on at least some of the process. It's hard to argue with a curriculum of historically important repertoire.

## The Great Choral Treasure Hunt

*The Great Choral Treasure Hunt* repertoire lists are available at: <http://www.wmea.com/CMP/repertoire>

### Where to Look

- CPDL (Choral Public Domain Library) [www.cpd.org](http://www.cpd.org)  
This resource of free editions gets larger every day.  
Browse it and "window shop" by composer, nationality, historical period, or VOICING!
- Visit a nearby college library. Peruse the collected works of great composers. Some are online!

<http://nma.redhost24-001.com/DME/nma/start.php?l=2> (Mozart)

[http://www.brahms-institut.de/web/bihl\\_notenschrank/ausgaben/noten\\_start.html](http://www.brahms-institut.de/web/bihl_notenschrank/ausgaben/noten_start.html) (Brahms)

- Seek out recommendations and lists from colleagues whom you trust.
- Attend convention performances. Save the programs. Make notes to yourself as you listen.
- Consider the suggestions students make from their summer music camp repertoire.
- Listen to lots of choral music. Attend concerts. Purchase CDs and professional recordings.  
(Suggestion: Use the *Classical Music Advanced Search* at Amazon.com to find professional recordings – it is a remarkable search engine. Also, iTunes now has a large selection of choral music.)
- Handlo Music ([www.handlo.com](http://www.handlo.com)). Every choral director should know Handlo. Check it out.
- When do U.S. works pass into public domain? Easy answer, if published before 1923 – more information here:  
<http://www.unc.edu/~unc1ng/public-d.htm>
- Look in choral collections. Permission to photocopy can be sought from the publisher.
- [www.choralnet.org](http://www.choralnet.org)
- Start a personal file of single octavos.
- Buy single copies from lists of quality music offered by individuals respected in the profession.
- Throw out almost all music/CDs sent by publishers. ☹

### **What is Good Music? & How Do I Hook My Students On It?**

“Swimming Upstream” & “Swimming Upstream Part II: Hooking Singers on Great Music”

Two articles by Randal Swiggum in the NCACDA newsletter *Melisma* (Winter 2005 & Spring/Summer 2005) available online at [www.ncacda.org](http://www.ncacda.org).

### **Translation Help**

Don't be afraid of editions that don't include translations. Use the Internet, or:

- Ron Jeffers: *Translation and Annotations of Choral Repertoire: Volume I Sacred Latin Texts* (earthsongs)
- Ron Jeffers and Gordon Paine: *Translation and Annotations of Choral Repertoire: Volume II German Texts* (earthsongs)
- Gordon Paine: *Translation and Annotations of Choral Repertoire: Volume III French & Italian Texts* (earthsongs)

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