Changing Cultural Paradigms in Choral Programming

Ciara Anwen Cheli
Advisor: Lisa Evelyn Graham, Music
Wellesley College
May 2020

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Prerequisite for Honors in Music

© Ciara Cheli, 2020
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 3

Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 4

Part One: Reflecting on Our Past .................................................................................................. 7
   Chapter One: An Overview of Choral Programming and Historical Trends ........................... 7
   Chapter Two: Modernism and a Choral Identity Crisis ............................................................. 10
   Chapter Three: Historical Perspectives on Concert Programming and Repertoire ............... 15

Part Two: Looking To Our Future ............................................................................................... 19
   Chapter One: Changing Cultures, Changing Choirs ................................................................. 19
   Chapter Two: Representation Matters ...................................................................................... 20
   Chapter Three: Culturally Responsive Programming in the 21st Century ............................. 24
   Chapter Four: Contemporary Perspectives on Programming ............................................... 30

Part Three: Putting The Research Into Practice ........................................................................ 42
   Chapter One: Creating a Program ............................................................................................ 42
   Chapter Two: Predictions Through Performance ................................................................. 46

Conclusion: Finding Community in Choir .................................................................................. 51

Appendix One: Interviewee Biographies ..................................................................................... 56

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................. 62
Acknowledgements

I am endlessly grateful for the support that I have received over the course of this process, without which the completion of this thesis would not have been possible. First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Graham, for being my mentor and champion these past four years. I can honestly say without a doubt that knowing you has changed my life for the better.

Thank you to the entire Music Department for supporting my musical and personal growth, especially Claire Fontijn, Jenny Tang, David Collins, Eliko Akahori, Gurminder Bhogal, and of course, my voice teacher Sonja Tengblad. Thank you to Katri Pitts, for nearly two decades of unconditional encouragement, and the best possible model of what a music educator should be. Without you, I would never have learned to love singing in a choir the way that I do.

Thank you as well to Sharon Elkins, who fostered my love of religious studies, and who has consistently challenged me to engage with complex cultural discussions and to hone my analytical abilities. Our office hour conversations have always been a highlight of my year.

I also want to thank the conductors who were generous enough to share their time and insights with me throughout this process – Charlene Archibeque, James Burton, Simon Carrington, Ėriks Ešenvalds, Simon Halsey, Christopher Jackson, Ann Howard Jones, Ethan Sperry, and Beth Willer – I am deeply grateful to each and every one of you.

I am so grateful for the friends and family that I have found at Wellesley. Thank you to Emma, who has had my back every step of the way, and who has been the best friend and cheerleader I could ever ask for. And to my choir family – my Choirbees! – and my Dower family, thank you for the years of memories. Wellesley would not have been the same without you all.

And finally, thank you to my family, and especially my mom, who instilled a love of music in me from my earliest years, and who has always supported me in all of my artistic endeavors.
Introduction

Informed repertoire choice is one of the greatest tools choral directors have at their disposal, one that allows them to shape the future trajectory of their choir. It can also be a contested process that attempts to determine the relative value of music that spans ten centuries. Choral music has reached a crossroads as we enter the 2020s, wrestling with challenges of relevance, flagging subscriber support, low ticket sales, and issues of culturally responsive performance practice that threaten to split the field along ethnic and socio-cultural divisions. By tracing the changes in repertoire selection over the past 60 years and analyzing the relationship between those trends and cultural shifts, we can better understand the options for choral music today – and its future.

Concert programming and repertoire selection have often served as barometers for the cultural influences on the field, as the music that is performed and established within the canon contributes to our sense of identity within the discipline. Program selection both reflects and contributes to the construction of a value system against which individual pieces are measured to assess their musical merit. Repertoire choice is a series of deliberate actions that determine the future course of the field. As choral directors assemble their concert programs, they operate as artistic gatekeepers between composers and singers. Additionally, they curate the works that reach their audiences, shaping the public awareness of choral music. Viewing choral directors in this role is critically important to understanding their impact on the trajectory of choral music, and to engaging intentionally with repertoire choice in the present day.

I endeavored to investigate the historical trends of choral music programming in America over the past six decades in order to better understand our current place in the field and to reflect on how the choral field has grown and changed in response to other eras of societal unrest.
similar to our present era. My hope is to identify lessons from history which I can apply to the creation of a renewed, responsive, and resilient art form.

To complete my survey of documented historical patterns and opinions, I relied primarily on the publication *Choral Journal*, which has been in circulation since the founding of the American Choral Directors Association in 1959. The *Choral Journal* provided a platform for a wide array of choral directors to engage in dialogues about many aspects of the profession and created an archive of best practices in programming over the decades of the organization’s existence. I also consulted texts on introductory choral conducting, including Robert Garretson’s *Conducting Choral Music*, for a background in educational perspectives on programming techniques. In addition to these published sources, I conducted a series of interviews with nine choral conductors to discuss their personal approaches to programming, the role of repertoire selection in creating a captivating choral concert, and their thoughts on the future trajectories of the field. I am deeply indebted to these conductors for sharing their time and insights with me in the course of this process.

The history of choral music and its evolution is lengthy and rich, and in order to keep this thesis within a reasonable scope, it was necessary to define some parameters for research purposes. The publications referenced here date from the late 1950s onward and are largely centered around American choral ensembles. While these parameters limited my focus somewhat, this allowed me to better trace the trajectory of choral programming within this country over the past 60 years, and to delve more deeply into the ramifications of cultural paradigm shifts around choral trends.

Choral performance has reached a junction, one which mirrors a societal moment of great change. As we are faced with a rapidly globalizing society, and the accompanying cross-
pollination of cultures and disciplines, we are faced with questions about where choral music will fit into this equation. Conductors and composers alike are pushing the limits of what exactly we define as “choral music” and continue to explore the myriad of directions that the act of singing in community can lead us. In times like these, it can be all too easy to allow the merits of an earlier time to be discarded in an attempt to expand the possible avenues of the future of choral music. While the accumulated wealth of historical repertoire developed over the past millennium certainly deserves a place on the programs of contemporary choirs, this canon must not prevent the inclusion and performance of new works of quality.

My goal in this thesis is to cast light on the historical trends in programming that have led us to our present day, and to describe the changes in recommended approaches to repertoire selection over the course of the past 60 years. In doing this, I hope to show that while the current turmoil over cultural ownership, identity, and the role of the canon feels like a massive reckoning, this is hardly the first crisis of identity that the choral field has weathered as a byproduct of social and musical factors. It is my hope, and my belief, that choral music will withstand these internal rifts and come through this period of questioning stronger, with an invigorated vision for the future.
Part One: Reflecting on Our Past

Chapter One: An Overview of Choral Programming and Historical Trends

Choral music has existed in a myriad of forms over a history spanning hundreds of years and several continents, and has grown and changed to accommodate shifting cultural mores. Despite the numerous religious and political upheavals that have destabilized the church, sacred music has proven its endurance. Papal admonitions placed serious limitations on the composers of the Renaissance, and the Protestant revolution rocked the English cathedral choirs, threatening to end the careers or lives of prolific composers who found themselves on the wrong side of the Anglo-Catholic schism. (Gant) The sacred oratorios, cantatas, and motets of J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel laid much of the early foundation for the Western choral canon, along with the masses of Giovanni Palestrina, Josquin des Prez, and William Byrd. As secular concert music gained popularity in the 19th century, audiences expanded and a more formalized performance setting arose, as did a clearer division of audience and singer roles.

Choral music traveled across the Atlantic with the European settlers and quickly established a place in American cultural life. By the mid-twentieth century, the American choral scene rivalled those of its European peers: schools valued their choruses as educational necessities, churches depended on active congregational choir participation, and amateur choral societies specializing in everything from symphonic works to madrigals spread rapidly across the country.¹

¹ Since then, choral participation has continued to grow; as of 2019, 54 million Americans, or 17% of the country, sang in some form of choir, according to the Chorus Impact Survey administered by Chorus America. (Chorus America)
Choral programming in the mid-twentieth century was largely chronological in focus, and deeply rooted in the traditional canon of choral masterworks and established repertoire. Concert programs were often arranged into sets by compositional era, beginning with a set of Renaissance polyphony or madrigals and progressing from sacred early music toward the secular and contemporary. Most mid-century choral texts on programming assert that modern works should only make up a small portion of an ensemble’s repertoire (if a noticeable portion at all). When contemporary compositions were recommended, composers like Charles Ives, Krystof Penderecki, and Benjamin Britten were frequently held up as examples of modern choral composers who were furthering the choral tradition. Yet the heart and soul of the art were still held to be in the predominantly sacred, Western European choral canon, and newer compositions which pushed the boundaries of choral aesthetics and vocal style were not welcomed with open arms.

Moving into the 1980s, many conductors recognized that choral music would need to become more flexible in reacting to wider societal shifts. The inclusion of music from beyond the Western European canon in choral curricula began to rise, although arrangements by white composers still represented a large percentage of the works in publication.²

Morten Lauridsen was one of the most prolific composers at the turn of the century to contribute to the development of a lush style of choral writing that leaned heavily on lyrical homophony, unresolved suspensions, and cluster chords. Following in Lauridsen’s footsteps, Eric Whitacre’s groundbreaking Water Night set the stage for a new wave of choral aesthetics,

---

² It was partly this approach to multicultural programming, coupled with a laissez faire approach to the study and performance of spirituals by predominantly white conductors and ensembles that laid many of the grounds for the debates over cultural appropriation and culturally responsive programming that have become a central discussion point in 21st century choral music.
one informed by the past but hardly bound by rules of consonance and dissonance, contrapuntal writing, or the preeminence of the text over texture.

With the rise of third-wave feminism and critical race theory in the humanities at large, choral musicians began to grapple more directly with a choral canon that was dominated by predominantly white, male composers. As the field itself slowly diversified, so too did the accepted performance repertoire. More conductors grew interested in incorporating music from non-Western traditions into their choral repertoire, leading to a steady increase in the number of works by non-white composers performed at conventions and conferences between 1989 and 2000. In recent years, mission-based choirs (e.g. hospice choirs, social justice choirs, and queer choirs) have carved out a space for themselves, utilizing the tools of community singing in pursuit of shared non-musical goals or beliefs. These types of choirs have met both firm opposition and celebration from within the choral establishment, as the field struggles to adapt to a radically diversifying demographic and a society in turmoil.

While choral music in the 21st century is struggling with a new cultural revolution and attempting to establish its identity amidst a rapidly shifting social landscape, this is not the first time that choral music has had to question its relevance in the face of radical social upheaval. And regardless of the uncertainty of the time, choral directors have demonstrated resiliency and adaptability that has allowed the field to continue to morph and grow to reflect the contemporary choral landscape of the time.

