



The GREAT CHORAL TREASURE HUNT XI

Slowly, Gently Raising the Bar for Better Choral Music (for Eleven Years!)

2013 Edition

Soul Music: Uncovering the Affective Dimension in Great Pieces

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Friday, October 25, 2013 • 10:00 am • Monona Terrace



Affective Outcomes

- Composer's Craft:** how has the composer, through compositional devices, created the piece's affect?
Students will analyze and categorize compositional devices that create tension, and their expressive impact.
- The Meaningful Performance:** how can we enhance the piece's affect and understand it more deeply, but making strong, informed, interpretive choices?
Students will compare the expressive effects of different styles of English diction (e.g. jazz inflection vs. art song style).
- Building the Community:** what might this piece teach us about ourselves as a group (group identity, teamwork, patriotism, pride, trust, openness).
Students will explore issues of group identity, nationalism, and patriotism, both healthy and destructive.
- Personal Knowledge:** what are my personal connections to the piece? What can I learn about myself and my interior landscape from this piece?
Students will define themselves as primarily a Romanticist or Classicist and explain why.
Students will explore themes of consonance and dissonance, in music and their personal lives.

Shaping Sound Musicians, pp. 35-39

2014 CMP Workshop: June 23-27, UW-Eau Claire. Go to wmea.com and click on "Programs".

1. Banaha (traditional Congolese song)

What makes a piece of music great art? "Greatness" is not the same as "complicated" or "difficult."

Ah, comme c'est chose belle (French canon, 16th c.)

Great art asks questions (but the question might not be obvious—you have to live with the piece a while).

Is music something that comes from God to us, or something that we create to give back to God, or both, or neither?

2. William Billings: first American composer genius

- **Rutland**

Great art asks questions. It often has a quirk. It invites us in and says "let's talk." It gives us something new to ponder. It bears repeated hearings. It continually opens dialogue.

- **Hopkinton**

3. Brahms: O Süsßer Mai (O Sweet May)

Intellectual or emotional companionship (even across centuries)

The importance of analysis to reveal layers.

What do the *notes* say, apart from the words?

- **Wenn die Klänge nahn** (3 pt. canon)

4. Edward German: Rolling Down to Rio

Sometimes a text is not really about what it seems. Finding the affective *heart* of a piece and/or its text often takes a little

pondering. Helping make that deeper connection to what the piece is *really* about helps our students connect more deeply.

O sweet May, the stream is free,
I stand close-mouthed, my eyes downcast.
I see neither your green array,
your colorfully blossoming splendor,
nor your blue skies;
I stare at the ground.

O sweet May, release me
like a song along the dark hedge.

PIECES WHICH SOUND LIKE NO OTHER

One of the marks of greatness in art is originality (okay, no kidding). But nowadays pieces try to sound like others which have been "big sellers." In the arts, the best creators invent new sounds, new ideas, new ways of thinking. Look for pieces which are truly unique in some way—chances are, they'll just be better than most other pieces.

Any great work of art... revives and readapts time and space, and the measure of its success is the extent to which it makes you an inhabitant of that world - the extent to which it invites you in and lets you breathe its strange, special air.

Leonard Bernstein

5. Ken Johnston: Johnnie Cope (2 pt or SATB)

The story of the battle of Prestonpans, 21 September 1745; the Scots (led by Bonnie Prince Charlie) against the British, led by Sir John Cope. The story is in this “story piece” will never be exhausted—always something to explore.

6. Vaughan Williams: Bright is the Ring of Words

A classic melody with an amazing Robert Louis Stevenson text that will never give up all its treasures easily. Ideas to explore: motif (the “knight’s move” of the first three notes, which is RVW’s signature motif), the shifting tonal center (you can sing the whole piece on solfège, but you have to change Do), the ambiguity of the poem. Yes, it’s just an art song (from the *Songs of Travel*) but singing a great unison has its own pleasures.

Also check out “Roadside Fire”, “The Vagabond”, and “Whither Must I Wander”. Your boys will thank you.

7. Magno Gaudens (12th century piece, unpublished; this edition prepared by Randy Swiggum)

Our boychoirs are singing this now and love it. Google the title and listen to various recordings. You can read more about this fascinating text in *The Later Cambridge Songs* (on GoogleBooks). Not necessarily a boy piece—your girls will love it too. But the text is very “boy friendly.”

FINDING A GREAT COMPOSER

8. Richard Dering (c.1580-1630)

• **Duo seraphim (2 pt.)**

Two seraphim cried one to another: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Sabaoth. All the earth is full of his glory!
Wow! Suspensions are so cool (even 400 years later)

• **Gaudet in coelis (2 pt)** Another gem.

• **Factum est silentium (There Was Silence In Heaven) (SSATTB)**

There was silence in heaven when the dragon fought the archangel Michael. The voice of a thousand thousand heard crying: Salvation, honor, and power be to almighty God.

The text is so dramatic but there are no dynamics or style markings in this piece. Let’s add them.

CHANT: OLD (BUT ALWAYS STRANGE AND NEW)

9. Ubi caritas (Where there is love, God is there.)

Everyone knows the Duruflé motet. This is the chant it’s based on. Knowing both enriches each of them.

10. Dies irae (chant from the Requiem)

Letting students “in” on this secret musical code will make them noticers of it the rest of their life. It is satisfying to sing, and the Original Fright Show.

TWO PURCELL CANONS

11. Purcell: One, Two, Three (puns, wordplay, hidden musical jokes; invent a Baroque accompaniment if you like)

12. Purcell: When V and I

A SIMPLE TREASURE

13. Howard Blake: Walking in the Air (from *The Snowman*)

As simple as a folk song or pop song, but with the small touches that say “brilliant.”
What accounts for the magical appeal of this song?

The Very Best Music Happens to Be Free!

1. cpdl.org (search by voicing!) 2. imslp.org (especially PD published pieces) 3. Wmea.com (Great Choral Treasure Hunts!)

I Think of Those Who Were Truly Great

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.
What is precious is never to forget
The delight of the blood drawn from ancient springs
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth;
Never to deny its pleasure in the simple morning light,
Nor its grave evening demand for love;
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields
See how these names are fêted by the waving grass,
And by the streamers of white cloud,
And whispers of wind in the listening sky;
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's center.
Born of the sun, they traveled a short while towards the sun,
And left the vivid air signed with their honor.

Stephen Spender (1909-1995)