



ChorTeach Vol. 6, No. 4 Summer 2014  
Practical Teaching Ideas for Today's Music Educator  
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Welcome to ACDA's online magazine for choral director/music educators. The articles below have been gleaned from state and division online and paper ACDA newsletters around the United States and from submissions by seasoned choral directors with topics germane to the profession.

*ChorTeach*, our name, is derived from the German word for chorus, *chor*. It is pronounced, as many of you know, like the word *core*. I hope *ChorTeach's* articles will be a breath of fresh air for you, provide you with a few ideas or techniques that give you a lift and help your singers reach the goals you and they have set. *ChorTeach* is designed for those of you who work with amateur singers at all levels.

If you have written an article and believe it would be of interest to *ChorTeach* readers, send it to me in Word.doc format. I will get back to you after reading it. If you have read an article from an ACDA newsletter or website you think would be beneficial to *ChorTeach* readers, send me the details at <barhamte@gmail.com>, and I'll check it out.

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### Creating an Inclusive and Safe Choir Room

Christopher Larson

University of South Dakota

Vermillion, South Dakota

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For a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) student, there is almost no experience in life that is normal. In our western culture, judgmental statements, "looks," and the prejudices of others are a constant background noise affecting what LGBT students do, how they act, and what they say.

All music educators would agree that music should be an expressive outlet for every person, especially school-age young people. It is our opportunity and obligation as musicians to try to understand the feelings, thoughts, and emotions of others. We should empathize with the ups and downs of our students, listen to them, nurture them, and help them grow as individuals.

Music rehearsals, classrooms, and performances are, or should be, a safe place to be oneself and express one's emotions without fear of ridicule or snide remarks. All of us are judged by others at one time or another, but I believe the music room and the music rehearsal is never the place for making judgmental statements of any kind about other people.

Hatred, caustic, and careless remarks can be a crushing weight on the shoulders of young people. Sometimes it is direct and blatant, as when someone uses derogatory language toward people who are "different." At other times it comes across as a flippant, critical comment. These sharp comments are hurtful and build up tension in an LGBT student. Some are able to ignore the remarks. Some challenge them.

Too often in today's culture, being "different" is bad. Being gay is sometimes demonized. In the eyes of some peers, an LGBT student is less than human. Making fun of him or her or inflicting pain is something of a game.

LGBT students are often made to feel like ciphers without feelings. GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) reported that in April of 2013, "fag" was tweeted 14,563 times

in one day, "dyke" 25,065 times in a week, and "so gay" was tweeted 279,540 times.

A student from Sioux City, Iowa, told me that in her middle school, hate-filled, bigoted language flew around social media sites constantly and was often directed at fellow classmates. Another student told me about arriving at his locker after class and finding several notes taped to his locker that made fun of him, called him a fag, and wished he would die. No person should be able to use such language and get away with it.

Here's a rhetorical question: How often have you heard, even peripherally, the words *faggot*, *queer*, *dyke*, etc. spoken about a student and done nothing about it? Such words or phrases are meant to hurt.

Eighty-five percent of LGBT students report being verbally or physically bullied according to GLSEN. LGBT students are more than twice as likely to attempt suicide. What can we teachers do?

#### **1. With approval of your principal, set up appropriate disciplinary action for those who use offensive language (see above). Enforce the rules fairly and without fail.**

Where I taught, my students received a detention (filing music in my office) if I heard them using derogatory/offensive language about anyone.

In the city of 800 where I began my teaching career, I wasn't aware of any LGBT students singing in our choirs. About three-fourths of the high school, seventy-seven students, were involved in choir. Having left that position, I am now aware that at least four LGBT students were a part of our small program. In my way of thinking, it is unacceptable for students to use dis-

criminy and/or hateful language even if no LGBT students are members of one of my classes.

### **2. Keep an open mind. Use inclusive language.**

Even though a number of the composers whose choral music we program are or were homosexual, we should not exclude their music on that basis. Composers use texts that talk about love and life. That does not prevent them from writing about a guy being in love with a girl, or vice versa.

At a dress rehearsal for a holiday concert at the University of South Dakota, I had a powerful and transformative experience. I was struggling with my sexuality. Matthew Harden, now at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, had put together all of the men from the three choirs to sing the *Biebl Ave Maria*. At this time, I hadn't come out to anyone.