---

3 A brief note on terminology: any attempt to categorize communities by broad regional or cultural characteristics will inevitably fall short of the goal, and the cultural descriptors “Western” and “non-Western” are no less flawed than any other. I have chosen to use these terms when referring to music from within and outside the Western European world for two reasons. First, because there a number of different terms employed throughout the literature (each with their own complex implications and inherent biases) and I felt that it was important to maintain consistency outside of those resources. Second, because I feel that the use of these terms highlights the relationship of the choral canon to the seat of Western imperial power, a power which has shifted geographic location over the centuries, but not its close relationship to the arts and the creation of an established canon.
Chapter Two: Modernism and a Choral Identity Crisis

Following World War II, a generation was left shaken and questioning the response of art to societal horrors. As Schoenberg rejected tonality for Sprechstimme and twelve-tone compositions, Ives coupled nostalgic patriotism with avant-garde tuning schemes and rejected compartmentalization in his works. Modernism gained ground in both the visual and musical arts, but was met with dubious reception by critics and choral conductors alike.

In 1968, Larry Christiansen wrote that while “much of this century’s instrumental music is liberated from the concept of tonality… most choral composers of this century write music orientated around tonal centers.” Composers like Milton Babbitt and John Cage forced the music community to question the boundaries between “music” versus “noise” or simple “sound.”

Meanwhile, choral music remained grounded in an overwhelmingly tonal, Eurocentric canon of established works. As Christiansen noted, choral composers tended to stay within the realm of tonality for practical reasons (it is much more difficult for singers to stay in tune with one another without any tonal center for reference), while adding additional suspensions and color tones to triadic harmonic structures to achieve a broader sonic palette. (Christiansen, pg. 6)

This is not to say that developments in contemporary music of the era did not affect the choral field; quite the opposite, in fact. In 1970, Raymond Moreman quoted a fellow colleague in response to a performance of a work by Luigi Nono as saying that,

“You have read Spengler’s Decline of the West, in which he states that Western civilization has reached its highest pinnacle, that it is degenerating, and even now is tottering toward its doom. Music is part of the general decay, and after all, what is there left to do with music? We have turned it upside down, inside out, backwards and
forwards; we have reached the end, and at this point disintegration is inevitable.”

(Moreman 7)

Hardly a measured statement, or indeed an optimistic lens on the future of the field; it would seem that Moreman’s colleague predicted the complete decline and eventual end of a centuries-long tradition of choral singing as a result of the current trends in composition. Fifty years after this essay, it is patently obvious that this particular director’s fears were not in fact realized. However, the concerns expressed by this unnamed conductor, and indeed somewhat by Moreman himself, are reflective of concerns shared by many professionals in the field during this era of political and artistic turmoil. Moreman poses the question, “what of value are we of the new generation preparing as our own gift to those who follow us? … has the musical line come to an end with us? Have all the themes been used?” (7)

This unease with contemporary music was eloquently addressed by Harriet Holt Buker just a year prior, in an essay wherein she wrote in favor of what she termed “the personal equation” in choral music. Buker used a metaphor of neat boxes with tight lids to describe how choral directors approach works by composers whose place in the canon has been firmly established. Contemporary composers, whose works cannot be so neatly compartmentalized, and whose lasting impact has yet to be determined in her eyes provide an opportunity for exploration without judgment, and an avenue through which to stay musically adventurous. However, as she notes, this approach takes considerable effort and time. Additionally, conductors have less historical precedents to rely on from their teachers and mentors than they might when approaching a Bach motet or a Haydn mass.

Buker writes “It is so safe and reassuring to put aside the open boxes or those with even wobbly lids. It is so relaxing to pry off a Haydn lid and do the D Minor Mass, or a Beethoven lid
and greet the Missa Solemnis score as an old and tried and true friend. … all so magnificently safe in their tight boxes where they conceal, congeal, and confide to us all the hours we spent learning to analyze them as our teachers did, learning to perform them as they are “always performed.”” (Buker 9)

While Buker does not go quite so far as to advocate for the avant-garde in choral music, she does present a much more sympathetic portrait of the young singers of her time than many of her contemporaries do. Rather than dismissing popular music as diminishing its listeners’ tastes in music, she recognizes that her students are responding as much to the personal connection that she so often finds lacking in interpretations of the choral canon. She believes that choral directors need to disentangle themselves from the assumptions of taste, value, and safety which they formed over the course of their education and be willing to engage continuously with the new and daunting in order to remain both musically edified and culturally relevant.

Not everyone was quite so sanguine about changing tastes in musical performance, or the need to adapt to the students and audiences of the day. Conductor Paul Hilbrich wrote a particularly provocative statement in 1973 on the fraught relationship between contemporary composition, audience appreciation, and aesthetic quality. Echoing some of Moreman’s sentiments, Hilbrich wrote that “we are an age without an art that expresses our own times. Despite the great smoke-screen of musical activity we see rising before us, if we look closely most of the smoke comes from smoldering coals representing the creative activities of a past age.” (5)

___________________________

4 It is worth mentioning that the very era presumed to be so lacking in contemporary creative activities coincides quite closely with an increase in access to training and publication for female composers, and for composers of color (to a more limited extent). It is unlikely that the creation of societally-responsive art would have decreased as drastically as Hilbrich and Read seem to be asserting, just as previously marginalized artists began to gain access to broader audiences. This is then perhaps a convenient way to negate the artistic contributions of composers who
Hilbrich’s assertions about the responsibilities of conductors and composers alike prompted composer Kirke Mechem to write a rebuttal in the next issue of the Choral Journal. Mechem’s response positioned conductors as musicians first and foremost, rather than as standard-bearers for twentieth century values and aesthetics. Mechem also advocated for a more nuanced take on the distinction between Hilbrich’s binary of so-called “learned” and “entertainment” music.

The philosophical differences between Hilbrich’s essay and Mechem’s response expose a rift in how conductors view their primary roles and responsibilities, one that is evident even to the present day. Although somewhat alleviated by the diversification of conducting positions and the subsequent creation of associations and publications designed to serve those specific groups, tensions still remain about the primary role of the conductor within any given ensemble setting. Hilbrich describes conductors as “taste-makers” for students and audience members, a role which “carries a tremendous responsibility not only to present the great works of our heritage but to ensure the survival of artistic creativity in the twentieth century.” No small burden to place on the shoulders of choral directors of ensembles of all skill levels and inclinations; not to mention one which assumes a certain degree of homogeneity among choral musicians, directors, and an objective quality of “taste” which almost certainly cannot exist without strong bias towards the preferences and training of one demographic.

Mechem, on the other hand, describes conductors (and composers) not as leaders, but as “musicians who wish to perfect our art and to share its blessings with others,” foreshadowing many of the continuing dialogues about the role of the conductor that have arisen in relation to culturally responsive programming and guardianship of the canon. (10)
Mechem also presents a counter-argument to Hilbrich’s assertion that the modern era is one without its own art form:

“On the contrary, we are an age with few spiritual values and we have a perfectly corresponding art. But art should be more than a mirror – that is a modern concept which smacks more of the historian than of the artist. It is a puny art which does not try to rise above its environment, try to inspire, console and to show the better way.” (10)

While many might take issue with Mechem’s characterization of contemporary choral music as an art lacking in spiritual values, his perspective is certainly more hopeful about the future than Hilbrich’s and allows much greater room for growth.
Chapter Three: Historical Perspectives on Concert Programming and Repertoire

From the mid-twentieth century to now, trends in concert programming have gradually shifted from predominantly chronological approaches to following thematic programming guidelines. As Gerald Hoekstra wrote in 1979, “the patterns most often encountered show an overall progression from historically earlier to later styles, from sacred to secular music, or from heavier to lighter music,” aptly summarizing the general approach to choral programming of the 20th century. (Hoekstra 20)

The chronological approach had the effect of highlighting the traditional, and the established canon of literature. Within such a concert framework, there is less flexibility than would be created by a thematic structure. While directors prioritize narrative or sonic continuity to varying degrees, the “potpourri” (Simons) or “leftovers” (Boyd) approach to programming seemed to be waning by the early 1960s. In 1964, Richard von Ende detailed his instructions for the “musically designed and integrated choral concert” in its place. Von Ende recommended relying on the “proven principles” which guide the creation of a symphony or mass, taking into primary consideration a detailed analysis of the key relationships between all selected works, as well as their tempi and audience impact. He was particularly emphatic about the importance of key relationships, and wrote that “the interruption of a concert by the sounding of pitch for a new key can be distracting… If employed rarely and with discretion, a shock modulation to an unrelated key may be used for valid psychological reasons.” (von Ende 13) Von Ende recommended that every choral director maintain a card catalogue of all choral works owned, noting key signature (opening and closing), impact score, style, period, and an assessment of musical worth. This ordering system would then allow the conductor to more efficiently select and arrange musically integrated concerts in the future.
In contrast to Von Ende’s almost mathematical guidelines, Gerald Hoekstra advocated for the employment of a concert theme to group seemingly disparate works by a topic area or event. In his own words, “Thematic choral programming carries the level of organization one step deeper. … The best programs are those in which the sequence of groups gradually unfolds the meaning of the theme.” (20)

By the time that Canadian conductor Jon Washburn wrote his guidelines for programming in 1984, thematic programming had taken hold, and the techniques of programming and repertoire selection had been increasingly codified since earlier texts started documenting best practices for concert programming. Washburn identified three distinct types of concert programs: 1) repertoire-based programs, where specific pieces or instrumentations determine the program; 2) idea or theme programs, which are “conceptual in character,” and consist of repertoire grouped around a topic; and 3) occasion programs, e.g. programs arranged by liturgical year, or to commemorate the birthday of a notable composer. (Washburn 7-8)

Composer David Brunner outlined a similar set of approaches to programming in 1994, when he wrote an article for the Music Educators Journal that provided a template for concert programming based on the underlying structural elements of the individual works selected. According to Brunner, the major approaches to programming are 1) chronological programming; 2) thematic programming, which he defines here as “music on a certain theme or for a specific occasion, season, or purpose;” and 3) concept programming, which he characterizes as programming that “assembles and then seeks to unify rather diverse compositions around a general idea or concept.” These definitions closely resemble Washburn’s classifications of programming approaches with a few minor differences, and it seems safe to say that these general approaches to programming had become common enough to be recognized as standard.
Brunner also articulates very precisely the concept of the “golden mean” of a program and demonstrates its application to building satisfying tension and release over the course of a given choral concert, regardless of theme. According to Brunner, “this point of most color and variety … occurs approximately two-thirds of the way through the program of fifteen, or according to proportion (used by many composers and other artists) of the “golden section” or “golden mean”. (Brunner 48) This type of mathematical determination of concert order might hearken back to Von Ende’s principles for concert programming but is applicable to a much wider array of program types, and often lends to the construction of a thematic program rather than limiting it.

