

# Washington ACDA

## Summer Institute

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### *Telling Stories through Programming*

Preface: The following notes are for your information and are intended as a series of lectures and classes given at the UW Summer Academy and expanded upon in the yearly Advanced Choral Techniques Classes. This session today will focus on sections:

Telling Our Stories To...Our Audience and Administration  
And  
Choosing Our Stories...Choosing Literature

#### **Traditional Approaches:**

- I. Historical Approach
- II. Midwest "Grouping" Approach I.II.III. etc.
- III. Shotgun approach (reading session inspired, filling holes)

#### **Pitfalls:**

- I. Too much of a good thing: program too much "beautiful music" or too much rhythmic music, too much pop or multicultural,
- II. Avoiding historic or religious

#### **Telling Our Stories with...Our Student's Voices**

- I. Concert Order
  - a. Does the Opening Work Get the Voice Moving?
  - b. Do the next works provide contrast and build upon principals taught in the opening work?
  - c. Does the Final Work leave them with a sense of fulfillment, success and satisfaction?
  - d. Are the works in line with your curricular goals for this concert?
- II. Vocal Issues
  - a. Key
    - i. Can we ever sing in F? Why not?
    - ii. Consider relationship between pieces
    - iii. Consider too static key relationships (too many works in similar keys)
  - b. Tessitura
  - c. Voice Building: What are you wanting to teach at this moment?
- III. Helpful Ideas, test your program, ask questions. Are there:

- a. Too many works same publisher (as an adjudicator I often get a pile of Alfred handed to me)
- b. Too many works of one style (folksongs, African-American styles, multicultural, sacred)
- c. Holes in my yearly layout of repertoire? (Too much 20<sup>th</sup> century, not enough American, no renaissance, no sacred)

## Telling Our Stories To...Our Audience and Administration

*Sing out your stories...a tale rises from the mind and heart to be sung.*

- I. Creating Context
  - a. Is Choral Music relevant to our audience?
  - b. Is Choral Music relevant to our singers?

NO, our art is so far away from mainstream culture, musical style, understanding. At least until midway through 20<sup>th</sup> century, church remained somewhat popular, people heard choirs, but no longer, so there is little or no access point for appreciation (audience), evaluation (administration), or learning (students).

- II. Whose story are we telling?
  - a. Our story? Do we personalize the texts?
    - i. We focus on meaning VERY SOON in the rehearsal process as we desire the students know and love the music.
    - ii. We ask that they sing as if they mean the text
    - iii. Creates problems: some won't sing pieces unless they mean them (Christinas not Singing Gate Gate), others won't sing them because they think they have to mean them (a Jewish person singing Jesus Christ the Apple Tree)
  - b. Conductor: Nature's Silent musician
    - i. Can we guide singers to be transparent, poets and story tellers to tell others' stories?
    - ii. Then how do we create meaning? We can ask the Christian to NOT sing with that specific meaning as they sing Ave Maria, but to share in a new context
    - iii. Lets tell of the people that do sing that, what do THEY mean? Then we can sing Gate Gate, something you do not believe, and not be professing it, but telling others's tory who needs to be heard!
    - iv. PROGRAMMING: IMPORTANT: By programming with thought, then the context of all the pieces together can create a new layer of Story:
  - c. The People's or Humanity's Story
    - i. What are general themes that we all share?

- ii. How can the Christian piece be shown to fit into the general theme, and not be “proselytizing”
- iii. How can the spiritual not be at the end of the program, but more fitting where the text and meaning puts it?
- iv. How can a piece you don’t love, or that is not a great piece, have real meaning because of its function in the program?

III. How do they Listen

- a. With their Eyes-Layout
- b. With their Schema
  - i. What is their background
    - 1. Cultural, Arts Exposure
  - ii. What is their bias
    - 1. Cultural, Religious
  - iii. What is their entry point to Choral Singing?
    - 1. Church, Funerals, Movies

IV. Programming Gives New Context To Our Art

- a. Themed Concerts give a context to experience new or unusual music (translated – ALL choral music is new and unusual to many!)
- b. Presenting a work within a theme allows us to explore the many contexts extant within every work:
  - i. Poetic/Thematic
  - ii. Historic/Musicological
  - iii. Cultural
  - iv. Stylistic
  - v. Educational
- c. How to think of themes?
  - i. What is going on in YOUR LIFE? YOUR WORLD?
  - ii. What piece are you longing to do next year?
  - iii. What texts or tunes are meaningful right now?