All of us guys were standing in the balcony singing. The music just wasn't coming alive. There was no emotion, no involvement. Dr. Harden wouldn't accept that from us. He said, "Come on, guys. You're better than this. Doesn't this text and music mean anything to you? Close your eyes. Picture the person you love. I don't care if it's your girlfriend, your boyfriend, your parents, or grandparents."

A warm sense of acceptance filled me and rushed through me. Dr. Harden continued, "Now imagine that you have to sing this music to save them. It's the only thing you have to do. Just sing this song!"

The *Biebl* took on a whole new meaning for me. It was glorious, or it felt like it to me. I don't know if the singing was any better, but it didn't matter. That particular work had become special, even magical.

In rehearsals with your singers, don't lose any opportunity you might have, any small comment or gesture, to illuminate a text, share a story, or make a point that helps. Someone will "get it." Someone will be lifted to a new level, a better understanding of themselves.

### **3. Have an open-door policy**

Hopefully, you have shown your students that you have an open mind. Be willing to listen to them, talk to them. Are you busy? Take time to listen anyway. You are their choir director and a role model.

Music is a highly personal experience with emotional and spiritual dimensions. It touches lives and stirs feelings. You may be the adult your singers come into contact with the most every week.

If your students are participating in mixed choir and show choir, that's great. Go another step. Offer extra rehearsals for all-state auditions and voice lessons, either group or individual. Interaction with you can be a lifeline to those students who are struggling with their identity. Be there for them.

### **4. Seek out helpful resources**

A number of excellent resources are available to help you broaden your understanding of LGBT issues. First and foremost is GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network, an organization that conducts research in schools, offers Safe Space kits and posts a National School Climate Survey. Other activities of this national organization include a No Name-Calling Week, a National Day of Silence, and webinars on discriminatory school policies and practices, sports and other extracurricular activities plus experiences of LGBT youth in US schools.

Go to the website, [GLSEN.org](http://GLSEN.org), and you will find lesson plans, curriculum, non-specific anti-bullying resources, examples of anti-bullying policies (both in the classroom and for the district), professional development workshops, and how to start a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) club at your school. Its purpose is to make sure your school promotes a safe, supportive environment for all students.

### **5. Talk to your colleagues**

If you find that a student is having trouble in your school because of bullying or a difficult time at home because of coming out, talk to your teacher friends. Together you will find issues that need to be addressed and that may help the student.

Talk to friends who are LGBT. They may offer helpful ideas and present another perspective. Be supportive of the struggling students.

### **6. Consider changing the names of your choral ensembles**

You may discover that transgender students are uncomfortable with the names of the ensembles of which they are a part. A female friend of mine told me she chose not to sing with any choral ensembles and remained in the orchestra. Her choir director had told her she had to "sing like a woman" because her vocal range was that of a tenor.

Another example, unique to transgender students, is that of a female, a soprano, who is transitioning to become a male. She will struggle with some of the same vocal difficulties experienced by boys as they move through puberty. She may end

up singing in the high baritone range. I believe a male who is transitioning to become a female will experience less change vocally than a female. Certain vocal therapy approaches can help male voices become more feminine. Options vary greatly depending on the individual.

Ensemble names such as men's choir and women's chorus make it challenging for students who may not identify themselves in that manner. Better choices would include treble choir or bass choir, both of which associate vocal ranges of singers with clef sign designations, not the gender of the singer. Other options might include titles associated with the school mascot, a city landmark, or a nearby river.

## 7. Be supportive

Your choirs are most likely diverse groups of individuals who need your support and encouragement. If one of your students comes out to you, respond with kindness and openness. Don't act surprised. Ask a few questions, e.g., "How did you come out? Are you happier? What has changed for you?" Be positive. That person is sharing a precious secret with you. You can act like it's no big deal, celebrate their courage, and support their decision.

Kevin Fenton came to my university recently for a choral workshop. He told a special story about what singing in choirs can do for people. A student of his had created an ecumenical cantata. People from all different denominations were involved. One of the singers, a minister, was an outspoken opponent of homosexuality. At the rehearsals and performance, the minister sang next to a man Dr. Fenton knew to be openly gay. Neither man knew anything about the other. They were there to enjoy the music and create a special "moment." The performance was highly successful and the men enjoyed each other's company.