Proponents of both thematic and non-thematic programs often agreed on a shared set of qualities which determined the effectiveness of a choral program, regardless of the specifics of the selection criteria. Among the terms that emerge repeatedly are “variety,” “balance,” “unity,” and “flow,” as well as that requirement which is hardest to define, to “select music of good quality.” (Apfelstadt 31)

This last directive assumes an objective set of values against which one can measure a piece of music to determine its musical quality; yet this can lead to murky waters where choral directors attempt to classify the compositional merits of a work derived from a musical tradition that is not their own, nor a part of their educational training. As conductor Hilary Apfelstadt states, “In terms of deciding whether ethnic musics are of good quality, we must often rely on the knowledge of colleagues whose familiarity with a particular type of music surpasses our own.” (31)

This leads us into the unique programming considerations of the 21st century – as choral directors have sought out and included an ever-widening array of music in their programming,
guidelines for constructing concerts must necessarily be flexible enough to adapt to the inclusion of new literature. Programming approaches over the past six decades have largely migrated from the chronological format, towards a thematically-organized approach, allowing for more diversity of genre and origin. While the narrative effect of a program was not often taken into great account for chronological groupings, the narrative of an entire concert presentation becomes of preeminent importance when theme-based. This leads to the concept of a concert’s “golden mean,” i.e. the ideal placement of the musical and emotional high point of a concert approximately 2/3 of the way through its duration, which mirrors the narrative arc of a play or work of fiction. As conductors began to broaden the range of programmed repertoire, challenges arose with finding “objective” rubrics of musical value with which to determine the suitability of a given work.
Part Two: Looking To Our Future

Chapter One: Changing Cultures, Changing Choirs

Choral music has always been directly affected by societal changes happening outside the concert hall, as evidenced by the dialogues around modern music, rock ‘n roll, and the role of choirs in the 1960s and 1970s. Directors and composers may be on the cutting edge of these adaptations or they may cling to tradition instead, but are always engaged in the dynamic work of serving as arbiters of artistic merit.

The late 1980s and 1990s brought heightened awareness of voices from marginalized populations, largely as a result of writers and activists of color who were gaining new and broader platforms to address systemic inequity. The AIDS epidemic shocked the nation and cut to the heart of the performing arts community, while the anti-apartheid movement brought musician-activists like Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela to a global stage and American audiences.

It was this momentum which carried the US into the new millennium, confronted almost immediately with the atrocities of 9/11 and the ensuing xenophobia and racism. In the face of rapid social change and political instability over the past twenty years, and in an era that could easily be defined by its divisive and siloed rhetoric, choirs have adapted. Choirs stand as representatives of community in a society that seems to be growing apart.
Chapter Two: Representation Matters

In a community-oriented art like choral music, representation matters. Western Classical ensembles as a whole frequently struggle to accurately represent the demographics of their home communities. For choral music in particular, where the retention of singers through their K-12 educations and beyond is critical to the sustenance of the field, conductors must be especially aware of the role which a representative and inclusive choral environment has in attracting and retaining singers.

The demographics of the choral field remain disproportionately white and overwhelmingly male in both leadership and programming for choral ensembles. In the sixty-year history of the award, there have been no female Grammy-award winning conductors of choral albums, nor were any of the works recorded for those Grammy-winning albums written by female composers. In the broader conducting world (including orchestral conductors), only eight of the world’s 100 most prolific conductors in 2019 were women, a statistic up from just one (Marin Alsop) in 2013. (Bachtrack)

Gender distribution is imbalanced across different types of choral ensembles, in both leadership and singer roles; women outnumber men in K-8 choral positions, but once singers reach high school, their chances of singing for a male conductor are significantly higher. The numbers narrow as singers reach college, where men make up the majority of collegiate choir conductors. Women are also more likely to conduct treble ensembles, less likely to direct mixed-voice ensembles, and are least likely to direct low voice ensembles. These gender-based divisions do not hold true for male conductors, who frequently conduct treble ensembles, albeit a slightly smaller percentage than their female counterparts. For female students and students of color, this lack of representation on the podium may make choral leadership appear to be the sole
domain of white men, perpetuating gender and race gaps in conducting and composition programs going forward. Further complicating the issue, much of the information currently available about gender and racial distribution in choral leadership is anecdotal, or derived from remarkable small sample sizes. The glaring lack of data on this subject is a gap that needs to be remedied urgently, if we are to have an accurate understanding of the areas where we need to direct our energy for diversifying leadership in the field.

Contributing to the complexity of this issue is the somewhat chameleonic role of the conductor in recent history. Whether a choral conductor is first and foremost an educator, a musician, a leader, or some other type of figure within the ensemble is highly disputed, and there are nearly as many answers as there are authors writing on the subject.

In 1962, Harry Wilson wrote quite an impassioned defense of the choral director as an educator first: “And what about the director? … Will he need to be an authoritarian disciplinarian? Horrors, no! He is, first of all, a teacher.” (Wilson 7) Eight years later, in an open letter to the American Choral Directors Association published in the Choral Journal, Morris Beachy criticized the tendency he perceived among his colleagues to prioritize the technical aspects of the music over the aesthetics of the whole experience. “Briefly, I believe that we have for too long concerned ourselves with the techniques of the field, and that consequently many of the intrinsic and extra-musical values which you and I both know exist have almost disappeared from the format of a choral presentation. Certainly good techniques are vitally necessary to good choral performance, but if aesthetic principles are never brought into consideration and developed, we have forsaken the title of artist or musician and must take up the trade name “technician of musical tools”. “(Beachy C2)
In September of 2019, Jeffrey Poulin of the Washington, D.C.-based arts mentorship nonprofit Creative Generation addressed the complex role of contemporary choral directors in an article for the *Choral Journal*. Poulin advocated for the need for choir directors to act as leaders in their communities beyond their roles as choral musicians, stating that, “We all have a responsibility beyond our job as a choral director to also be a leader through our work.” (Poulin 29)

From these varied and often conflicting perspectives, it is easy to see how these beliefs have led to a broader array of choral ensembles, often with wildly disparate missions and artistic foci. This diversification of ensemble types has grown to include social-justice choirs, professional chamber choirs composed of singers from across the U.S., competitive youth choirs, and collegiate chapel choirs, to name a few. Quite predictably, there are rather noticeable differences in the goals of these choirs and their directors.

In addition to the pressing need for a more representative pool of conductors, the repertoire lists of most choral ensembles are firmly grounded in a European tradition that does little to give space to composers from under-represented backgrounds. African-American spirituals have deep significance to the choral landscape of contemporary America, and yet spirituals have often been programmed simply as up-tempo closing numbers, without addressing any of the underlying history and symbolism. Additionally, if the only music by Black composers that a student encounters in their four years of a high school or collegiate choir is born out of the history of slavery, that student will be lacking in an understanding of the true breadth of choral compositions that have been written by Black composers in the intervening years.
Whether or not the rosters of today’s choral ensembles reflect contemporary demographics also factors into the cultural relevance of today’s choirs. American choirs are generally still largely white, with a few notable exceptions. And yet, choirs can be havens for singers of wildly different backgrounds, and these singers carry their own experiences, biases, and cultural orientations with them into the rehearsal hall. The diversity of experiences among choral singers today argues the crucial need for programming which is culturally responsive and inclusive, especially in educational settings.

It is also important to recognize that audience members bring the same range of experiences and biases with them into the concert hall, and the traditional demographics of classical music and choral concert-goers are aging well into retirement. In this era, choirs would do well to recognize the need to diversify their audiences as well as their rosters.

As choral music ventures further into questions of representation, the nuances of who can and should sing what music become thorny points of contention. Discussions about issues of cultural appropriation and inclusive performance practice have divided the field, and to date have raised more questions than they have answered. Just as clashes between traditionalists and proponents of new music define many aspects of the 1970s choral scene, it is likely that contemporary debates around culturally responsive programming will be among the defining moments of the early 21st century in choral performance.⁵

⁵ In all of these contexts, it is important to recognize the intersections of gender and race as factors in representation, particularly in leadership. These are nuanced issues which require nuanced discussion, and it is necessary to expend the time and effort to increase access to participation in choral music at all levels.
Chapter Three: Culturally Responsive Programming in the 21st Century

As today’s choirs become more diverse, and better reflect the demographics of our society, the relevance of the standard choral repertoire to today’s singers and audiences is called into question. At the same time, many directors and ensembles are attempting to navigate the boundary between programming music that is responsive to our contemporary cultural landscape, and potentially performing works without having done adequate research into their cultures of origin, thereby contributing not to cultural inclusion, but cultural appropriation.

An exact definition of the difference between cultural appropriation and appreciation is hard to come by, and often subjectively determined on a case-by-case basis. Debates around specific instances can become heated, and personal, complicating attempts to establish best practices for respectful performance. To better understand how we arrived at quite such a polarized state in the field, it is helpful to look back on the history of changing opinions about the place of multicultural music in choral performance.

In the 1960s, former ACDA Vice President Marie Joy Curtiss published an essay in the Choral Journal entitled “Choral Singing: A Phenomenon of Western Musical Culture.” In her essay, Curtiss asserted that the development of a choral tradition belonged solely to Western musical history and should be kept separated from the influences of what she called “the Oriental world.” Curtiss suggested that the American choral director engage with non-Western music in order to “deduct what is most unique in his own tradition… sharpen his perception of unusual sounds.” This degree of exoticization of non-Western cultures would be easily rejected by the majority of conductors today, and yet many of Curtiss’ assumptions about the fundamentally Western nature of choral music have gone unchallenged in the intervening decades.
This is not to say that choral directors have been slow to recognize the potential inherent in their art for broadening social understanding and communication. As part of a series of interviews about the state of choral music in 1975, Jane Skinner Hardester had this to say about the future of the field:

“I see awareness of the problems of our society and solutions for these problems through the choral idiom with integrated groups, emphasis on music of black composers, Mexican-American composers, Latin American composers, etc. We should be even more aware the internationality which many of us have always known. … We have a great opportunity and responsibility in this area which we are just beginning to face.” (Glenn 16)

Lynn Whitten’s “Predictions Regarding the 1980s” represent a slightly more moderate voice, and yet she too recognizes the imminent need to engage with the social consciences of the students of the day. Whitten advises a balance between a socially driven and musically directed choral education, stating that “The students must be listened to, but not capitulated to, if in the process we lose our direction toward aesthetic education.” (Whitten 27)

Gail Mottola and Gary Funk both provided early schema for the thoughtful integration of non-Western music into choral curricula and performances. In 1987, Mottola laid out guidelines for developing a multicultural choral concert, placing particular emphasis on the inclusion of works in their native languages. She also points to the capacity for choral music to serve as a tool for building multicultural education and literacy among singers and audiences alike. (Mottola) Similarly, Gary Funk’s 1994 “culturally permeable choral curriculum” presents a framework for the teaching of non-Western choral music in a high school or collegiate setting that provides the students with a thorough introduction to music of a given region outside their own culture(s) of origin. (Funk)
At the time of Funk’s writing, 85% of the music performed at ACDA conventions was of Euro-American origin. In 2000, Dan Graves conducted a survey of the role of multicultural choral music in the canon between 1975 and 2000. Graves found a steady increase in both the number of multicultural pieces performed and the number of scholarly articles published on topic of multicultural music between 1989-2000, pointing to a growing interest not only in the performance of that repertoire, but of its accompanying history and research. (Graves)

This is not to say that this increase was not met with backlash from ardent proponents of the standard repertoire. In 1997, conductor William Dehning published a scathing “Broadside” lambasting many of his colleagues for neglecting to program the masterpieces which he viewed as “our patrimony, our heritage.” Dehning wrote that “we deserve to be criticized when we fail to teach, perform, and promote the masterpieces a majority of the time. A minority nod toward the experimental, world musics, the avant garde, the ephemeral, and the popular is instructive and fun.” (Dehning 26)

This argument raises a critical point: who is the “us” of “our” choral history? If the “us” being presumed is in fact comprised of those who direct choirs, with no other qualifiers, than the assumptions made by Dehning (and others) about the inherited culture and history of that “us” is significantly lacking in awareness of the true diversity contained within that “us.” Dehning was hardly the only conductor of his era to write to a presumably homogenous group of choral conductors; many of the early articles detailing approaches to culturally inclusive programming assume an audience of white conductors. While it is true that this field is still majority white (and male), is it not well past time to unpack our assumptions about who the “us” we describe is comprised of – and whether that population is really as homogenous as the literature suggests?
We are far from having concrete answers about the right way to approach cultural inclusion in the field, and there are still many conflicts and debates. However, those debates are not going to be resolved in our broader society any time soon either. In the meantime, we can commit ourselves to the work of engaging with the potential flaws in the canon as it stands, and to listening to the voices of those populations who have historically been excluded.

