

Choral Music in the Junior High/Middle School

Janeal Krehbiel, editor <janealk@sunflower.com>

The Joy of Middle School!

A Conversation with Veteran Middle School/Junior High Choral Directors

by

Tom Shelton

As middle school choral directors, we are aware of the large job turnover in our area. It takes a special person to connect with this age group. Over the years, I have observed that you either love the challenge or you move on to a different age level rather quickly. I have taught middle school for sixteen years, and have loved every minute. I equate each new day to solving a puzzle. I enjoy the excitement and challenge each day brings and am fascinated by the students singing abilities. The energy and candidness they bring to rehearsal is refreshing. As a choral conductor and music educator, my goal is for them to love music for a lifetime, not a semester. Selecting quality repertoire is one of the most important ingredients in the success of middle level choral music.

In my quest to address the topics of

longevity and repertoire, I have contacted six, veteran middle school choral directors and asked: (1) What do you love about teaching middle school that has enticed you to stay with this age level?; and (2) What are your five favorite repertoire selections for middle school singers?

All together the panel represents 141 years of middle school choral teaching. I hope you are enlightened by the responses and gain a few repertoire ideas as well.

Cynthia Bradford is the choral director at Robert A. Taft Middle School in Crown Pointe, Indiana. She has been teaching for twenty-five years, the past eighteen at Taft Middle School. Bradford serves as the Central Division's R&S Chair for Middle School/Junior High choirs.

David Dobbins is the choral director at Southeast Guilford Middle School in Greensboro, North Carolina. He has been teaching middle school for fifteen years. Dobbins has served as the Middle

Tom Shelton is the choral director at Kernersville Middle School in Kernersville, North Carolina, and serves as president of the North Carolina ACDA.



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years. Dobbins has served as the Middle School/Junior High R&S Chair for North Carolina ACDA, and is currently the Chairperson-elect for the Middle School section of the NC Music Educators.

Janeal Krehbiel retired last year after teaching for thirty years, the last twenty-five in junior high school. She is artistic director of the Lawrence Children's Choir, where she conducts 5th-9th grade singers. She conducts junior high and children's honors choirs throughout the U.S. and conducted the 2005 ACDA National Junior High Honor Choir.

Marie Palmer is the choral director at Zionsville Middle School in Zionsville, Indiana. She has taught middle school for eighteen years and is currently the president of the Indiana ACDA.

Sherri Porterfield is the choral director at Cedar Park Middle School in Cedar Park, Texas. She has taught middle school singers for twenty-six years and is an accomplished composer.

Tamera Shook is the choral director at H.M. Arndt Middle School in Hickory, North Carolina. She has taught middle school for twenty-three years at H.M.

Arndt and serves as the NC ACDA R&S Chair for Middle School choirs.

What do you love about teaching middle school that has enticed you to stay with this age level?

Bradford: Really, what's not to love? Even on the worst day (and there are very few), the day is filled with the joy of learning, the drama of "failure," and the overpowering sense of hope that tomorrow will be the best day of their lives. Every day is a high-energy day. Unless, during rare times, the energy in the room is working against you, it is a wonderful atmosphere in which to empower young musicians and thinkers in the world of choral music.

Dobbins: Several things keep me interested in the middle school/adolescent age. I love to watch the amazing amount of growth and maturity a student achieves from age eleven through fourteen. I love

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their energy and enthusiasm. I love the fact that this age child still realizes that he or she is not yet an adult, but is beginning to use adult-level thinking skills. I love helping them find those skills within themselves. Being an adolescent in the twenty-first century is a tough job, and teaching them is difficult as well. It satisfies me professionally to help kids find solutions to their every-day challenges. I feel that the ability to communicate, discipline, and bond with students of this age is a rare gift and blessing. I think that anyone who possesses that gift should try to put it to good use.

Krehbiel: Their energy, when channeled correctly, can bring the most wonderfully rewarding results. (Krehbiel recently wrote an article for this column explaining why she spent most of her career with this age group.)

Palmer: I love teaching middle school students because I can have a positive impact on whether a young person becomes or remains interested in singing in a choir as they get older. I also enjoy seeing the reactions when they have success with something they didn't think they could do (a difficult piece of music, a high note, a long phrase, a foreign language, etc.), and the expressions on their faces when they discover something new musically (e.g., their first really tight chord).

Porterfield: Middle school students have such incredible potential and once you help them to see what they can do musically, the sky is the limit. I love teaching middle school because this is a time in their young lives when you can make the most profound difference. This is a time when teachers can most inspire and influence their students to be their best, not only musically, but also personally.