Music has the power to unify us, no matter what our cultural differences or sexual orientation may be. Music brings people together for common goals. I believe we must work together to ensure that this sublime and uplifting bond not be broken by students' fears of being themselves (i.e., LGBT) in our choirs. All students should be able to come to our choir rooms and find them to be safe places to sing, to thrive, and to belong.

## Recommended Reading

Louis Bergonzi, "Sexual Orientation and Music Education," *Music Educators Journal* 100, no. 4 (June 2014): 65.



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If you sit down at set of sun and count the acts that you have done, and counting, find one self-denying deed, one word that eased the heart of him who heard, one glance most kind that fell like sunshine where it went, then you may count that day well spent.

—George Eliot

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## Sing Out Loud: Empowering Women's Choirs

Lindsay S. Pope  
Mount Holyoke College  
South Hadley, Massachusetts  
(Used with permission of  
Massachusetts' *Mass Sings*, January 2014)

It is my privilege to teach at an institution where the women's choir is the premiere choral ensemble—Mount Holyoke College, the first all-women's college established in the United States. It is also my alma mater.

I direct three choirs of varying sizes and ability. During my student days, I enjoyed singing, at one time or another, in all three ensembles. It wasn't until I attended graduate school that I became aware of how often, in a co-ed institution, the women's choir is regarded as a second-class citizen in a choral program. While I understand that this secondary status is not necessarily intentional, it is a serious and ongoing problem. As choral educators, we must begin thinking about the messages we are sending women.

Are we empowering them through language, programming, and healthy vocal development, for example, or are we furthering gender stereotypes that would make women believe they are indeed less capable, less productive, less worthy of being recognized for quality work and outstanding effort?

### Language Matters

Language is a powerful tool for establishing relationships and defining identity, both of which are integral to a choir's success. Language is also linked with social progress.

Consider the role that language has played and continues to play in the Civil Rights Movement. In this same vein, we need to monitor the manner in which we address female members of our choirs.

If you conduct an SATB ensemble, address your male and female singers using terms of equality, such as men and women, gentlemen and ladies, or guys and gals. Too often I hear conductors address the tenors and basses as guys or men and the sopranos and altos as girls.

While I understand that the intention behind this gesture may be one of gentility, the conductor who uses these terms is doing the female choir members a disservice. Before giving pitches to begin singing, the conductor is setting up a dichotomy—the solid, dependable “guys” and the dainty, dependent “girls.”

Whatever the makeup of your ensemble, be wary of employing the terms “girls” or “ladies” in addressing sopranos and altos. Addressing the women with the term “women” is easy enough. With it come associations of empowerment and self-sufficiency *a la* Rosie the Riveter, a productive and essential part of the United States work force in the Second World War.

If you have transgender members singing in your ensembles, use language that is even more inclusive—singers, sopranos, or altos, for example. We identify ourselves as choral musicians because we believe in the power of communal singing. We cannot accomplish this if we do not make our ensemble members feel that they are part of a fair and inclusive community.

### Down with Unrequited Love and Flowers

One of the challenges facing women's choirs is the lack of engaging, great repertoire. One can only program Holst's *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda* and Poulenc's *Litanies a la vierge noire* so many times.

This present lack presents an exciting opportunity for conductors of women's choirs to be adventurous in their programming, not just by exposing their students to different genres, eras, and cultures, but also through gaining new perspectives.

When I first began teaching at Mount Holyoke, I frantically worked to educate myself about the breadth and depth of repertoire for women's choirs. I was disturbed to find that much of the repertoire contained texts centered on unrequited love

or picking/giving flowers.

While both of these subjects offer valid insights into the human experience, they speak to antiquated expectations of what a women's choir can and should be singing. Professional female ensembles such as Norway's Cantus, directed by Tove Ramlo-Ystad, and Boston's Lorelei Ensemble, directed by Beth Willer, serve as inspiring examples of what women's choirs can program and commission.

I believe we directors should program music that features women at work. Use *kulning*, a semi-improvisational music indigenous to Sweden that imitates herding calls. Women traditionally sang this music while they were tending their cattle. In addition to offering a view of women that is not hearth-centered, *kulning* also teaches vocal independence through improvisation.