General consensus seems to be leaning in a few directions simultaneously: first, that all music from non-Western cultures is deserving of the same respect and in-depth research as any piece from within the Western canon. Second, that choirs need to become more diverse in their membership, so that we don’t have exclusively white choirs singing spirituals, simply because we do not have exclusively white choirs.

At the end of the day, choral performance is most meaningful when we create beautiful music together, in community. Artistic qualities are open to flexible interpretation; beauty is in the eye of the beholder (or listener), after all. But the power of music-making in unity is undying and will endure long after the masterworks like Mozart’s Requiem have fallen out of the common repertoire. In this moment, it is the responsibility of every choral director arguing for the retention of a “pure” approach to choral performance to ask themselves – what is the mission of this art? What is the lasting effect of choral music, not simply with respect to the canon, but on the lives of those who experience it either as performers, composers, conductors, or listeners? And if the answer to those questions includes any aspect of community or experiential value, which communities’ experiences and values are neglected by asserting the superiority of a purely Western tradition?

It is useful to acknowledge the historical patterns of programming in all their facets, in order to better understand not just the assumptions held by practitioners in the field, but also by
those outside of the field. The reasons why people do not participate in and attend choral music are certainly as relevant to the survival and continuing relevance of our discipline as the reasons why members do. It is also worth contextualizing our desire for innovation in choral performance and composition within the rich and varied history of this music, not simply referring to those works, conductors, and performances whose contributions have been safely solidified in the canon of instruction.

The work of compensatory history in choral singing is deeply meaningful, as it attempts to uncover the neglected female and non-white voices of historical composition. This is critically relevant work, especially as our access to a broader span of historical material continues to expand with the help of open-source online publication, and as global scholarship is made available on an immediate and international scale through online connections and resources. It is my deep desire that we will collectively dedicate as much energy to preserving and bringing to light the choral works of Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel as we do to their male relatives’ compositions, and that we continue to seek out the voices of women and people of color as we read between and beyond the lines of our extant musical canon for works to be rediscovered. It is also my hope that we dedicate our energy to fostering a place for choirs in diverse communities, without feeling the need to exile that work to the sole domain of “social justice” or “issue-based” choirs. Choirs have always existed to serve the demographics of their host communities. We must have faith in the integrity of our own art, that it will not be lessened if we commit to doing the work of broadening the range of demographics that choirs meaningfully support. As Graves articulated twenty years ago, “Our educational obligation is to the expanding choral field and to a society whose demographics are changing rapidly. If we serve one well, we will serve the other well. … The active repertoire is becoming truly
multicultural. We now need to turn our scholarly criticism and research towards this rich and varied repertoire to expand the choral canon.” (Graves 41)
Chapter Four: Contemporary Perspectives on Programming

As part of my research, I had the opportunity to speak with a number of leading conductors in the field about their approaches to concert programming and repertoire selection. I asked them a series of questions about their personal approaches to programming in their careers, as well as about their perception of the effects of cultural changes on the choral field as a whole. I also asked my interviewees to reflect on the literature currently regarded as core parts of the canon, to offer their opinions on choral works that might not remain quite so central to our repertoire, and to speak to works that have entered the repertoire over the past 50 years that they believe will have a lasting impact on the field going forward.

I’ve summarized their responses below and have attempted to highlight the continuities and common threads across their responses, as well as some of the differing perspectives they shared with me over the course of these interviews. Many of their responses – especially to questions of representation and advocacy in the choral field – expose the tensions at play in today’s choral landscape between those who believe that currents of social justice and a focus on diversity have led to a loss of emphasis on the choral canon, and those who believe that it is vitally important to address the needs of the diverse demographics of our current society.

Q: In your opinion, what aspects make a compelling choral concert?

Ann Howard Jones offered a few specific criteria, including “skillfully composed music, a variety of sonorities, and compelling texts in any language,” as well as “music that helps shape the taste of the singers and the community.”

Simon Carrington feels that programs “need by nature to demonstrate a variety of styles…especially for the benefit of the student singers.” And for Simon Halsey, a compelling
choral concert is one which is “not too long, presented with energy and communication, with contrasted items.”

Speaking to the cumulative effect of a concert experience, Beth Willer says that,

“I think there is something to me as an audience member about just the absolute quality of the performance, that the artists onstage are fully engaged and passionate about what they’re doing, and that they’re very unified both vocally and visually as beings on the stage. I think that most excellent performances -- not just choral -- are going to be housed in an ensemble that has that sort of unity and presence. … As far as programming goes, I also am really drawn to programs that have narrative … I want something that’s going to draw me out of my life and my day, in a way that I forget what I’ve been doing because it’s got such a clear thread, and such a clear purpose artistically.”

**Q: When programming a concert, do you take into consideration whether you have represented a diverse range of texts, genres, and composers?**

Willer shares that she starts “from a single piece that I’m so drawn to that I want to create a space for it and surround it with other pieces that contrast and uplift that piece. … What piece is going to most gracefully and powerfully sit next to the center piece?” This approach is shared by Ethan Sperry as well, who looks for an “anchor piece” whenever programming a concert for his college choirs.

Ann Howard Jones says that she tries to create variety by “combining sacred and secular, motets and madrigals,” focusing more on the formal aspects of the works than their cultures of origin.

Ēriks Ešenvalds views the diversity of a choral concert as key to its narrative strength:
“Any event - be it a concert or listening to a new CD, or reading a book, or seeing a theatre play, is a journey which takes the person into deeper imagination; so, also a concert is a journey, musical journey which does need the artistic overview, which involves calculations of the concert dramaturgy, theme, sometimes even tonality.”

Q: Do you believe that the repertoire you select should advance an agenda (social, political, cultural), or not?

This question prompted some of the strongest and most divergent responses, with some staunchly against programming to advance an agenda, others in favor, and many falling somewhere in the middle of the road.

James Burton responded strongly in the affirmative, saying “Oh, it certainly can! Why not? Well, if that’s the reason [for a] concert or a group, absolutely. … In the symphony I think we try to be a broad church and there is no political agenda, or social one in particular, but certainly a concert program can be devised in order to reach a community that might not normally come to hear music.”

Charlene Archibeque, in contrast, does not appreciate when conductors program this way, and believes that it is “using music in a way that is not fair to the audience.” She acknowledges that there may be specific instances where an agenda-based program is appropriate, for example “If there is something going on in the community, or something that is deeply personally meaningful.”

From Simon Halsey’s perspective, “It [a program] can do but life would be mighty boring if that was a regular necessity.”

Beth Willer expresses the need for balance between extra-musical influence and artistic merit:
“I don't think there’s any should or should not about it. If you want to say something, and you have the artistic impetus to say it, then you should. I’ve been moved by both types of programs, and I’ve [not been] moved by both types of programs.

So, it’s finding a way for the art form to have a meaningful cultural impact in a way that is distinct from a podcast, that is distinct from nonfictional commentary, that is distinct from film. We are a vocal ensemble… we need to find a way to comment that is powerful via our particular medium, and in doing that, we have the potential to shape culture.”

Christopher Jackson also highlights the importance of engaging with social justice programming in a genuine way.

“There's a way of doing things naturally that gives it authenticity … we just have to make sure it always feels authentic, or I feel we’re doing it a bit of a disservice. I will continue to always include marginalized composers in my regular programming. I won’t make a huge deal out of it, but marginalized composers need to be included as often as makes sense, and if it doesn't make sense, maybe don't do it, because you’re putting things out of context, and out of authentic space that doesn’t actually do the issue justice.”

Ēriks Ešenvalds says that,

“To me the art is the priority. Art is always bigger, more adventurous, challenging and crazy and it does widen the horizon of imagination and understanding. I am not fond of political concert programs or supporting a cheap and sugarish music-making. People in the audience are educated people, people are smart and there is no need for a composer or conductor, or musicians, to feed the audience putting a precisely detailed/themed food-spoon into their mouth of imagination. It is always better to leave some space for freedom - freedom to imagine, to see a wider world.”
Q: To what degree does subscriber or audience pressure influence your repertoire choice? Boards? Congregations? Alumni of your program?

The common consensus among most of my interviewees seems to be that while box office interests are often in the background, very rarely do those interests interfere with the director’s artistic programming impetus. This is due to a combination of flexible box offices and conductors who prioritize the musical above the financial. Ann Howard Jones told me, “I want to say not at all… because I object to that insertion of pressure.”

James Burton explains his take on the relationship between the box office and the music director:

“No, that’s the lovely thing about the [Boston Symphony Orchestra], is, there is a relationship obviously, but, the artistic side does come first. And that’s quite unusual, and especially having come from the UK where the arts is clinging on by its fingernails in so many cases, they have to have programs which will fill seats. With something like the Symphony, where so many of the concerts are subscription concerts, you can take risks and stick your neck out and do different things.”

Across the pond in London, Simon Halsey describes his position this way: “At the Symphony, it’s a mixture of stimulation, breadth of repertoire and sensible budgeting - here we do listen to committees of players, audience representatives and finance is always in the background. But being careful isn’t the answer. That’s the beginning of the end. You must program with passion and conviction.”

Q: What is the first step you take when programming a typical concert for your ensemble?
From a pragmatic point of view, Ann Howard Jones asks the following: “Who are the forces?” “What are the requirements of the score?” “Is the text appropriate?” “How often has the piece been performed?”

From a structural perspective, Christopher Jackson described some of his goals when creating a festival choir program:

“I try to make sure that at least two pieces have off-the-charts really good poetry: and by really good poets, I mean e e cummings, or Sara Teasdale. I try to make sure that the poetry stands alone. I try to make sure that I do some world music. Also, it’s been really important [to me] to make sure that there’s at least one female composer and at least one composer of color.”

James Burton addressed the unique programming considerations of a choral concert, saying that,

“It’s a complicated thing. Programming takes a lot of time and thought, and I would say it needs to be handcrafted for each and every performance, performers, venue, and audience. And where I’ve had the most success with programming myself has been when I’ve given absolute focus to those things - like where is this concert taking place vis à vis the acoustic, and who is the audience? Who are my singers, and what are their capabilities? And how then best to construct a program, because inevitably in choral concerts you’re more often than not doing shorter pieces and more of them than an orchestral concert. For choral concerts, you’re dealing on a much more microcosmic level.”