Shook: I love being the bridge that connects children to becoming lifelong singers. Most children had elementary music, but they take chorus at the high school level only if they have had a middle school teacher who has nurtured their love for singing. What an awesome responsibility!

What are your five favorite repertoire selections for middle school singers?

Bradford:

- *Trolls*

Clifford Crawley
(unison, Leslie Music Supply)

This song is full of rhythmic vitality with a text that is clever, without being cute. Although marketed as a treble piece, I have had success using this song with boys' changed and changing voices.

- *Rhythm of Life*

(Sweet Charity)—Cy Coleman,
arr. Barners (SAB with *divisi* treble parts and also available in SATB, Shawnee Press)

Middle school choirs need to be ready for any voicing, but music that is mostly homophonic may be difficult to learn and balance between voices. This song layers a series of *ostinatos* and builds on melodic sequences. Each voice part is given

a chance to sing the featured melody. The text and rhythmic complexity appeal to most middle school singers.

- *Gloria ad Modum Tubea*

Guilliam Dufay, ed Mason
(two equal voices, Plymouth Music)

This is a two-part canon. It provides opportunities to teach about the development of the Mass, the early Renaissance, and sight-reading in C major. In keeping with the time period, the range is limited and most melodic passages move in step-wise motion. Students also enjoy learning about the relationship of the text to the rhythmic notation. It is especially effective to add two trombones/tubas to the accompaniment (unless you know any sackbut players).

- *Goin' to Boston* -American folk song,
arr. Alice Parker
(SATB, G Schirmer)

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choir has a limited number of changed voice singers. This piece can be done without a totally balanced choir. Tenors and basses team up "against" the sopranos and altos, all in good fun.

- *Niska Banja* – Serbian song
arr. Nick Page
(SSAB, Boosey and Hawkes)

I believe that a school choral program should reflect the heritage of its community. We are graced with the presence of many people from countries once bonded together as the former county of Yugoslavia. Having a student's parent as a language coach is an added bonus.

Dobbins:

- *Dodi Li*
Doreen Rao, editor
(SS; Boosey & Hawkes - M051466795)

I know everyone knows this piece and has performed it, but it's still one of my favorites. Hebrew text; Three musically

different stanzas with the same refrain; Lively and fun; and also very suitable for beginning choir.

- *Come in From the Firefly Darkness*
Amy Feldman-Bernon
(Three-part mixed; Heritage Music Press - 15/1515H; also available SSA - 15/1698H)

Outstanding voicing, accompaniment, and use of lyric poetry. Three lovely (yet easy) solos, one on each voice part, highlight the middle section; and a surprising 9th chord at the finish. Feldman-Bernon is an excellent middle school composer.

- *Come to Me, O My Love*
Robert Alan Petker
(SAB; Hinshaw Music Company - HMC 1047; also available 2 part; TTB; SATB)

Four distinct melodies are established, and each voice part exchanges them throughout the piece, providing a thick aural texture. This piece sounds harder

than it is! There is a big dramatic ending, and it would make an excellent concert closer.

- *Ye Shall Have a Song*
Sherri Porterfield
(Three-part mixed; Alfred Music - 0-11605; also available SATB; SSA)

This is a challenging piece with mixed meter, wide dynamic variations, a distinct ABA form, and lots of fast-moving text. This is a great festival/competition piece.

- *Cum Sancto Spiritu*
Antonio Lotti/Patrick Liebergen
(SAB; a cappella; Alfred Music - 0-SV9112)

Here is a simple but challenging Italian Baroque work from a Lotti Mass. The slow tempo requires sustained breath support and dynamic control. It is a short piece that is great for teaching Latin vowels.

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"Our trip was fabulous and far better received by the Italians than I had expected. The Greeley Chorale experienced lifetime memories and for this—I thank you. In considering future trips, I will continue to seek out Kingsway International as my tour agency." —*Dr. Carl Gerbrandt, Conductor, Greeley Chorale [performed at St. Ignatius Church in Rome, Summer 2005]*



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"Kingsway International clearly understands the values of touring as well as how to put the details together to ensure a successful tour in today's changing climate. For our 90+ tour members, this was an extraordinary time." —*Dr. David Morales, Conductor, "Cantare Con Vivo" [toured St. Petersburg-Tallinn-Helsinki-Stockholm, 2005]*



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"To be able to perform Mozart's Requiem in this beautiful church was one of the most amazing musical experiences of my life. It's so overwhelming; I don't have words for it. The chorus was beautiful, the orchestra played well and the audience was fantastic, they were so warm and welcoming." —*Jo Anne Wasserman, Conductor, Santa Barbara Choral Society [performed in the Baroque St. Nicholas Church in Prague, June 2005]*



