

“Choral Text – The Heart of the Matter”

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As choral conductors, the text is central to the choral experience. Finding ways of engaging the mind and the heart through the selection of literature with texts that uplift, inspire, and ‘speak’ to both the audience and the singer becomes an important key to the role of choral music in our culture. In a word, it is the “heart of the matter.”

A. Historically, Singing is Basic to the Human Experience”

1. Recorded in Greek mythology
2. Confucius wrote of singers with great respect.
3. Since Biblical times the power of music to heal, soothe and calm.
4. King David was an influential singer and musician.
5. Songs have marked births, deaths, worship, weddings, courtships.
6. World leaders have always known the power of music over emotions and the mind.

B. Beauty in Music - Melody

1. As humans, we are drawn to the intrinsic beauty of music.
2. A conduit for the engagement of the mind, the spirit, and the voice.
3. There is Power in Music.

C. Beauty in Music – Text

1. There is power in the word, the Text.
2. The words engage our minds.
3. Words and ideas are often best remembered when put into a musical context.
4. Melody and Word form a strong bond in the memory.
5. Words stimulate emotions (peace, solace, joy, hope, sadness, etc.)
6. Words enhance our thoughts and communicate ideas and feelings.
7. Words unlock the Imagination.
8. Text can provide a vehicle for empowerment.
9. Liturgical texts have been set by composers throughout the ages.
10. Texts can illuminate social and political issues in culture.

D. The Choral Poet – Defined by Dr. Jerry McCoy

E. Becoming a Choral Poet

1. Find choral music that resonates with us as conductors and singers.
2. The music is always our textbook both musically and poetically.
3. Become a reader and lover of Poetry and Prose
4. Scripture continues to be a literary source.

5. Hymns provide basis for theology.
6. Hymns also stay within our memory.

F. Power in Choral Singing: The Combination of Text and Music

G. Looking at Specific Texts

1. ***Sing a Mighty Song*** – Gawthrop – Jane Griner
2. *Psalm 23* – Basler - King David
3. *Lebenslust* – Schubert – Johann Unger
4. *All Things New* – Hagenberg - Mary Louise Bringle
5. *Cornerstone* – Kirchner - Texts drawn from Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 11:6, John 12:24 and 1 Corinthians 15:55 (King David, Isaiah, John, and Paul)
6. *Tuttarana* – Esmail – Tutti - “Everyone” “Tarana” – Hindustani solo form

Texts for “The Choral Poet”

As conductors, we must determine how the text affects the music? (i.e., what is the relationship between the music and the text?)

Once determined, what impact does this information have on the conductor from the standpoint of choir of vocal style, tone, dynamics, tempi?

How does the conductor show this information in the gesture? THIS is where the gesture becomes a “musical metaphor” for the poetry of the piece, which is enwrapped in the music.

Sing a Mighty Song – Daniel Gawthrop

Singers! Awake and arise! Lift up your voices as the waves of the sea. Sing a Mighty Song, a Mighty Song! (MAJESTIC, CALL TO WORSHIP).

*Make the earth resound, for the Lord delights in the song of the heart. (Imitative)
Make the earth resound, For the Lord delights in the song of the heart.*

Sing Ye! Arise! (RESOUNDING PRAISE IN EACH VOICE, THEN HOMOPHONICALLY WITH DYNAMIC BUILD. FINAL SHOUT TO “SING YE” AND “ARISE!”)

Woven with melody, Thy word is sweet to my soul. In concert confirmed in harmony, Thy yoke is easy. (THE SWEETNESS OF THE WORD AS A HEALING BALM. ACCEPTING IS SO SIMPLE – CHANGE OF TEMPO, KEY, PHRASING)

O blessed am I, that I may sing my devotion. O blessed am I that I may sing. O blessed am I. (A CAPPELLA – REFLECTIVE, AS A PRAYER FROM ONE TO THEIR GOD).

ALL THINGS NEW - Elaine Hagenberg

***Light after darkness, gain after loss,* (UNISON LINE, MELODY ULTIMATELY DESCENDS)**

***Strength after weakness, crown after cross;* (DYNAMICS ADDED ALONG WITH 2-PART HARMONIC WRITING)**

***Sweet after bitter, hope after fears,* (TEXTURE BUILDS, HARMONY THICKENS)**

***Home after wand'ring, praise after tears.* (DESCENDING VOCAL LINE, MOVING TO DOMINANT)**

***Alpha and Omega, beginning and the end,* (CHANT-LIKE, TREBLE UNISON – ANTECEDENT PHRASE)**

***He is making all things new.* (RESPONSE – T/B ANSWER – CONSEQUENT PHRASE)**

***Springs of living water shall wash away each tear.* (DECLAMATORY – UNISON INTO FULL 4-PART HARMONY)**

***He is making all things new.* (KEY STATEMENT BUILDING DYNAMICALLY AND WITH 9-8 SUSPENSION)**

***He is making all things new.* (FINAL STATEMENT STARTS IN UNISON AND ENDS WITH ALL VOICES IN CERTAINTY ON UNISON "A.")**

TUTTARANA – Reena Esmail

The title of this piece is a combination of two words: the Italian word ‘tutti’, means ‘all’ or ‘everyone’, and the term ‘tarana’ designates a specific Hindustani (North Indian) musical form, whose closest Western counterpart is the ‘scat’ in jazz.

The piece is made up entirely of rhythmic syllables. A typical tarana is the singer’s chance to display agility and dexterity. While a Hindustani tarana is a solo form, Esmail wanted to bring the tarana into an ensemble setting.

Tuttarana was commissioned by the Mount Holyoke College Glee Club for their 2014-15 season and has since been performed across the US.

As an addendum, the composer writes:

Three years after I wrote this piece, the #metoo movement, created by Tarana Burke broke on social media. It occurred to me that the title of this piece, if read a different way, literally means “We are all Tarana.”

I couldn’t believe the incredible coincidence that this work, a powerful 3-minute tidal wave of sound, written for an all-female ensemble from the oldest women’s college in the country, bore this name.

Esmail states, “I’m so grateful for what this movement has done to move the discussion forward about the issues we face as women, and how we can begin to change and heal our society.”

<https://www.reenaesmail.com/catalog-item/tuttarana-ssa/>

(A recording by the Mount Holyoke College Glee Club performs the SSAA version from 2015 at this website.)