Why not program works that present women in unconventional roles? “The Woman Turns Herself into a Fish,” composed by Robinson McClellan, a living composer, features a text by the Irish poet Eavan Boland. The text speaks about the Irish myth of the Selkie. In it, a seal is transformed into a beautiful woman. In Boland's poem, however, the story is reversed so that the woman turns into a sexless, cold fish, and, as a result, feels liberated.

I do hope you will consider programming music that breaks down gender stereotypes and creates space for new views and progressive perspectives.

### Women Should Sound Like Women

Always encourage and teach your women's choirs to sing with a full, well-connected, vital tone. Too often, especially in the United States, women are taught to speak (and sing) like little girls. The movie *In a World...* (2013) illustrates this point quite clearly. I highly recommend it.

Vocalises present a fine opportunity to shape the sound of your choir through healthy vocal technique and appropriate vowel modification. In addition, the use of folk music is an effective way of teaching women how to sing with connection.

My interest in women's music has taken me to two fascinating locations to study folk music: the Republic of Georgia in the Caucasus area between western Asia and Eastern Europe and the French island of Corsica in the Mediterranean Sea. Our Mount Holyoke choirs perform works from these two countries often.

Georgian music from the Svaneti region transfers quite well to women's voices. The music sits low in the female range

and requires a well-grounded, centered physical stance and a well-supported chest voice. After I have taught our singers how to sing this music authentically and in a healthy manner, the sound can be utilized in more traditional women's repertoire, especially when a vibrant, rich timbre is required.

Letting my students know that big, powerful sounds are achievable and within their reach with consistent practice boosts their morale and gives them ownership of their voices.

### Final Thoughts

Stigmas attached to women's choirs need to be addressed and laid to rest through proactive, well-informed teaching. Women's choirs should not be a dumping ground, the leftover choir for females who did not make it into the premier SATB ensemble.

In addition, a women's choir should not be a testing ground for graduate conductors. Conductors of women's choirs should not be pigeon-holed and relegated to the musical background. Rather they should be taken just as seriously as the conductors of SATB ensembles.

Such prejudices will take time to overcome. Right now, you can and should begin building a women's choir that takes pride in its work, one that fosters progress rather than negating it. Through appropriate language, wise programming, and dynamic, healthy vocal development, you are encouraging your women to sing out unapologetically with individual and collective empowerment.



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By three methods we may learn wisdom. First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.

—Confucius

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### Recruiting Boys into Choirs — Techniques That Work

Jonathan Krinke

Lee's Summit High School

Lee's Summit, Missouri

(Used with permission of  
Missouri's *MCD A Reporter* Spring 2014)

January has flown by. The MMEA state conference has come and gone, and student enrollment conferences for the fall 2014 semester are quickly approaching. Besides having MSHSAA Large-Ensemble and Solo & Small-Ensemble festivals looming, many of us are thinking about one thing: choir auditions!

If your school district is like mine, administrators are hyper-focused on numbers. Why? The number of students enrolled dictates staffing. How can we increase our choir's numbers? More specifically, how can we retain and recruit more young men?

It's no secret that our culture has convinced young men that singing is not a manly trait. No matter how passionately you disagree with this idea, go to your school lunch room and speak with five to ten guys about singing in choir. Chances are you will quickly hear statements such as "I'm not a choir guy;" "I cannot sing;" or "choir is for girls." A table of guys might just stare at you and offer no response to your question.

The following methods have proven to be beneficial not only to my choral program but to those of a number of my colleagues. Some of the approaches have been shared by other teacher friends. Many ideas can be utilized to recruit boys as well as girls. Although I am writing from the perspective of a high school teacher, many of these strategies are equally effective for middle school choral directors. The first step is getting guys to walk through the door into the choir room.

### Target Group: Middle School Boys

Provide joint concerts with the middle schools that feed into your school. This strengthens both programs. The more opportunities middle school kids are given to see what is in store for them in the future, the better.

Use area churches that have decent acoustics. Consider including/inviting elementary students, thus providing them opportunities to hear middle and high school ensembles. These

concerts can be formal performances, clinics, or mini-tours.

Arrange for your high school singers to speak to the middle school choir. Timing is important for this activity to have maximum impact. It is best to schedule this activity before any enrollment information is dispensed.

