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Choral Music 5-12

Dr. Abrahams

Choral Philosophy

Abstract

Stepping in front of a choir demands the teacher to implement their teaching philosophy, philosophy of music education, as well as implementing their own personal beliefs and value systems. Within these philosophies lie the majority of skills the teacher will use, such as musicianship, conducting, sight singing, etc, and more importantly, how they are used. Coupled with these important aspects, what must also be present in the choral classroom is each teacher's individualized choral philosophy.

Repertoire Selection: Authenticity

The world of choral music today is filled with great pieces, not so great pieces, and pieces that should just be avoided at all costs. With the explosion of world music, these two concepts add together and create some problems for me as a choral director. I hold authenticity above every other value when it comes to the selection of my music. According to Dr. James Jordan, "The inherent human message within a piece of music points the direction for the teaching of a piece from the first rehearsal to the last (Abrahams, Bowers, Head, Jordan, Liebergen, & Porterfield, 2011)". The advent of the internet, the explosion of so-called world music, and popular media has flooded the choral music community with a sea of mediocre

pieces of choral repertoire. I want my students to get actual meaning out of the pieces they sing and be able to access the human message Dr. Jordan speaks of.

When picking my repertoire, I am not afraid to look outside of the large publication companies to find the right piece of music. If we decided to do a piece of music which honors a culture in West Africa for example, I would rather teach a song by rote to the students which is of actual African descent rather than using a GIA or Schirmer published “Noel” or the likes. One of the biggest travesties is when a piece of music does not honor the culture or population it is supposed to represent. Although it might be small details, it is still inauthentic nonetheless. For example, when looking at a piece of music that represents the Ivory Coast, it is laid out in the following manner: choir, piano, conga Drum, maracas, and cowbell. All three of the percussion instruments orchestrated for this piece descend from Central/Latin American cultures. Ninety percent of the time, composers and arrangers utilize these instruments because they are easily accessible by the school, partially because schools are more likely to have Congas than djembes. However, a 21st century choral director should be globally connected to the community around them. There is no reason that the choral director could not reach out and find either instruments or instrumentalists which could play authentic the instrumentation (in this case it would be the djembe, axatse, and agogo respectively). Traditionally, West African music does not have piano accompaniments, except for the mbira, the African thumb piano. Although minute to some, these details pose real ethical problems for me as a conductor. I would have a hard time picking a piece like that because it says to the students that every culture in the world uses the piano for accompaniment, uses notated music just like ours, and more importantly, that every culture uses the same structure of music (V-I).

Every Child Can

Bernice McCarthy speaks in her book, *Teaching 4MAT in the classroom*, about four different learning types (McCarthy, 2000). Choral directors must realize that not every child learns the same as the one sitting next to him/her. It is the responsibility of the choral director to engage all learning types as effectively as possible. This relates to the philosophy of Every Child Can. Present in all of my philosophies, I believe that every child has the potential and the willingness to engage in the act of music making. It is up to the choral director to engage this musical passion and provide a safe, equitable learning environment where every student feels welcome. It is my personal goal to provide a meaningful experience for kids in their music making, whether they decide to pursue choral studies further in their educational career, or if they want to use the skills I teach in their music making outside of school.

Conclusion

It is the mission of the choral director to be the focusing aspect of the choir. They need pick repertoire that is challenging, engaging, and true to the culture that it is representing. They must provide children with a strong learning environment accepting of all learners, take the strengths and weaknesses each student brings to the table, and then utilize these strengths and weaknesses to advance on a unified front towards a specific goal. This goal can be the concert, but for me, I am more about the process in which we get there. I want my students to understand it feels like to actually understand and feel a piece of music. Music should connect students to the world around them, not create gaps.

Bibliography

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