**EX. Victoria: *Ave Maria* Possible contexts:**

POETIC/THEMATIC: Prayer, Mary, Jesus, Death, Help,

Meditation, Humility, Gift, Latin, Spanish Poetry, Famous Women

HISTORIC/MUSICOLOGICAL: Renaissance, Sacred, Roman Catholic, Vespers, Antiphon, Reformation

CULTURAL: Renaissance, Spanish, Evening, Rest/Medieval

Fear of death and night, Good Deeds

STYLISTIC: A Cappella, Cathedral, Renaissance, Long Sustained Singing, Vertical and Horizontal Intonation

EDUCATIONAL: Tactus, A Cappella, Long Sustained Phrases, Rise and Fall, Gothic Arch in architecture and music, Intonation, Inner Rhythm

IMPORTANT: Each of these aspects leads to a series of descriptors that could serve as a unifying device for a program or entire concert.

Each of these contexts creates a way to listen to and understand the work, if it is presented with other works that relate along the same idea, each reinforcing the other. NOTE HOW FEW OF THE CONTEXTS DEAL WITH THE ORIGINAL SACRED INTENT OF THE PIECE, for most people the original intent (Vespers antiphon in a renaissance mentality) is so foreign a context, they react negatively only due to present schema of separation of church and state. So, by "distracting" or highlighting the other aspects, each context takes away the schema of fear, sacred issues.

V. The Christmas Thing

- a. We know the Supreme Court Supports us in the programming of sacred repertoire, however, the context of religion in the time of Christmas is inescapable SO:
  - i. Show that Christmas is Cultural, focus on the historic, linguistic, and cultural traditions as opposed to the religious meaning.
  - ii. The idea of doing a concert of Hanukah, Kwanza, and Winter music is an idea whose time has come and gone
    1. Hanukah is a lesser festival in the Jewish Calendar, akin to the Christian church's All Saints Day – now I don't know too much great All Saints music, certainly not enough to devote to one full concert a year, this is why finding excellent and varied repertoire for Hanukah is difficult
    2. There is virtually no sung tradition in Kwanza
      - a. The holiday is so new there is no canon of repertoire to support it yet

**Christmas as a cultural event:**

3. From a cultural perspective, music is an integral part of Christmas, inarguably. The secular stores inundate us with it from October on. We associate White Christmas, Silent Night, Silver Bells, Rudolph, and Joy to the World on an even playing field – we associate it with the cultural holiday, one does not stand out as religious. We must re-do the schema of defense and fear and preachy-ness associated with anything Christ-oriented.

## **Telling Our Stories Through...Our Curriculum**

- I. Pitfalls of Performance Based Education
  - a. Our Curriculum Gets out of whack.
  - b. Start teaching contest repertoire in the fall
  - c. After the first few weeks of class in September all our good intentions to teach skills succumbs to getting repertoire learned
- II. What Do We Want Our Students to Know and When?
  - a. TOP PRIORITY: Moving Breath, talk about nothing else until the body is activated
  - b. Once Body and Mind are activated then set your priorities:

- i. Rhythm: Feeling pulse, articulation in the breath, smaller units of measure, etc.
  - ii. Establishing legato
  - iii. Vowel: Purity, Unity and Modification, etc.
  - iv. Artistry: Shape of Line, Various Articulations, Successful Dynamic Range, etc.
  - v. Style: Folk, Renaissance Motet, Chanson, Gospel
- c. Breaking the rules and expanding the palate of color
- i. Jazz and Pop
  - ii. Gospel

Ex. So you lay out what order you want them to assimilate successfully these ideas. Of course you are teaching all of these things each day, but their attention, testing, your questioning etc can draw focus on various issues:

So this years order is: Fall Concert: a. Winter/Christmas: b.i., biii.  
March: a., bi.biii. (review) bii., biv. Spring: a., ci., cii.

Therefore we choose repertoire according to this layout. *Ave Maria* doesn't fit in this year's Winter Concert as much as I want to do it. I don't want to start *Bible* until January. *The Heaven's Are Telling* will be great for Fall, I am going to wait to get the kids going on *Shout Glory* until March.

EX. Curriculum Goal bi.(rhythm issues), this track shows how one might choose an increasingly difficult work dealing with the same goal at different points through the year with the same choir.