Select a few high school choral students to spend a day at the middle school. Have them talk about the high school choirs and the difference that their choir class is making in their lives. Be sure the high school students have varied interests and can relate to all students (e.g., an athlete, a top academic student, a band or orchestra student, a science student, etc.). Have a structured plan for the presentation. Leave time for questions.

Have selected high school students send letters to middle school singers. Create a writing assignment in which your high school choral students write letters to the middle schoolers. Make it a contest.

A possible format might include the following: 1) Introduction of the letter writer, including his/her current activities at your school; 2) Explain what the writer has gained from being a choir member and what he/she likes about the class; 3) Explain why a middle school student should take choir in his freshman year of high school.

After your students have created a rough draft that you have proofread and approved, provide choir program letterhead stationery for your choral students to write their final draft. This makes the letters seem official and, more importantly, causes middle school choral students to feel that they are getting something special from the high school.

Also, with your high school's push to provide writing activities in all subject areas, this activity will help fulfill that requirement. After you have screened all letters, personally deliver them to the middle school choral teacher for sharing with his/her students prior to enrollment for freshmen classes at the high school.

Take your high school students to perform at the middle school. This is the number-one recruitment tool for most college and university programs, and it can also be an effective recruitment tool for high school choral programs. Wow the middle school kids with a performance that includes a mixture of musical styles and, of course, something fun and appealing.

#### **Target Group:**

#### **High School Boys Currently Singing in a Choir**

Offer a "Man Day." In our district, we put together a day in which the men's choirs from each high school rehearse at an

off-site location. A guest clinician works with each choir. Three guest community men's choirs perform. The primary focus is singing for one's entire life. Our boys love missing school for the entire day, and they enjoy hearing the older men's groups perform. The camaraderie that develops among all the guys is wonderful.

Have upper-level, experienced singers speak to your men's choir. Immediately before enrollment begins, ask several of the seasoned male choir members to talk about why underclassmen should stay in choir for four years. It is important for younger guys to hear this message not only from you but from the older guys they respect.

Focus on quality and make the groups important. Guys like feeling that they are part of something special. Be consistent. Structure each day carefully. Have a routine.

Choose a uniform for the ensemble that builds a sense of pride. Our guys wear slacks, blazers, and ties. Have fun. Don't be afraid to joke, even on day one. Focus on team atmosphere and school pride. Perform the National Anthem and school song at games and assemblies. Make this men's choir a visible presence in the school.

Plan an open house. If scheduling allows, invite students to attend a rehearsal of your top auditioned choir, or have your top students invite younger singers to the open house rehearsal. If this choir meets during lunch, visiting students can eat in the choir room while they watch the rehearsal. If your school offers a career day or an electives fair, it is a great opportunity to schedule a choir open house/rehearsal. Find any way you can to get kids into the choir room and see music making in action.

#### **Target Group:**

#### **High School Boys Currently Not Singing in a Choir**

Offer a choral department open house. See above. Invite guys not currently singing in your ensembles.

Increase the choir program's visibility at your school. Design a choir t-shirt/hoodie. Shirts are a mobile poster for your program. Consider letting the singers design the shirt but get administrative approval before printing them. Have kids wear their t-shirts when singing at games or events of any kind.

Put together a Choir Awareness Week. The week before choir auditions, have announcements about the auditions read each day on the school's PA system.

Send e-blasts to your singers' parents about auditions. Arrange for choir students to be in the cafeteria before school or during lunch shifts to sign students up for choir auditions.

Have a week of choir auditions held after school. Be sure that kids have multiple opportunities to meet you. You must get out into the hallways and talk to students about your program.

Use your current students' knowledge to find out about students who sing but are not enrolled in any ensembles. Most of these students have grown up together. They will remember who sang in elementary and middle school or who currently sings at church on Sundays. Tap into this information.

Create and send an invitation to the non-choir singing students to come to the choir room and meet you. Your personal invitation might say that one of their friends has selected them as a person who would enjoy and benefit from participation in the choir. This idea could be used in conjunction with Choir Awareness Week.

Produce a recruitment DVD. Include both rehearsal and performance footage along with student and teacher (you) interviews. Show your singers engaged in team building activities, joking around, and having fun. Include quotes from recent graduates and maybe even parents. Duplicate the DVD. Give it to everyone applicable and post it on your choir website.

