

cial what you *really* think about the revised duty roster for arts teachers. (Breathe in, breathe out.)

- An improved ability to prioritize. When the mind is cluttered with various and sundry detritus that may or may not be the most important consideration at hand, the first seemingly urgent decision that presents itself can cause us to drop what we are doing and race to address what appears to be the most pressing thing on the horizon. A quieter mental state can give you the presence of mind to set aside teapot tempests and do as Stephen Covey suggests when he advises us to “put first things first.”
- The ability to work on multiple projects without quickly becoming overwhelmed. While we do want to clear our minds to be able to address issues one at a time, every choral conductor knows that the luxury of working on just one project or issue at a time will not always be a possibility. Mental calm can make multitasking less of an impossibility.

What Do You Program?

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There is something I have always found exciting about discovering a great choral work I have never heard before. I marvel at the depth of creativity composers across the ages have employed by melding the building blocks of music with a text. Whether it’s a motet from the early fifteenth century or a new work from the abundance of composers writing today, discovering a well-crafted setting creates excitement. For me, I just want to jump into rehearsals.

I am, to use a term favored by a colleague of mine, a choral literature wonk—a person obsessed with finding inspiring choral literature and sharing it with others. I am happy to spend my free time listening to a work I’ve never heard or exploring a composer’s website. I amass choral octavos to a level that should guarantee me an appearance on A&E’s *Hoarders*,

a fact to which my family will readily attest.

The good news is, I know I am not alone in this affliction. Odds are, if you are reading this, you have it too. Choral Conductor’s Anonymous, here we come! Our challenge is not that there are too few pieces of quality choral music to share with our choirs but that there is not enough time to program all of the great music we’ve discovered. But it’s this very problem that leaves me so perplexed when we set out to explore the choral offerings sent to us in catalogs and advertisements.

Before continuing, I remind you that this guest blog does not—at least officially—represent the opinions of the folks here at MusicSpoke.

About a month ago, I had a long drive and decided to listen to some of the many recordings sent to me by choral music publishers. In the selection of choral literature, my top priorities are the quality of the text and the care the composer has taken in setting it.

A good text that is well set has never failed to inspire and motivate my singers regardless of their age level. Yet every year it seems that I have to skip more tracks on a promotional CD. This year the experience lived up to my expectations. This year’s listening included works by composers who felt it necessary to add their own text to both the Psalms and a poem by Christina Rossetti, a setting of “Dies Irae” that had such a peppy piano accompaniment and so many shimmering major chords that it seemed to exude a perverse excitement and delight for the pending Last Judgment, the requisite dozens of settings of Latin texts with “driving” piano accompaniments, and my personal favorite, a song that included references to lol, emoji, and the line, “It doesn’t matter if your spelling’s bad.” (Yes, it does matter!)

At some point, it should be incumbent upon a composer to at least gain a basic understanding of the text they are setting. Given the fact that there is much wonderful music out there that treats a quality text with dignity and respect, why do some publishers force me to wade through so many compositions that have the nutritional value of a Twizzler? The answer? Because too many of us are programming far too much of this music.

For the love of all that is good in the world, choral directors must stop programming this drive! I love to eat cake and candy as much as the next guy, but our choirs and audiences deserve a more balanced and healthy diet. Check out some of the great music (both contemporary and historic) for all

levels and styles. It is not only fun for singers to perform, but it won't rot their brain like some of this "candy" being sold. More importantly, quality music will keep our students well-nourished and help them grow as musicians, scholars, and human beings.

Here are a few of the questions I ask myself with regard to text and music. There are, of course, many factors to weigh when choosing music, including the educational, musical, and vocal goals for our students.

- Is the text of literary value?
- Does the musical setting support and enhance the meaning of the text?
- Does the composer's interpretation of the text follow a consistent logic?
- How will the text, given sufficient background information, appeal to the members of the ensemble? The audience?
- What additional educational opportunities (historical, literary, philosophical, etc.) will the text provide?
- Will the text and its setting allow the singers to achieve a mature and emotionally involved performance?
- Are the text and its setting appropriate for my programming needs?

Best wishes to you in your quest for quality choral music!

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