**Q: How do you feel that cultural changes in choral music have affected your approach to repertoire selection, if at all?**
Simon Halsey writes that the cultural changes have affected his programming approach “hugely,” leading him to focus on the following questions: “How do we build new audience? How do we address diversity? Is the programme stimulating new growth? Are we covering the existing repertoire? Are we creating new work? Is everyone involved as much as they can be? Is there youth involvement?”

Charlene Archibeque’s primary takeaways from the recent discussions about cultural appropriation and respectful performance are that “All music belongs to all people,” but simultaneously, and equally importantly, that “all music ought to be studied and performed to the best of your abilities as the composer desired.”

Q: Which works do you strongly feel belong in our current repertoire?

Simon Carrington contributed the strongest defense of early music in our repertoire, stating that “the case for early music must be made constantly, because it is from that which everything stems.” Jones echoed this desire to reinforce the presence of classic literature. Speaking about some younger cohorts of singers, she says, “They wouldn’t know Bach’s Dona Nobis Pacem if you plastered it all over their faces.” In Archibeque’s opinion, Brahms, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Bruckner “should form the nucleus of a choir,” and she believes that “a choir isn’t a choir until it’s sung Brahms.”

Halsey points out that “we should never close off any repertoire… It’s certainly important that the repertoire is stimulating for everyone, well done and ideally contain new music.”

And, as Willer highlights, there are always questions about the construction of the canon itself: “Who decides what goes in the canon? Is it ‘X’ number of performances? … It’s hard to
have that kind of perspective on a piece as it’s gaining its significance and proving itself as a lasting work.”

**Q: Which works do you feel no longer hold a place in our current repertoire?**

Jones feels that “pieces that have no musical integrity” should not remain in the canon, while Archibeque believes that one-word texts, e.g. Randall Thompson’s *Alleluia*, are “tired.”

In discussing some of the more controversial works in the canon, Ethan Sperry says that, “pieces come into being to be art, and pieces come into being to be entertainment… Tastes in entertainment change faster than tastes in art, thereby contributing to the creation of the canon.”

In his opinion, we shouldn’t necessarily retire controversial works like *Madama Butterfly*, or the *St. John Passion*, but rather interrogate the problems head on. Interestingly, the *St. John Passion* resurfaced over the course of almost all my interviews. The general consensus seemed to be that while it should not be entirely removed from performance, it should always be presented with intentionality, and with an engagement with the complexities of the work.

Ēriks Ešenvalds offers a perspective on the relationship between our current pace of life and the established canon, writing that,

“Today life runs FASTER and this is OUR life, OUR world which runs faster! And to some extent and also naturally the music, written in previous centenaries, both physically and mentally has become harder to listen to; for example, the longer works of Bach, Handel, Haydn - even performers have decided today to shorten them. Plus, the standard pitch A has become higher, more intense. To ignore today's speed of life is not a good thing.”

**Q: Do you feel that your educational background and training prepared you for the challenges of the contemporary choral landscape and associated programming?**
Christopher Jackson shared his perspective on the educational needs of conducting students today:

“I think it is impossible for an educator coming out of undergrad to be adequately prepared to program, period. What it takes is a lot of care on the part of that individual, and that is what we have to teach. You have to teach them to dive in and look for new rep, you have to teach them how to dive in and look for new rep, you have to teach them that diving in and looking for new rep is what’s going to save and make our art form relevant to the times. Those are the things that need to be taught, because what inevitably ends up happening is that you go and program the things that you did as a college student. … You do have to teach them to be voracious about collecting new repertoire, and caring about that, and I think that’s the best we can do.”

This echoes many of the elements that Archibeque, Sperry, and Jones cited as having been foundational to their own education – both the transmission of research skills and the exposure to high quality repertoire.

Q: What responsibility do you feel to program works by composers from underrepresented backgrounds?

Jones feels that “an underrepresented composer is Bach, or Brahms,” and she feels great responsibility to continue to program these composers frequently, and to educate her students about their place in the tradition.

Ethan Sperry offers his guiding principle for presenting works from composers of different cultural backgrounds, one which is based in the personal narrative of each work:

“Everyone in the audience needs to know why they’re listening to a piece, and the singers need
to know why they’re singing it. … If you try to go onstage and tell a story, you will always succeed.” As Simon Halsey says, “it must be relevant and well done and never tokenistic.”

**Q: What work(s) or composer(s) do you feel have defined the choral idiom of the past 50 years, and will continue to be a part of the choral canon for future generations?**

From Charlene Archibeque: Brahms, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Bruckner, Barber’s *Three Reincarnations* and *Sure On This Shining Night*, and Thompson’s *Choose Something Like A Star*. In her opinion, “People would be a lot better off choosing music that the great choirs have done.”

From James Burton: Jonathan Dove’s *The Passing of the Year*, James MacMillan’s *Miserere*, John Adams’ *Harmonium*. Speaking on the pieces that have made a lasting impact on the choral idiom, Burton says that,

“I think you know those straightaway -- as a conductor you want to program it, as a singer you want to sing it…. And it’s difficult to know why a piece is going to catch the zeitgeist, and everyone just goes “yes!” … I’m not sure it’s connected to societal issues; I think that’s the beauty of music, you can’t really define it.”

From Simon Carrington: works by Eric Whitacre, Morten Lauridsen, James MacMillan, Benjamin Britten, Herbert Howells, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Francis Poulenc, Arvo Pärt, and Samuel Barber; Claude Debussy’s *Trois Chansons*, Gyorgy Ligeti’s *Lux Aeterna* and *Nonsense Madrigals*, Frank Martin’s *Mass*, and Leonard Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms*.

From Ēriks Ešenvalds: “A pretty precise answer to this question can be seen from the recording labels catalogues because that is the choirs' beloved music from the wider world. Also the top competitions for amateur choirs, such as the Europe Grand Prix - just from reading the programmes of the participating choirs we can list the pieces they value the most high.”

From Christopher Jackson: Caroline Shaw’s *Its Motion Keeps*; Julia Wolfe’s *Anthracite Fields*; and works by Rosenphanye Powell, Eric Whitacre, James MacMillan, and Anna Thorvaldsdottir.

From Ann Howard Jones: Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*, Leonard Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms*, John Adams’ *Harmonium*, and Krystof Penderecki’s *St. Luke Passion*; as well as works by up-and-coming composers including Nico Muhly, Caroline Shaw, and Julian Wachner.

From Ethan Sperry: Eric Whitacre’s works, especially *Water Night*; Morten Lauridsen’s works; and Frank Martin’s *Mass*. He also believes that Robert Shaw’s recording of the Rachmaninoff Vespers after the fall of the Berlin Wall left one of the biggest marks on the past 50 years of choral performance.

From Beth Willer: Julia Wolfe’s *Anthracite Fields*, David Lang’s *Little Match Girl Passion*, Schnittke’s *Choral Concerto*, and Caroline Shaw’s *Partita*.

**Further reflections:**

Each of the conductors I spoke with was hopeful about the future of the field and spoke confidently about an ongoing need for choirs in our society. In the words of Ann Howard Jones, “If we’re going to save the world, we have to sing.” Simon Carrington described what he viewed as the special quality of choral music as follows: “You have a unique privilege singing text set to music, and facing the people to whom you’re singing… The great goal of choral performance is 2-3 seconds of silence after each piece which you’ve poured your heart into.”
James Burton spoke about the process of working with contemporary composers, and the doors which commissioning and new works can open up for greater diversity in the field.

“Doing modern music, it just makes such a difference when the composer comes and talks to the performers and is right there as flesh and blood: it shows them that it is a possible thing to be a composer. It’s so important. … I’ve never thought that I couldn’t be a composer, because I met one when I was young.”

Looking to the future, Beth Willer gave this optimistic perspective: “People will ask, is choral music going to have its last day? The moment we make it all about nostalgia, it will go away. The moment we make it about the future, everything we’ve done in the past will remain relevant.”
Part Three: Putting The Research Into Practice

Chapter One: Creating a Program

In setting out to illustrate some of these programming principles in practice, I decided to create a sample program which was informed by the guidance of my research and the advice of my interviewees. I selected repertoire that was representative of popular trends in programming, and created a program order that aligned with the methods for grouping pieces that I had studied. I also largely chose to select repertoire that has been programmed frequently over the past years and appears on many of the recommended repertoire lists from previous decades. I was strongly influenced by the advice and perspectives of my interviewees, and many of their recommendations appear in my selections. My historically-informed program follows below:

Sample Program I

***

“Kyrie” from the Missa Papae Marcelli………………………………………Giovanni Palestrina
Virga Jesse floruit………………………………………………………………Anton Bruckner
Excerpts from Liebeslieder Waltzer…………………………………………Johannes Brahms
   No. 2 “Am Gesteine rausch die Flut”
   No. 6 “Ein kleiner, hübscher Vogel”
   No. 11 “Nein, es ist nicht auszukommen”

“Through The House Give Glimmering Light” from Three Shakespeare Choruses….Amy Beach

***

The Lamb…………………………………………………………………………………John Tavener
Excerpts from Rejoice in the Lamb………………………………………………Benjamin Britten
“For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour”
“For the instruments are by their rhimes”
“Hallelujah from the heart of God”

“Reconciliation” from Dona Nobis Pacem…………………………………Ralph Vaughan Williams

***

The Battle of Jericho……………………………………………………..traditional arr. Moses Hogan

“Se per havervi, oime, donato il core” from Madrigali…………………………Morten Lauridsen

Stars………………………………………………………………………………………..Ēriks Ešenvalds

For this program, I chose to follow a chronological programming trajectory in order to both demonstrate a well-established and traditional format, and also highlight the trajectory of the choral canon through the past century. While I debated about presenting a thematic program, I ultimately decided that a chronologically-ordered program would allow me the most range to represent the changes in the mainstream aspects of the field.

I began my program with the “Kyrie” from Palestrina’s Missa Papae Marcelli. As Simon Carrington emphasized, Renaissance polyphony has played a critical role in laying the foundation for a choral education. Giovanni Palestrina was one of the leading figures of Renaissance counterpoint, and one who skillfully navigated volatile papal politics, maintaining a robust career composing sacred works while advancing the boundaries of the genre.

To continue in that sacred vein, and contrast a mass movement with a motet form, I chose Anton Bruckner’s Virga Jesse floruit. Written in imitation of Palestrina’s style, but with a harmonic sensibility that was distinctly Romantic, Bruckner manages to incorporate many threads of the extant tradition into his motets.
Johannes Brahms’ *Liebeslieder Waltzer* appeared countless times in my research as an example of a multi-movement secular work that was central to the choral tradition. Scored for mixed ensemble and four-hand piano, the set is dramatic, varied, and solidly rooted in the stylings of the German choral school. For this concert program, I selected three contrasting movements of the *Liebeslieder Waltzer*, both to showcase the secular Romantic style and to provide tempo and instrumentation contrast in my first set.