**Target Group:  
High School Boys Who Have Sung  
in the Past but Are Not Singing Now**

Don't give up on guys who have sung in the past but dropped out. For many of us teachers, a number of students have told us they wished they had stayed in choir.

Go to the guidance counselors and get your old choir rosters. Find those singers who left because "they didn't have room in their schedules." Tell them that they are missed, they already read music, and might even miss singing and you!

**Conclusion**

Don't give up! You may feel that no matter what you do, you cannot improve your numbers. If you have followed through with many of the above activities and nothing is happening, reach out to your colleagues across the state for other suggestions.

If you are doing your part, the number of students in your choral program will increase. If it happened to me, it can happen to you!

Stay creative. Stay positive. Believe!



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All our progress is an unfolding, like a vegetable bud. You have first an instinct, then an opinion, then a knowledge as the plant has root, bud, and fruit. Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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**Battling the October Blues:  
Stimulus Variation in Rehearsals**

Erin Colwitz  
University of Alabama  
Huntsville, Alabama

(Used with permission of Alabama's *Reprise*, Fall 2013)

Fall brings such beauty to our region of the country. We have perfect sunny days and cool nights, less humidity, and glorious fall colors. But if you're like me, fall can also bring challenges into the rehearsal room. By this time, your choir(s) may have already performed at least once, or you may be preparing for an upcoming performance.

I always find that in mid-October, attendance problems pop up along with occasionally dazed and overwhelmed singers. Additionally, you may find your own energy waning. My gas tank is perpetually running on low at this time of year. Yet, our list of "to-do's" gets longer, and the pressures of daily work get heavier.

How do we continue to be the best teacher/conductors we can be while keeping our singers' attention and motivating them to do their best?

First, we must take care of ourselves. As conductors, we understand the meaning of the word *sacrifice* all too well. But we also know that lack of sleep, lack of healthy eating habits, and lack of exercise make it harder to do our best and work at our optimum level.

I learned the hard way that my lack of respect for my body was keeping me from performing at my best. I have found that

by putting in a little extra time exercising, watching what I eat, and taking time for myself—yoga, massages, turning off the phone and computer to spend time with my husband—made me more productive and efficient on a daily basis. But I still find myself falling back into old habits only to be reminded again of what I really should do to help myself.

Second and equally important, we must continually find new ways to challenge our singers. As much as we complain about singers and their occasional lack of motivation, I am also aware that we conductors are asking them to do more than ever before. It seems that I can almost feel their lack of energy as they walk into the rehearsal room during this time of year.

Family, work, personal relationships, and school obligations weigh heavily on students just as they weigh on us. I often blame myself for uninspired rehearsals, but if I sit down and analyze what's happening, the definition of insanity comes to mind! How can I expect different results when I follow the exact same procedures and activities day after day (e.g., vocalises, structure of the rehearsal, language describing musical elements).

Recently, I've begun employing a concept taught to me by one of my graduate school professors whose teacher was Lawrence McQuerry. Stimulus-variation is largely a wind band rehearsal concept, but I adapt it and use it with great success in our choir rehearsals.

During those "October blues" days, it's important to change things. Don't be hesitant about getting your singers' attention through creative means no matter what their age. Try something new. You'll be surprised at the positive results. Here are a few suggestions.

- Walk out from behind the podium while conducting.
- Walk between the rows of singers.
- Have singers stand and sit during rehearsal.
- Vary the seating chart often—with each work, for example.
- Have the women sing to the men and vice versa. Don't be surprised by the giggles that result!
- As a teaching tool, share YouTube videos of one or more of the works you are rehearsing.
- On a particularly beautiful day, take students outside for rehearsing. Sing near the cafeteria (a recruitment op-

portunity) or for the principal, dean, and/or secretary or just for the trees!