FALL	WINTER	SPRING
Mozart: Sanctus from Credo Mass	Mozart: Kyrie from Missa Brevis in Bb	Mozart: Regina Coeli

EX. Curriculum Goal biii.(vowel issues), this shows cross-curricularly how you might focus on the same issue with all choirs

WINTER CONCERT (as per year layout above)

GIRLS CHOIR	JAZZ CHOIR	CONCERT CHOIR
Johnson: Kang Ding Flower Song	Jones/Lewis: A Child is Born	Singh: A Glimpse of Snow and Evergreen

So even if and when we abandon skill building, the repertoire can continue to teach an ongoing curriculum of skills and technique.

## Choosing Our Stories... Choosing Literature: The Spider Web Approach

- I. Given Curriculum Find pieces you Love

- a. Best pieces form summer workshops
    - i. HINT: Have the curriculum laid out BEFORE you go to the reading sessions so you can plug in accordingly
  - b. What pieces unlock your passion and your gift?
- II. EVERY PIECE IS MULTI-CULTURAL and INTER-DISCIPLINARY
- a. Every piece can be placed in an historical or cultural context, rather than meaning.
  - b. Every piece can be tied into a program considering the many inter-disciplinary aspects of music: Language, theology, philosophy, sociology, culture, history
- III. Layout one piece per concert in curriculum order
- a. Time to create context:

**BRAINSTORM:** What are all the contexts and themes that I can derive from this piece.  
Formula:

Piece you love + Cultural or Inter-disciplinary context= Program Idea! Then let the Spider Web grow out of that idea!

**EX. Brainstorming Contexts:** *Dirait-on* by Lauridsen, this represents biv. So I will plan my March concert around this piece: Rose, French, Love, Melody, Chanson, Rilke, Romantic Era, Romance, Narcissism, Flowers, Symbol, Legato, Metaphor, Gossip, Wisdom, Blooming, Spring, Garden

Ex. 2 *Shenandoah* by Erb + Culture=Thinking about water/rivers/emotions tied to them: O Waly, Waly – *The Water is Wide* Zimmerman, *Super Flumina Babylonis* Palestrina, *Down by the Riverside* Rutter, *Deep River* Hogan, *Just around the River Bend* Mac Huff, *As Torrents in Summer* Elgar

Highlights of this program: A religious piece (*Super Flumina*) is recontextualized to be about water and deep feelings of being captured – not religion, the Mac Huff is elevated from drivel which it WOULD be surrounded by 3 Alfred Publications, to having greater meaning.

Erb+Sociology=Remembering/Home/Journey/Longing: *I'll be Seeing You*, *In Remembrance* Daley, *A Boy and A Girl* Whitacre, *Awakening* Martin, *Whither Must I Wander* RVW, *Dream a Dream* Ed Lojeski

Highlights: You can do the Whitacre (which your students have been nagging you to do) and surround it with easier pieces which may become more meaningful in the end (Martin) and lifts up a poor piece (Lojeski) that you probably have in your library, so saving money, creating a new context for a dated 1970's piece. Including a solo piece.

#### IV. Spider Web

- a. Explore and Choose the context(s) you wish:
  - i. Poetic/Thematic: Find related pieces that share a theme, content, poet or mood
  - ii. Historic/Musicological: Find works in a similar style or representing a certain period (Mostly Mozart, Mad Mad Madrigal)
  - iii. Cultural: Find similarities throughout history that reflect a similar story or idea (persecution, freedom)
  - iv. Stylistic: Find pieces that are similar in form (dance music), intent (kings and queens)
  - v. Educational (see curriculum discussion)
- b. Time to create a "Web" of repertoire: think texts and specific pieces  
**This is a great place for students to be involved!**
- c. Check out Musica @ <http://musicanet.org> for a great database
- d. The Spider WEB occurs when your initial circle of related topics/contexts then relates to other things—a whole new circle of related topics

**EX: Dirait-on as a center piece to a Rose set:** Regina Coeli, A la Claire Fontaine, Go Lovely Rose, Music When Soft Voices Die, There is No Rose, O My Love's Like a Red, Red, Rose

**Dirait-on as a part of a Garden Set:** Girl's Garden or Make our Garden Grow Bernstein, Britten Flower Songs, Bartok In the Village, Berkeley Voices from the Earth, Salley Gardens, There is a Garden in Her Face, Garden of Gethsemane

**EX. Stream of consciousness for Winter Concert, so works are related not so much around one theme but a series of evolving themes, Girl's Choir, your "passion" piece is Britten: There is No Rose—Flower—Johnson:Kang Ding Flower Song—Peace/Moon/Rebirth—Raminsh:Let Wildness Sing—Voice/World/Community—Spevacek-Avery:Christmas Madrigal 'Roundezvous'**

\*It is a long way from Britten to Raminsh, but the WEB creates a new context, takes attention away from the contexts of sacred, historic, and textual meaning, and creates a new context of rebirth and community.