I chose the third movement of Amy Beach’s *Three Shakespeare Choruses* to close my early-Classical set, for two reasons. Firstly, because Beach’s writing bears stylistic similarities to that of Brahms, and the two composers paired nicely together; and secondly, because I wanted to demonstrate some of the historical choral repertoire by women that has been neglected but is beginning to be programmed more broadly.

The next three works are by mid-century British composers John Tavener, Benjamin Britten, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, all of whom emerged from my interviews and research as transformative compositional influences on the choral idiom of the past century. To showcase their significant collective impact, I paired Tavener’s classic choral anthem *The Lamb* with excerpts from Britten’s *Rejoice in the Lamb* and Vaughan Williams *Dona Nobis Pacem*. All three of these works are firmly rooted in the tradition of British sacred music but represent three clearly distinct compositional voices.

Tavener’s *The Lamb* is deceptively complex in its harmonic construction, even with a rather simple melodic line. Britten’s *Rejoice in the Lamb* demonstrates his characteristic use of mixed-meter and a text-driven setting of Christopher Smart’s complex and verbose poetry. Vaughan Williams’ *Dona Nobis Pacem* intersperses the text of the mass with biblical verses and war poetry by Walt Whitman. “Reconciliation” features a baritone solo and chorus, setting the
text of Whitman’s poem by the same name, wherein the speaker confronts the humanity of his fallen enemy.

Moses Hogan’s spiritual arrangements have provided a wealth of historically informed spiritual arrangements that are grounded within the history of the tradition. The impact of the Moses Hogan Singers, under his direction, on understandings of idiomatic and historically influenced performance of spirituals cannot be understated. To represent this deeply important aspect of choral literature and history, I selected Hogan’s arrangement of “The Battle of Jericho.”

Looking to the future, and the impact of contemporary choral compositions, I chose to include the sixth movement of Morten Lauridsen’s *Madrigali*. This song cycle is built around a chord which Lauridsen calls the “fire-chord,” illustrating his characteristic use of unresolved suspensions and clustered intervals to build emotional and narrative tension.

Finally, I closed my program with Ėriks Ešenvalds’ groundbreaking *Stars*, scored for mixed choir and tuned water glasses. The employment of this nontraditional instrumentation and the coupling of Sara Teasdale’s rich text with Ešenvalds’ lyrical compositional style have made this piece an instant classic, and a staple of choirs around the world.
Chapter Two: Predictions Through Performance

No one program can encompass all deserving works at once, and my historical sample program is no exception. I did my best to balance elements of musical flow and the representation of different eras in choral composition, while simultaneously adhering to the guidelines for programming established in my research. In my attempts to faithfully represent staples of the choral tradition, I was limited by the purview of canonic programming, and as a result this program represents far fewer female composers or composers of color than I would like to see on a contemporary concert.

I do believe that there will always be a place for the beauty and sheer musical craft of polyphonic writing, and I do not foresee that diminishing any time in the near future. I think that the soundscape established by the cluster chords and lush writing of Eric Whitacre, Morten Lauridsen, and Ėriks Ešenvalds has permanently affected choral composition. But I also feel that my concert program reflects the limitations of the eras and programming techniques which I am trying to reflect, and that there will be much bolder and more visionary approaches to programming that will emerge over the next 50 years. I believe that these new ways of approaching repertoire selection and concert narrative will redefine the way that we experience the connections between the works in our repertoire. New projects will also continue to be commissioned, in collaboration with directors and ensembles who are looking to the future, and these pieces will shape our new “canon,” if that is even in fact what we choose to establish in the field going forward.

If I were instead to program a concert reflective of the future trajectory that I believe we are on, I would choose instead to highlight lesser-known historical composers from marginalized backgrounds. I would also attempt to center new compositions that I could place in dialogue
works drawn from the canon, in order to illuminate connections across geographic and
chronological divides.

To provide one example for what such a program might look like in practice, I created
the following sample program around the related themes of home, migration, and farewell, topics
which are deeply relevant to our current cultural landscape.

Sample Program II: Im/Migrant

I. Home

The Road Home ................................................................. Stephen Paulus

I Want to Live ................................................................. David Lang

O chì, chì mi na mòrbheanna .............................................. traditional arr. James MacMillan

“Ich will hier bei dir stehen” from the St. Matthew Passion ....................... J. S. Bach

American Tune ............................................................... Paul Simon arr. Ed Blunt

A Path To Each Other ...................................................... Timothy C. Takach and Jocelyn Hagen

II. Freedom

Mother of Exiles ............................................................. Mary Margaret Koppel

Motherless Child ............................................................ traditional arr. Rosephanye Powell

1965 Selma: Let My People Go ........................................ traditional arr. Rollo Dilworth

Excerpts from Riverdance ..................................................... Bill Whelan

“Heal Their Hearts”
“Freedom”
III. Farewell

Saro..........................................................................................................................Joshua Shank
Tāls ceļš (Long Road)..............................................................................................Ēriks Ešenvalds
As the Ship Went Down (You’d Never Looked Finer).............Woodpigeon arr. George Chung
Closer To Home........................................................................................................Dale Trumbore

I attempted to represent a broader diversity of composers and cultures of origin in this program, while maintaining the clarity of the concert’s narrative arc. To open this program, I selected Stephen Paulus’ *The Road Home*, which was commissioned by the Dale Warland Singers in 2001, and is inspired by a tune from *The Southern Harmony Songbook* of 1835. This piece frames the rest of the program through the lenses of leaving and returning to home, themes which are explored throughout all of the following works.

I chose David Lang’s *I Want to Live* to focus on the personal and human elements of home. This movement from the larger oratorio *Shelter* very poignantly expresses the speaker’s desire to live with their loved ones through the repetition of a single line of text by Deborah Artman, “I want to live where you live.”

*O chi, chì mi na mòrbheanna* is a traditional Scottish Gaelic ballad about the singer’s deep longing for home, and enduring hope that they will one day return. This flowing arrangement by Scottish composer James MacMillan draws out the wistful, modal elements of the original folk song, and stands as a natural contrast to the anxious momentum and tight harmonies of the preceding piece.

Paul Simon’s *American Tune* was written in 1973, a tribute to the immigrant American experience, and the joys and pains of being far from home. Simon borrowed the melody from the
chorale tune of J.S. Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, to which he set new lyrics and gave his own musical interpretation. I chose to program the original chorale, “Ich will hier bei dir stehen,” alongside Ed Blunt’s choral arrangement of Simon’s *American Tune*, in order to draw out the musical and thematic connections between the old material and the new.

To transition from songs about home to songs about freedom, I selected Timothy Takach’s and Jocelyn Hagen’s *A Path to Each Other*. Deceptively simple in its construction, this brief round emphasizes the importance of using language to build connections across communities, rather than barriers.

The following set explores the theme of freedom and migration as paired concepts, beginning with Mary Margaret Koppel’s *Mother of Exiles*, a setting of the poem by Emma Lazarus inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty. I followed this with two spiritual arrangements that speak to the realities of forced migration: Rosephanye Powell’s *Motherless Child*, and Rollo Dilworth’s 1965 *Selma: Let My People Go*. While many songs in the spiritual tradition engage more or less directly with these topics, I chose these particular spiritual arrangements because of their emphasis on the experiences of displaced people trapped far from home, both directly and through Biblical analogy.

I closed this set with a medley of two pieces from Bill Whelan’s *Riverdance*, “Heal Their Hearts” and “Freedom,” which address the shared experiences of poor immigrants living in America from an Irish perspective.

I focused my last set on the farewells that occur as a result of migration, and I opened this set with Joshua Shank’s *Saro*, which tells the story of two young lovers separated by class, family, and eventually an ocean. Shank employs canonic elements within a small semi-chorus to
create a keening effect above the unison melody, and a violin obbligato that interweaves with the soprano soloist to evoke a hauntingly folk-like effect.

To build on the theme of lost love, I chose Ėriks Ešenvalds’ *Tāls ceļš (Long Road)*. This piece is a setting of a text by Latvian poet Paulina Barda, and describes the “long road” to heaven, where the speaker’s lover is. Ešenvalds incorporates the use of chimes and flute in addition to multiple divisi, further complexifying the timbral character of the piece.

*As The Ship Went Down (You’d Never Looked Finer)* is a song by contemporary Canadian band Woodpigeon, arranged for mixed choir by George Chung. The text deals with the loss of a loved one in a shipwreck, a story all too common among those who travel by sea to reach a new home or better circumstances to this day.

Finally, I chose Dale Trumbore’s *Closer To Home* to close out the program. This up-tempo piece was written as the companion to her work *Faster*, but I have chosen to present it alone, as it explores the theme of homecoming introduced by Paulus’ *The Road Home*, and brings a sense of closure and continuity to the program overall.

There are a myriad of ways to effectively program selections that are culturally responsive and representative of the true diversity of composers writing choral music today or historically, and this program is only one example of a possible approach. However, it is imperative that we continue to engage creatively with our programming practices to ensure that we are fully representing the wealth of experiences communicated through choral music.
Conclusion: Finding Community in Choir

As I write this, we are painfully reminded of just how much our art depends on gathering with one another in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognize how deeply our choirs depend on community and face-to-face communication that cannot be supplanted by video-conferencing tools or pre-recorded tracks without losing the essence of what it is that we do when we sing together.

We are at the crossroads of a new cultural revolution, one that will contribute to the shaping of this century in the same way that the anti-war protests, sexual revolution, and myriad other social movements shaped the trajectory of the 20th century. In times like these, it can seem nearly impossible to predict where our society will be in five years, ten years, or fifty, let alone where choral music will be, given that it is an art so fundamentally tied to community and culture.

We would not say that new literature should not be written and nurtured and studied simply because we have Shakespeare’s canon of works. Why should we attempt to create an equivalent culture in choral music, a discipline which is so directly born out of the ever-changing and dynamic act of singing in community? Choral music is powerful because of its very ability to touch both the hearts and ears of its listeners and participants. If the field remains stagnant in its views of musical quality and meaningful music, it will lose its ability to touch hearts, even if its technical skill is unparalleled.

None of this means that the choral literature of the past should be thrown out; in fact, I would advocate the very opposite. However, as many humanists know, the point at which we become so enamored with the accomplishments of the past so as not to recognize the achievements of the present is a dangerous one. Choral music has been notoriously slow to
engage with the work of self-reflection and interrogation that has been the work of many other arts and disciplines in the humanities for the past two decades. Some of this may stem from the belief (mistaken, in my opinion) that music is capable of existing in an aesthetic vacuum, removed from the circumstances of its creation or the actions and beliefs of its creator. We need to become more agile with the problematization of art, beloved or not, and find ways to keep listening to music while simultaneously acknowledging the complexity of its origins and effects.

Wagner’s music serves as an excellent example of this dilemma. The National Symphony of Israel refused to perform works by Wagner until the late 1990s (and even then to extreme protest) due to his extreme and violent anti-Semitic views. Since few would dispute Wagner’s status as a staunch anti-Semite, should this have any bearing on how we perform his music, and is the music even related to his political views? In Wagner’s case, the answer is yes, since Wagner himself believed that German music showed an indisputable superiority to works by Jewish composers such as Mendelssohn, and viewed his own compositional endeavors as demonstrations of that fact. He composed his works with an underlying goal of demonstrating Aryan German musical superiority – an intention which surely should affect how we as contemporary musicians choose to perform and portray that music.