- Use kinesthetic movement. Form circles while singing.
- Use walking, marching, and running in place to reinforce musical concepts such as sub-division, etc.
- Take time for the students to get to know one another using games. A good example is The Secret Game. Feel free to contact me if you are interested in learning more about this game.
- Have each section put together a skit to share on a Friday.
- Plan a fall retreat. We often travel to a retreat center in Tennessee for several days where we rehearse, relax, and bond with one another. I usually schedule this activity for the end of September or early October.
- Ask one of your mature, more advanced singers to lead vocalises and/or calisthenics. Students take ownership in the choir during this process.
- Introduce props into your rehearsal such as a choir mascot, large elastic bands (low breathing) or soccer balls (bounce in hands for staccato).
- When learning a Renaissance work, have each section stand in a corner and sing toward the middle of the room.
- Stage short, mini performances. Again, have the women sing for the men and vice versa.
- Ask an advanced, capable student to rehearse the choir.

Extend the ideas above or develop new ones. You'll reinforce learning and change the flavor of your rehearsals. Adding "spice" provides variation both visually and kinesthetically. Such activities stimulate students and promote learning. Boredom is banned to the back hallway. Adopting any number of these activities will, in my way of thinking, keep the choir's momentum going through October and November and into a successful concert season.




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One's philosophy is not best expressed in words. It is expressed in the choices one makes... and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

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## Stuck in the Middle—Finding Multicultural Repertoire for Middle School Choirs

Kurt McKee

Emerald Ridge High School  
Puyallup, Washington

(Used with permission of Northwest Division's online newsletter; [www.nwacda.org](http://www.nwacda.org), March 2014)

Recently, I have been contacted by several middle level choir directors, all of whom wanted to know if there were lists of multicultural works appropriate for their ensembles. If you have taught at the middle school level, you know that there are no absolutes when it comes to literature. Songs that were sure-fire winners three or four years ago may not work this year because none of the basses can sing below a D3 (D below middle C) or nearly every girl in your choir is truly a soprano, and the alto part is written too low.

As frustrating as this situation can be, trying to reuse music that at one time was a prime candidate for teaching musical concepts is even more frustrating when you purchase a new work for your choir in July and then discover that it will not work for the ensemble when classes begin. Most of our choral budgets, as you know, are limited. Where do we find literature that is age-appropriate, represents a variety of cultures, and teaches musical skills and concepts? Here are several ideas worth pursuing:

- Talk to colleagues you trust. Mentoring comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Sometimes we need a person we respect to suggest that we try a particular work. This

is helpful; however, many of us teachers are regionally insulated. We only hear music our colleagues perform with their choirs. We miss out on what may be happening outside our region.

- Do your homework. Between publisher websites and YouTube, you will find a vast amount of literature available in mp3 or video formats. Use these resources in class to help students develop critical thinking skills and expand their vocabulary when they offer comments. A possible downside? You may find yourself spending four or five hours on YouTube researching music, all to no avail because you will not have found the right literature for your ensembles.
- Investigate [www.ChoralNet.org](http://www.ChoralNet.org). ACDA has been the driving force in creating a web presence that is interactive, broad-based, and that also supports the needs of choral directors at all levels—everything from programming ideas, vocal pedagogy, and middle school singers' challenges to types of fabrics to avoid when purchasing formal wear for your women. On ChoralNet.org, you can ask questions and receive input from choral experts on a huge array of topics. For example, if you would like to perform a piece in Latvian, you can find a person to help you with a good translation or a pronunciation guide. Be patient. Begin asking your questions on ChoralNet.org early on. You'll hear from colleagues from around the world!

Below is a list for those who are interested in finding middle-level multicultural literature. You'll find many different voicings and music from various cultures. Information on each work includes the title, voicing, accompaniment, composer/arranger, publisher, and the culture out of which the music sprang.

The music below is appropriate for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade choirs of varying ability levels. I have either played through each work, performed it with a middle-level choir, or have had a trusted colleague who has used it.

*The Drover's Dream* (Australia)

TB, piano, opt. guitar

arr: Vijay Singh

National Music Publishers

*Rothsay-O* (Scottish folk song)

SSA, guitar (or piano), treble recorder, hand drum

arr: Ken Berg

Hal Leonard

*Bonse Aba* (Zambian)

SATB, unaccompanied, drum

arr: Andrew Fischer

AMP

*Bonse Aba*

2-part, 3-part, SSA, with piano (and optional drum)

arr: Victor Johnson

Heritage Music Press

*Songs of Africa for Upper Voices - Set 1*

(Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana)

SA (includes lead voice) unaccompanied and percussion

arr: Fred Onowwerosuoke

Oxford University Press

*Dormi, Dormi, O Bel Bambin* (Italian Carol)