V. Being Creative with the Program: Take a meaningful line of Text that illuminates subtly the "meaning or thrust" of the concert. This becomes the thrust for program notes, poster and PR

Ex. Spider Web 2: Erb Shenandoah

A Trusty Tree: Songs of Love, Loss, and Hope (from Water is Wide)

Crossing Over: The River of Life (from Deep River)

Songs We Must Sing: Love, Loss, Hope (from Super Flumina "required of us songs")

V. Program order:

A. Consider First Vocal needs (Section 1 above):

As Torrents in Summer (easy limited ranges)  
Super Flumina (sustained limited ranges)  
Water is Wide (sustained limited ranges)  
Down By the Riverside (gets voice moving, larger ranges)  
Shenandoah (extensive vocal demands of sustain and range)  
Deep River (Easier)  
Just Around the River Bend (light)

B. Consider Second Context and Textual meaning:

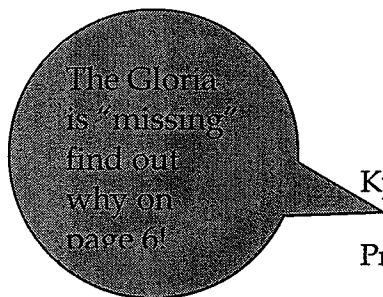
Super Flumina (mysterious, sad, longing)  
Two Rivers from Each Side of the Ocean:  
    The Water is Wide  
    Shenandoah  
Songs of Faith and Hope:  
    Deep River  
    Down By the River Side  
Rivers of Love:  
    As Torrents in Summer  
    Just Around the River Bend

*Lets do a Spider Web program together:*

## **Telling Our Stories To...A New World of Learners**

- I. Themes and Visuals: How can posters and program layout underscore the meaning of the program?
  - a. All of the visuals help your audience "listen" better, allows people to listen more openly, without defense as to culture or sectarianism, helps people "get" this weird choral music thing.
  - b. Play with standing arrangements:
    - i. Can highlight the sound or meaning of a piece
    - ii. Ex: Estonian Philharmonic Choir-Tormis Circle
    - iii. Ex. Esoterics, National Lutheran Choir
    - iv. Every piece can look different, so they listen differently
  - c. Play with the Program: (especially church musicians!)
    - i. Teach visually
    - ii. Church Bulletins:
      1. Differentiate between what is Liturgical, that is work for the congregation and what is chill out edification time

- a. Different font **CREED**, *Special Music*
- b. Placement on the page

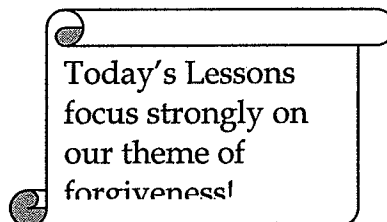


- 2. Seasonal Changes, of r example Lent, the Gloria is missing

Kyrie: blah blah blah

Prayer of the Day: Ya Da, Ya

Lessons



- 3. Non-Traditional Program Ideas
  - a. Non-Linear Layout (see heart shape below)
  - b. Audience Interactive: Audience can choose what comes next or if they want to hear something again: Color coded programs
  - c. Clues imbedded in or a crossword made from program to solve a mystery for a prize
    - i. Ex. Concordia Christmas Concert backdrop
  - d. Program reflects visually theme of Concert
    - i. Lewis and Clark—a map
    - ii. Marginalia—special drawings (one with a current administrator's image!)

## Our Stories Bless...YOU!

- I. You begin programming with a purpose for your kids
- II. You program from your passion
- III. Your programming builds from concert to concert toward musical and technical goals
- IV. Your audience relates more and enjoys more
- V. Your administrator understands more and can support more
- VI. Your constituency will be less defensive and reflexive about touchy issues of church/state
- VII. Concerts build form one to the other
- VIII. You can continue to teach skills through the repertoire
- IX. You can program any kind of repertoire more freely