



The GREAT CHORAL TREASURE HUNT Lucky Number XIII

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

2015 Edition: *O Fortuna: Don't leave music selection to the Fates!*

Margaret Jenks and Randal Swiggum • Thursday, October 29, 2014 • 11:50 am • Monona Terrace

I. WHAT MAKES IT GREAT?

- a. **Carl Orff: Carmina Burana**
- b. Great art rarely reveals its greatness at a quick read-through. (This is the problem with Reading Sessions in general—it makes us attach ourselves to very surface-y features, like “catchy melody” and not see that the piece might actually be quite shallow.)
- c. Using CMP style Analysis helps us see deeper. What is the piece actually made of?
- d. Good news: we can all get better at this. It takes patient practice, like anything of value.

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

II. NO LUCK INVOLVED: Being Intentional

- a. **CMP Outcomes:** 1) Skill 2) Knowledge 3) Affective

III. ART vs. ENTERTAINMENT

“Let me clarify the difference between art and entertainment. Entertainment is not the opposite of art—please, Lord, don't let entertainment be the enemy of art, be opposed to art in any way, or we are goners. What distinguishes entertainment is that it happens within what we already know. Whatever your response to the entertainment—laughing, crying, getting excited—underneath the surface, it confirms. Entertainment says, “Yes, the world is the way you think it is.” It feels great to have your worldview confirmed in the many dynamic, imaginative, exciting ways our entertainment industries provide.

Art, on the other hand, happens outside of what you already know. Inherent in the artistic experience is the capacity to expand your sense of the way the world is, or might be. The art lives in an individual's capacity to engage in that fundamental act of creativity—expanding the sense of the possible—every bit as much as the art resides in what's being observed.”
Eric Booth in *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible: Becoming a Virtuoso Educator* ©2009 Oxford

IV. HISTORICAL MUSIC (Old but Never Old)

- a. St. Nicholas songs: who knew this was a thing? Check out Anonymous 4: *Legends of St. Nicholas*
 - i. Godric's Song: Sainte Nicholaes (Look at the original manuscript and compare it to how various early music groups interpret the notation: <http://aclerkofoxford.blogspot.com/2012/12/carols-for-st-nicholas.html>)
 - ii. Intonent Hodie (new editions from R. Swiggum)
 - iii. Every previous Treasure Hunt has lots of early music—we love it and it works well always. Look especially at II (2004), VIII (all Early Music), and IX (how to take simple medieval tunes and arrange them for performance)

V. CANONS!

- a. Abbie Betinis: Be Like the Bird
- b. Arthur Frackenpohl: Be Like the Bird (recorded by Libana)
- c. Palestrina: Illumina oculos meos
- d. To check out: many of the first 12 years of Treasure Hunt packets (especially I and VI) feature canons of high quality. Check them out. Consider various arranging possibilities: drone accompaniments, soloists, choir in unison, various voicings for the canon, etc.

VI. BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)

Everyone knows the masterpiece *Ceremony of Carols*, and most college choirs sing the big *Hymn to St. Cecilia*. But Britten wrote dozens of smaller choral pieces and best of all: art songs.

With their singable lines, we can focus on all the skills a good singer needs, PLUS we can teach kids to dig deep with truly significant texts (Britten really understand poetry and chose the best), and compositional devices (who had more imagination than Benjamin Britten?).

a. **Tit for Tat**

Written when Britten was about middle school age, this is a piece like no other. Weird, wonderful text, a piano part that is at least half the story, and a vocal line that just brings pleasure to sing it (and provides great opportunities for dramatic expression).

b. **Folk Song arrangements: Avenging and Bright**

- i. Check out *Complete Folksong Arrangements: 61 Songs* (for High or Med. Voice)
- ii. Remember *The Ash Grove, Salley Gardens?* What makes their accompaniments so profound, even though the songs themselves are easy enough for 5th graders to sing?

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!)

Other art songs and arias to check out: nearly every Treasure Hunt packet from the last 13 years has included some amazing solo pieces which work beautifully for choir (and they love them). A few we have used recently: *Gia' il sole dal Gange* and *Danza, danza, fanciulla gentile* from the 24 Italian Songs. Other Handel arias too! These pretty much all work great for unison choir, and kids feel very grown up singing them. Don't bother with flashy new multi-voiced arrangements of them—they're all weaker than the original unison version.

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.

VII. Men's Voicing (also check out GCTH II (2004), VI (2008), and X (2012, all boy music)

a. **Vincent Persichetti: Song of Peace**

Its recurring refrain is haunting and beautiful, and like no other piece. Worth the time.

VIII. Let's talk about taste, proportion, and not over-reaching.

- a. Some pieces are just trying too hard to be something they're not.
- b. Simple pieces can teach us profound lessons about form, melodic craftsmanship, and metaphor.
 - i. Hot Cross Buns, Ah Poor Bird, and Fuzzy, Fuzzy Caterpillar

IX. The Wailin' Jennys: One Voice

A piece that kids don't get tired of singing, it has many features that "feel good" in the voice. It's an opportunity to really "fine tune" the skill of singing in close harmony with a piece that kids are willing to repeat and repeat, and retune and retune. They can hear when it's not right and will work to fix it. (When you find a piece like this, it's a treasure.)

Best of all, the piece goes deeper than most pop music: first, its topic is enacted in the changing texture of the piece (so a great opportunity to reinforce the idea of *texture*), and second: the changing texture (and the lyrics) are actually a metaphor for something else. Endless points of entry and lots of discussion when the piece doesn't "preach." This is a gem—not super sophisticated, but simply beautiful.

CMP WORKSHOPS in 2016

- **CMP Winter Weekend:** February 5-6, Wisconsin Center for Music Education. 2 credits available.
Our now "traditional" winter retreat. Join us. It's a blast.
- **Summer Workshop** (forty years and still going strong!) June 27-July 1, Lawrence University
- **Illinois CMP Workshop:** July 11-15 Northern Illinois University

PLAN AHEAD! 2017 Wisconsin Summer CMP Workshop at Concordia University, Mequon, July 10-14, 2017

Thanks for caring about giving your students the best music.

It is hugely time-consuming, no one will understand how much time you spend, no administrator will give you extra time for it, and no one will pat you on the back for making it a priority.

But you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your students are handling great art—art that changes them and helps them understand the world, and themselves in new ways—and your own imagination will be stirred in bringing it to life with your students.