I am not of the mind that all music with such complex origins or undertones should be immediately discarded, or cut from all concert seasons. I believe there is great value in understanding where we have come from on both musical and cultural fronts, and there is incredibly brave and beautiful work being done in the reimagining and confronting of deeply challenging artistic works. I would not lose the feminist reinterpretations of Desdemona in favor of the eradication of Othello from our stages. However, this cannot be all that art is. Contrary to the theory of “absolute music,” art does not and has never existed in a vacuum. Art is always
formed in response to the culture surrounding the artist, and whether that art exists as a challenge, a mirror, or some other less obvious response, the responsive aspect is always present.

It is for this very reason that we should have a great deal of hope for the ongoing resilience of choral music. If we want choral music to not only survive, but provide cultural nourishment for a new generation, we must not be afraid of creating new traditions. Choral music will be weakened if we do not continue to engage with our past, and what a rich past it is. But choral music will also be underserved if we are afraid to move forward and encourage the composers and conductors and singers of today’s ensembles to shape a new sound and a choral culture that will be able to reach out and touch hearts and ears in fresh and responsive ways.

This does not mean neglecting the study of Brahms and Bruckner in favor of dwelling solely on Lauridsen or Lang. Lauridsen’s compositions are full of references and homages to the stylings and theoretical underpinnings of his compositional predecessors, spun into new form, and reshaped by his own compositional voice. We must be able to recognize that which is being reflected, just as we must create space for Lauridsen’s creative descendants, direct or otherwise, and in doing so not limit our search to those who are as tethered to the canon as we might be ourselves.

Humans have been singing together for centuries, well before the recognition of any established canon, well before the formation of the Western tradition as we know it, or indeed before the creation of our contemporary understanding of the West itself. Views like Curtiss’ are so narrow as to be suffocating, blinding the practitioner to the beautiful wealth of diverse approaches to choral music that have existed across borders and time periods, defying cultural categorization and the tight lids we like to place on the music of the past. As choral musicians we
must be unafraid to take the leap to open our eyes to a broader definition of choral music than we were given ourselves, and to work in pursuit of those connections and growths yet to come.

I am finding it a particular challenge to make any predictions regarding the future of the field when the future of our country, and in fact of the world, seems precarious at best, and wholly unpredictable even on a weekly level. It feels nearly impossible to know where our performance practices are going to be a year or five years from now, since we cannot realistically know how a genre dependent on communal gathering will weather a global pandemic enforcing extreme measures of isolation and distancing, the very opposite of what we as choral musicians seek to do. We must be willing to reimagine a more equitable, accessible, and sustainable normal for all, and to hold that guiding principle as we go about the work of rebuilding our choral community in the aftermath of this pandemic and accompanying isolation. As choral musicians, and indeed as musicians working in any ensemble setting, we will need to be consciously deliberate in our approach to strengthening and advocating for ensemble music in the coming years, walking the line between falling into nostalgia and over-embracing a marketed approach to assert our value.

I believe that we need to challenge our commonly held understandings of musical value and merit with the goal of becoming more egalitarian in our approach to defining music of “quality.” As Hilary Apfelstadt stated, this will require reaching out to colleagues whose context on a given culture or musical tradition is greater than our own, and we must be willing to be continuously educated on those fronts.

We need to recognize that choir is fundamentally about community, and that in order to be relevant to broader communities, choirs will need to find ways to become reflective of broader communities. This means increasing access to leadership, diversifying our understanding
of the roles that choirs can play in specific communities, and utilizing inclusive repertoire
selection as the powerful tool that it is. We do not need to discard the canon in this process, or
traditional choral settings, but we need to be willing to engage with all facets of the tradition,
both positive and problematic.

And finally, we need to remember that choirs have acted as agents of and responders to
social change for centuries, far from existing in a vacuum apart from it. We must allow ourselves
to be bravely visionary and hopeful about the future, and in that process allow our repertoire
choice to build a cultural narrative of which we want to be a part.
Appendix One: Interviewee Biographies

Charlene Archibeque: Following 35 years as Director of Choral Activities at San Jose State University where she trained hundreds of today’s choral conductors, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, Dr. Charlene Archibeque returned to the SJSU campus as Acting Director of Choral Activities for the academic year 2010-11. One of America’s foremost choral conductors and teachers, Dr. Archibeque helped put SJSU on the world map by winning seven international choral competitions with the famous SJSU Choraliers. Her choirs completed sixteen concert tours to Australia, Mexico and throughout Europe and she has conducted in many of the major music halls including Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Royal Albert Hall in London, and the Berlin Philharmonie and Schauspielhaus. She won prizes for Best Conductor at Spittal, Gorizia and Tallinn International Festivals. Dr. Archibeque has presented multiple choir clinics and conductors’ workshops throughout the US, as well as Australia, England, Canada, and most of Europe. Known as one of America’s top choral clinicians, she has conducted hundreds of honor choirs in 45 states and six provinces of Canada. Active in the American Choral Directors Association she has presented major interest sessions, served on many panels, and her choirs have performed at 25 states, divisional and national conventions. She was the recipient of the Howard Swan Award presented by Calif. ACDA in 2008 and in 2013 the “Excellence in Choral Music,” a new award presented by the University of Colorado. In the past several years Dr. Archibeque conducted All-State Choirs in Connecticut, California and South Carolina, judged the Golden State Choral Festivals, and presented a major session at the Western Division Convention of the ACDA in Reno. She was Headliner for the National Association of Church Musicians Convention in Los Angeles, one of the Headliners for the ACDA Voices United Conference at James Madison University in Virginia, as well as for the Michigan ACDA Conference. She currently teaches a Summer Workshop on Conducting at SJSU every July. Known for her knowledge of the choral repertoire and performance practice of all styles, Dr. Archibeque has conducted and prepared over 150 major choral works with orchestras and performs music from all historical periods. She regularly serves as Visiting Professor at various Universities and was on the campuses of both the University of Michigan and Michigan State in 2010 and at the University of Delaware, at Seattle University and at the Westminster Choir College in spring 2012. Her most recent conducting activities included Guest conductor for the California Bach Society in concerts of an all-Handel program, the Santa Clara Chorale Baroque Christmas concerts with Period Instruments and an all Britten Concert in St. Louis Missouri. Her degrees were earned at the Univ. of Michigan, San Diego State and the DMA at the University of Colorado. She was named Outstanding Alumna at the latter and was given both San Jose State’s highest honors: Outstanding Professor and President’s Scholar. She currently serves on the Board of the American Beethoven Society, is Past-President of the Silicon Valley League of the San Francisco Symphony and is Editor of the Charlene Archibeque Choral Series with Santa Barbara Music Publishers.

James Burton: Born in London, James Burton holds a master’s degree in orchestral conducting from the Peabody Conservatory, where he studied with Frederik Prausnitz and Gustav Meier. He began his training at the Choir of Westminster Abbey, where he became head chorister, and was a choral scholar at St. John’s College, Cambridge. He has conducted concerts with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Hallé Orchestra, the
Orchestra of Scottish Opera, the Royal Northern Sinfonia, BBC Concert Orchestra, and Manchester Camerata. Opera credits include performances at English National Opera, English Touring Opera, Garsington Opera, and the Prague Summer Nights Festival, and he has served on the music staff of the Metropolitan Opera and Opera de Paris. Mr. Burton’s extensive choral conducting has included guest invitations with professional choirs including the Gabrieli Consort, the Choir of the Enlightenment, Wrocław Philharmonic, and the BBC Singers, with whom he performed in the inaugural season of Dubai’s Opera House in 2017. From 2002 to 2009 he served as choral director at the Hallé Orchestra, where he was music director of the Hallé Choir and founding conductor of the Hallé Youth Choir, winning the Gramophone Choral Award in 2009. From 2002 to 2017 he was music director of the Schola Cantorum of Oxford. Well known for his inspirational work with young musicians, he was director of the National Youth Choir of Japan in 2017 and founded the Boston Symphony Children’s Choir in 2018. Mr. Burton has given conducting master classes at the Royal Academy of Music in London and at the Tanglewood Music Center, and founded a scholarship for young conductors at Oxford. His growing composition portfolio includes works for commissioners including the National Portrait Gallery in London, the 2010 World Equestrian Games, the Choir of St. John’s College, Cambridge, and the Exon Festival, where he was composer-in-residence in 2015. His works are published by Edition Peters. As BSO Choral Director and Conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, James Burton occupies the Alan J. and Suzanne W. Dworsky Chair, endowed in perpetuity.

**Simon Carrington:** Simon Carrington, Yale University professor emeritus, has enjoyed a long and distinguished career in music, performing as singer, double bass player and conductor, first in the UK, and latterly in the USA and round the world. From 2003 to 2009 he was professor of choral conducting at Yale University and director of the Yale Schola Cantorum, a 24-voice chamber choir which he brought to national and now international prominence. During his Yale tenure he led the introduction of a new graduate voice degree for singers specializing in oratorio, early music and chamber ensemble, and, with his faculty colleagues, he guided two Yale graduate students to their first prize wins in consecutive conducting competitions at American Choral Directors Association National Conventions. From 2001 until his Yale appointment, he was director of choral activities at the New England Conservatory, Boston, where he was selected by the students for the Krasner Teaching Excellence Award and from where he received an Honorary Doctorate in 2014. From 1994 to 2001 he held a similar position at the University of Kansas. Prior to coming to the United States, he was a creative force for twenty-five years with the internationally acclaimed British vocal ensemble The King’s Singers, which he co-founded at Cambridge University and which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2018. Simon now keeps up an active schedule as a freelance conductor and choral clinician, leading workshops and master classes round the world. For the 2016-19 academic years he accepted the position of Visiting Professor of Choral Conducting to work alongside Simon Halsey and his students at the University of Birmingham, UK.

**Ēriks Ešenvalds:** Ēriks Ešenvalds is one of the most sought-after composers working today, with a busy commission schedule and performances of his music heard on every continent. After study at the Latvian Baptist Theological Seminary and the Latvian Academy of Music, he was a member of the State Choir Latvija. In 2011 he was awarded the two-year position of Fellow Commoner in Creative Arts at Trinity College, University of Cambridge. Ēriks has won multiple
awards for his work and undertakes many international residencies working on his music and lecturing. Recent premieres include Lakes Awake at Dawn for the Boston Symphony Orchestra and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Whispers on the Prairie Wind for Utah Symphony and the Salt Lake Vocal Artists, St Luke Passion for the Latvian Radio Choir and Sinfonietta Riga, the major multimedia symphony Nordic Light in the US, Canada, and Germany, as well as commissions from the BBC Proms, Gewandhaus Leipzig, and Grant Park Music Festival, Chicago. His full-scale opera The Immured was premiered at the Latvian National Opera in 2016 to great acclaim. 2018 saw the premiere of his second major multimedia symphony based on volcanoes. His compositions appear on recordings from Trinity College Choir, Cambridge and Polyphony with Britten Sinfonia on Hyperion, Portland State Chamber Choir on Naxos, Latvian Radio Choir and Sinfonietta Riga on Ondine, ORA on Harmonia Mundi, and VOCES8 on Decca Classics, amongst others.

