



Wednesday, January 10, 2018

Dear Choral Musicians,

Thank you in advance for the opportunity to work with you next month as part of Virginia's District IX Middle School Chorus ensemble. I look forward to our collaboration and journey in music together.

As you prepare for our first rehearsal on February 9, I wanted to share with you the background and context for each of the pieces we will perform.

I used two overarching ideas in creating our program. One was to be purposeful in presenting music written or arranged by women, which four of the six pieces reflect. The other was to connect to history or tradition with each selection in some fashion.

Winter is at Hand

We open with original music by Ruth Morris Gray (b. 1961), a composer and music teacher who is Chair of the Performing Arts Department at Rosemead High School in Rosemead, California. The historical connection here is the text from *Richard III* by William Shakespeare (1564-1616). The piece has two main ideas, the second of which is a refrain (same words, same music, set homophonically or so that all parts have the same words and same rhythms) that occurs measures 21-37 and again measures 59-75. The first idea is presented with many variations in texture, harmonies, and voicings.

Snow On a Moonlit Night (for sopranos and altos)

Chicago-based composer, music teacher, and professional vocalist Catherine DeLanoy uses a famous selection of classical music, "The Moldau" (the longest running river in the Czech Republic) from *Ma Vlast* by Czech composer Bedrich Smetana (1824 – 1884), and adds poetry by Peggy Proctor Aranowski to the main melodic idea. The first theme has a minor scale and a major scale iteration in compound duple time; The middle idea changes texture and meter to simple duple, and it is reminiscent of traditional dance music from what is now the Czech Republic. Be aware of the D.C. al Coda, a true ABA form composition with ending material (Coda) on page 11.

City Called Heaven

Another Chicago-based music teacher and composer Josephine Poelinitz created an arrangement of the gospel song "City Called Heaven." As you can read on the inside front cover, this music is a "sorrow song" performed in the style of "surge-singing." For us, the eighth-notes with quarter rests breaking up the phrase need to emphasize the beat and feel heavy, hence the tenuto marks. The solo voice will be a small group, and we will use it to challenge our sopranos to sing divided (S1 and S2). For measures 5 to 21 (second time), soprano 2 sings solo as a group while soprano 1 sings choral accompaniment. Measures 22 to end, first time, soprano 1 sings solo while soprano 2 sings choral accompaniment. On repeat, eighth grade sopranos sing solo while grades 6 and 7 sing choral accompaniment.

Jubilate Deo (for tenors and basses)

Linda Spevacek (b. 1945) arranged a setting in Latin of Psalm 100 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791) for tenor and bass voices with piano accompaniment. While most of the musical ideas here are presented with immediate repeats of phrases, not all do. Also, as is part of the style of music from the Classical Era of Western Art History, look out for terraced dynamics (rather than *crescendo* or *diminuendo* to prepare changes of volume, there are phrases, particularly with the way some repeat, that are echoes of each other).

The Water is Wide

Stephen Paulus (1949 – 2014) was a Grammy Award winning composer known for his operas and choral music. His simple setting of “The Water is Wide,” an American folk song that has roots from pre-colonial times in England, is originally written for harp accompaniment: I believe our collaborative pianist, Anna de Groot, will demonstrate just how strong she is as a musician and keyboard artist in this piece specifically and throughout our program generally. Be aware that all voices have opportunity to sing the main melody, and that the soprano/alto counter melody on page 3 only happens while tenors and basses (not baritone solo as marked) sing verse 3, or the second time through that page.

Daa Naa Se

Our closing selection is an AABA form traditional Ghanaian folk song performed throughout Ghana for many years, and transcribed by composer and lecturer on African American music Raymond Wise (b. 1961). The text in italics is an American guide to pronouncing the words as would be true to the various tribes in the Southern regions of Ghana. Something that Dr. Wise taught me years ago that will apply as we perform this piece is two concepts of singing in African tradition: first, singing involves the whole body, so that none of us will stand still for this particular selection; second, that we are connected to the earth, so that we are not looking for movement that causes us to jump up and down or lift our feet off the risers.

The blessing that musician and author Peter Boonshaft offered his readers in his book, *Teaching Music with Purpose*, is what I hope is true for each of you as we work together, and as we continue to work on our own choral music paths: “May the journey [of music] be as magnificent and full of wonder as those musicians with whom you share it.”

See you in a few weeks.

With appreciation,

Michael

Michael Wu