SSAA, unaccompanied (a little more challenging because of four parts, but lines are easy)

arr: Robert DeCormier

Lawson-Gould

*Yo Le Canto Todo El Dia* (Venezuelan-style Spanish)

2-pt or SSA, piano

David Brunner

Boosey & Hawkes

*Winds of Peace* (Ruach, Ruach) (Traditional Hebrew round)

4-pt treble, piano and flute

arr: Nancy Grundahl

Colla Voce

*Tuuti, Tuuti Tummaistani* (Finnish)

2-pt, piano

arr: Charles Collins

Boosey & Hawkes

*Three Yoruba Native Songs* (Nigeria)

Unison with percussion

arr: Henry Leck and Prince Julius Adeniyi

Colla Voce

*Three Dominican Folk Songs* (Spanish)

Unison with piano

arr: Francisco Nunez

Boosey & Hawkes

*Song of the Sea* (the Song of Moses, Miriam & the Israelites)  
(Yiddish)

SAB, oboe and piano

arr: Valerie Shields

Mark Foster

*Dodi Li* (Israeli Folk Song)

2-pt treble and piano

arr: Doreen Rao

Boosey & Hawkes

*Cielito Lindo* (Mexican)

SSA or TTB, piano; opt. 3 trumpets, 3 guitars, bass

arr: Barbara Harlow

Santa Barbara Music Publishing

*Ahe Lau Makani* (Hawaiian)

2-pt, piano

Lili'uokalani, Likelike, & Kapoli, arr: Jerry Deput

Shawnee Press

*O Mary, Don't You Weep* (Traditional Spiritual)

SSA or TTB, piano

arr: Rollo Dilworth

Hal Leonard

*Hiney Ma Tov* (Hebrew)

Available in 3-pt mixed, SSA, TTB; with opt. solo and violin

arr: Lon Beery

Shawnee Press

*Al Tambor* (Panamanian)

2-pt or 3-pt mixed, piano and opt. percussion

arr: Victor C. Johnson

Heritage Music Press

*Two Brazilian Folk Songs* (Brazilian Portuguese)

3-part mixed, keyboard and optional 2 flutes, percussion

arr: Lon Beery & Elisa Dekaney

Carl Fischer

*J'entend le Moulin* (French Canadian folk song)

2-pt, piano

arr: Ruth Dwyer & Martin Ellis

Colla Voce

*Al Shlosha D'Varim* (Hebrew)

2-pt. treble, piano

Allan E. Naplan

Boosey & Hawkes

*Lamma Badaa Yatathanna* (Andalusia/Spain Arabic)

2-pt, piano with opt. violin, cello, and dumbek

arr: Joy Ondra Hirokawa

Hal Leonard

*Hala Lala Layya* (Lebanese folk song)

3-pt. mixed or 2-pt., piano, percussion, and optional melody instrument

arr: Audrey Snyder

Hal Leonard

*Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning* (Traditional Spiritual)

2-pt, piano

arr: Glenda Franklin

BriLee Music

*Remember Your Story* (Yapi Kapi) (Lakota Sioux)

TBB, piano and opt. soprano recorder and percussion

arr: Vicki Tucker Courtney

Carl Fischer

*Salaam Aleikum* (African)

Unison, TB, TT, TTB, unaccompanied, opt. keyboard and percussion

arr: Laura Farnell

Carl Fischer

*Arirang* (Korean)

3-pt mixed, TB or SA, piano and optional flute

arr: Jonathan Lim and Sonja Poorman

Alfred

*City Called Heaven* (Spiritual)

SATB (singable parts for middle level) or SSA, piano

arr: Josephine Poelenitz

Colla Voce

*Minoi, Minoi* (Samoan)

SATB and SSAA (a bit challenging for middle school but attainable), unaccompanied

arr: Christopher Marshall

Alliance Music Publications

Voicing requirements for middle level singers are challenging. I have attempted to include as many voicings as possible. Titles of the various works reflect a few of the many cultures from around the world.

Use this list as a starting point. Those of you who teach middle-level ensembles may recognize arrangers or publishers you have used in the past. With the internet, you can investigate music from particular arrangers or publishers. Many of the works above have recordings available on the publisher's website or on YouTube.

Have a great school year!