Simon Halsey: Simon Halsey CBE holds positions across the UK and Europe as Choral Director of London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Chorus Director of City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Chorus, Artistic Director of Orfeó Català Choirs and Artistic Adviser of Palau de la Música, Barcelona, Artistic Director of Berliner Philharmoniker Youth Choral Programme, Director of BBC Proms Youth Choir; Artistic Advisor of Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival Choir, Conductor Laureate of Rundfunkchor Berlin and Professor and Director of Choral Activities at University of Birmingham. Simon Halsey occupies a unique position in classical music. He is the trusted advisor on choral singing to the world’s greatest conductors, orchestras and choruses, and also an inspirational teacher and ambassador for choral singing to amateurs of every age, ability and background. Making singing a central part of the world-class institutions with which he is associated, he has been instrumental in changing the level of symphonic singing across Europe. He is also a highly respected teacher and academic, nurturing the next generation of choral conductors on his post-graduate course in Birmingham and through masterclasses at Princeton, Yale and elsewhere. He holds three honorary doctorates from universities in the UK, and in 2011 Schott Music published his book and DVD on choral conducting, Chorleitung: Vom Konzept zum Konzert. Halsey has worked on nearly 80 recording projects, many of which have won major awards, including the Gramophone Award, Diapason d’Or, Echo Klassik, and three Grammy Awards with the Rundfunkchor Berlin. He was made Commander of the British Empire in 2015, was awarded The Queen’s Medal for Music in 2014, and received the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2011 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to choral music in Germany.

Christopher Jackson: Dr. Christopher Jackson is the Director of Choral Activities and Head of Voice at Muhlenberg College since 2017. Professor Jackson works frequently as a guest conductor for Honor Choir Festivals on the east coast, and has led masterclasses and workshops on conducting and Baroque music at the San Juan Conservatory of Music. He has taught courses in Music History, Vocal Methods and Pedagogy, Conducting, and He is also the co-founder of professional ensemble Bricolage, which debuted with performances of David Lang’s Pulitzer Prize winning composition, The Little Match Girl Passion, in conjunction with various Collegiate and High School Art Departments and to raise funds for Women’s and Children’s shelters. In his previous position at Lycoming College he led national and international tours (China, Canada, Florida) and co-founded the Lycoming Baroque Choir and Orchestra. That ensemble was honored to have been selected as a guest performer for the PaACDA 2016 Fall
In addition to teaching, conducting, and academic research, Christopher is also active as a professional choral singer, and soloist. Most recently, he was honored to sing as a member of the Grammy Award-Winning ensemble, Roomful of Teeth. He is a core member of and Educational Outreach Manager for the professional chamber choir, Skylark Vocal Ensemble. He is featured on Skylark’s recent album, Crossing Over, released in the spring of 2016, and has sung with other professional ensembles such as the Tucson Chamber Artists, Kinnara Ensemble, Santa Fe Desert Chorale, The South Dakota Chorale, and more. His areas of research include the choral music of Benjamin Britten, links between modern educational practices, learning theory, and music education, and programming Renaissance and Baroque Music for choirs of all ages and abilities. Dr. Jackson received his BA in voice performance from Oklahoma State University, and his MM in choral conducting from Westminster Choir College, and was the graduate assistant conductor of the Westminster Symphonic Choir under Dr. Joe Miller. He received his DMA in choral conducting from the University of North Texas.

**Ann Howard Jones:** Ann Howard Jones is professor emerita of Music at Boston University. During her twenty-two years as director of choral activities, she founded and conducted the Symphonic and Chamber Choruses, supervised conducting students in the Concert Chorus and Women’s Chorale, taught graduate choral conducting, and administered the MM and DMA programs in choral conducting. Her musicianship, integrity, and influence are present in every corner of the country through the numerous academic appointments of her former students, the transformative experiences of musicians under her baton and a generation of enthusiastic concertgoers. Recognized as a distinguished clinician, adjudicator, teacher and conductor, Dr. Jones has led many all-state and regional choruses, workshops, and master classes in the U.S., Europe, South America, Canada and Asia. She has been invited to teach and conduct at the University of Iowa, the University of North Texas, Michigan State University, University of Missouri University of Miami, San Diego State University, the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Southern Methodist University, Westminster Choir College of Rider University, the University of Georgia, the University of Kentucky, the University of New Mexico, Syracuse University, Florida International University, and the State University of New York at Potsdam. From 1984 to 1998, Dr. Jones was the assistant conductor to the late Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony choruses, where she was the assistant conductor for choruses, sang in the alto section, assisted with the Robert Shaw Chamber Singers, and helped to organize the Robert Shaw Institute. She sang and recorded with the Festival Singers both in France and in the U.S. The Festival Singers were also represented in annual performances of major works for chorus and orchestra at Carnegie Hall in a series of performance workshops. After Shaw’s death in 1999, Jones was invited to conduct the Robert Shaw Tribute Singers for the American Choral Directors Association conferences in San Antonio and Orlando. Choruses at Boston University have been invited to appear at conventions of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) in Boston, New York City and Providence. Jones has traveled with a group of BU graduate students to Venice and Padua, Italy, to perform and to study. A similar trip was made to Oslo and Bergen, Norway. In the spring of 2009, the graduate conducting students joined Jones at the national convention of ACDA in Oklahoma City, where she was invited to prepare and conduct the world premiere of Dominick Argento’s CENOTAPH. Among the honors that Jones has received are the coveted Metcalf Award for Excellence in Teaching from Boston University, a Fulbright professorship to Brazil, and a lectureship for the Lily Foundation. At the ACDA national conference in 2011, she was named the recipient of the Robert Shaw Choral Award for
Distinguished Service to the Profession, the highest award given by the association. In 2012 she received the Distinguished Service award from Chorus America, and in 2015 she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from Choral Arts New England.

**Ethan Sperry:** Hailed by *The Oregonian* for providing “the finest choral concerts in Portland in recent memory,” Ethan Sperry is Director of Choral Activities at Portland State University, Artistic Director and Conductor of the Oregon Repertory Singers. Born in New York City, Sperry began studying conducting at the age of eight, cello at the age of twelve, and singing at the age of eighteen. He has earned a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from Harvard College and Masters and Doctoral degrees in Choral Conducting from the University of Southern California. Ensembles under his direction have won over 20 medals at International Choir Competitions, performed at over a dozen professional conference in the United States and toured to Bermuda, Canada, China, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Guadeloupe, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Puerto Rico, Russia, and Taiwan, and have performed at major venues in the United States including The Hollywood Bowl, The Kennedy Center, The Washington National Cathedral, St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, The Nassau Coliseum, Cincinnati’s Music Hall, Boston’s Symphony Hall, and the United Nations. In July 2013, he led the Portland State Chamber Choir to victory at the Seghizzi International Competition for Choral Singing in Gorizia, Italy where they captured 15 separate awards including the Grand Prix, becoming the first American choir to ever win this competition in its 52-year history. A prolific arranger of World Music and Popular Music for choirs, Dr. Sperry’s arrangements are published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Hal Leonard, and CF Peters. He is also the editor of the Global Rhythms series for Earthsongs Music, one of the best-selling choral series in the country. Sperry is also a frequent collaborator with film composer AR Rahman and has appeared as a guest conductor for him numerous times including at Bollywood Night at the Hollywood Bowl and the 2008 Filmfare Awards, the Indian equivalent of the Oscars. He also serves as a consultant for the KM Music Conservatory in Chennai, the first classical music school in India, which opened in 2009. From 2000-2010, Dr. Sperry was on the faculty at Miami University in Ohio where he conducted the Men’s Glee Club, Collegiate Chorale, and Global Rhythms Ensembles. From 2000-2006 he was the artistic administrator of the Arad Philharmonic Chorus in Arad, Romania, and from 2001-2003 was the principal conductor of the Choeur Regional de Guadeloupe, the only symphonic choir in the French West Indies.

**Beth Willer:** Noted for her “directorial command” and “technical expertise,” conductor Beth Willer is recognized as a bold, 21st-century artist with her finger on the pulse of the vocal ensemble art. Her commitment to expanding and deepening the repertoire for vocal ensembles through creative collaboration and culturally-relevant programming can be seen in her work with professional and student ensembles alike. A champion of new music, Willer frequently collaborates with established and emerging composers, including significant projects with David Lang, Julia Wolfe, George Benjamin, Kati Agócs, Kareem Roustom, James Kallembach, Shawn Kirchner, and Jessica Meyer. As Founder and Artistic Director of Boston’s Lorelei Ensemble, Willer has led the octet to international acclaim, performing at celebrated venues across the country, including Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tanglewood Music Center, and Boston’s Symphony Hall. Committed to fulfilling Lorelei’s mission to elevate and expand the repertoire for women’s voices, she frequently initiates collaborations with composers from
the U.S. and abroad, leading the ensemble in more than 60 world, U.S. and regional premieres since its founding. Nationwide performances in 2019-20 featured the world premiere of Jessica Meyer’s I long and seek after (winner of the 2019 Chorus America Dale Warland Commissioning Award). Recent recordings include David Lang’s love fail (Cantaloupe, 2020), and Impermanence (Sono Luminus, 2018) featuring motets of Guillaume Du Fay, selections from the Turin Manuscript and the Codex Calixtinus, and the premiere recording of Peter Gilbert’s Tsukimi. As guest conductor Willer has been privileged to lead premiere ensembles from across the country, including performances with Seraphic Fire, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, New York Baroque Incorporated, and Roomful of Teeth. Symphonic work includes performance and recording of standard repertoire and multiple world and U.S. premieres with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (Andris Nelsons), the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra (Stefan Asbury), Boston Modern Orchestra Project (Gil Rose), and Boston University’s Tanglewood Institute (Ken-David Masur). Prior to joining the Peabody faculty, Willer served as Director of Choral Activities at Bucknell University, where she led the University Choir & Camerata, and taught courses in conducting, chamber music, arts entrepreneurship, and choral music education. Previous academic appointments include positions at Harvard University and The Boston Conservatory. A passionate music educator, Willer has led numerous young artist ensembles, including choruses at Boston University’s Tanglewood Institute, New England Conservatory’s Preparatory School, the Boston Arts Academy, The Walnut Hill School, and Eau Claire Memorial High School. An active clinician and master teacher, Willer enjoys frequent engagements with high school and collegiate ensembles across the country. Willer holds graduate degrees in conducting from Boston University (DMA and MM), and an undergraduate degree in Music Education and Trumpet Performance from Luther College (BM). Teachers include Ann Howard Jones, Weston Noble, Mark Shapiro, David Hoose, and Bruce Hangen.
Bibliography


Yet another perspective on the relative value of historical choral music as opposed to contemporary compositions.


Cruz, Penelope. “Is All Music For Everyone?” *The Choral Journal*, vol. 58, no. 4, November 2017, pp. 10-20.