Ireland and Scotland

"I have taken my choir on five different tours to various European countries. We have always had great musical experiences – and have been shown the highlights of every city we visited. Our musical travels have created great friendship within the choir and have also attracted many new members to our group. We plan to go again with Kingsway International." —*Doreen Irwin, Director, SCC Choir's tour of Ireland and Scotland; 2004 Conductor, Sacramento City College Choir*



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Krehbiel:

- *Oh, Had I Jubal's Lyre*
Handel/Michael Mauldin
(SATB; Santa Barbara Music - SBMP 476)

A wonderful Baroque piece that teaches Junior High kids how to "dance the phrases". It stretches the singers and changes their lives vocally.

- *Lebenslust*

Schubert/ed. Cennen Gordon
(SATB Tetra/Continuo Music - 258)

This piece inspires kids to feel the joy of singing as they sing the "Joy of Living." The German is not difficult and they beg to sing it over and over. It is a one minute piece that says yes to choral music!

- *You Stole My Love*

W.C. MacFerren/ed.
Geoffrey Mason
(SATB; Walton- W7016)

This piece provides a great experience in unaccompanied singing that gives kids a chance to sing a late 1800s piece in Renaissance style.

- *How Can I Keep From Singing?*

arr. Gwyneth Walker
(SA(T)B; EC Schirmer - 5100)

This old Quaker hymn is brought to life in an arrangement that is especially for junior high singers—not hard but solid!

- *HMS Pinafore Medley*

Gilbert and Sullivan/arr. Marilyn Epp
(SATB; Alliance Music Publications - AMP0564)

This medley gives kids a chance to experience the joy of operetta and enjoy the incredible lyrics, full of wit and skillfully wedded notes and words. It is simple and full of opportunities for solos and small groups for an extra challenge.

Palmer:

- *The Violet*

Mark Patterson
(SSA; BriLee Music - BL239)

I love this piece for girls chorus. The text describes a middle school girl perfectly and there is plenty of opportunity for shaping, dynamics, and discussion of text. The harmonies are lovely.

- *In Flanders Fields*

Jacobson/Emerson
(SSA; Hal Leonard - 08741386;
also available SATB; SAB; TTB)

I also use this piece with a girls chorus. We use it for contest and Veteran's Day,

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and tie it in with their History and Language Arts classes. It provides a wonderful opportunity to highlight a soloist. Students request to sing it and audiences love to hear it.

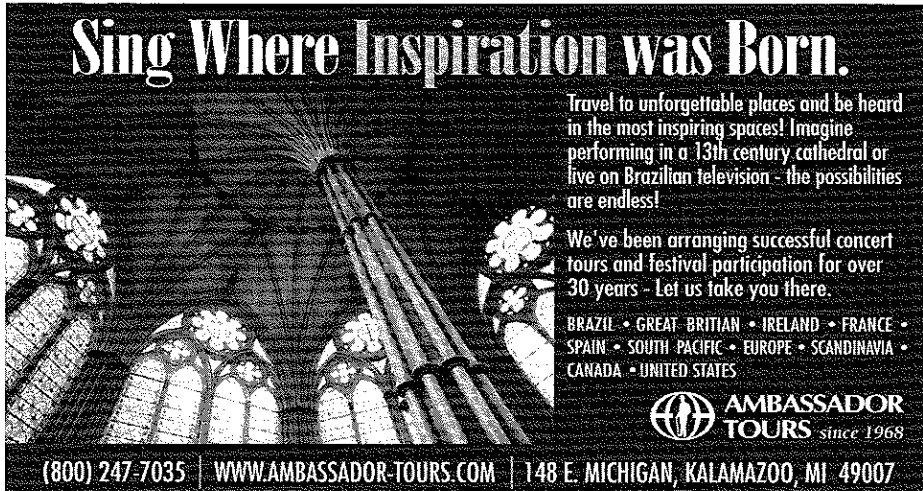
- *Goober Peas*
arr. Donald Moore
(TTB; a cappella with optional String Bass; Alfred - 0 -OCT9711)

This is a great unaccompanied piece for the boys, if you have enough lower voices. It is repetitive, the harmonies are easy, and the bass line gets to have a little fun. It is a good song for contest/festival.

- *Workin' on the Railroad*
arr. Donald Moore
(TTB; a cappella; Alfred - 0-SV9438)
Another great one for the guys. It is

much easier than it looks. The good thing is the song can't be done without the tenor 1 line, which makes them feel very important! It is also more contemporary sounding to the singers.

- For mixed groups, there are many wonderful traditional pieces, but I like to program at least one gospel song. The range is great for middle school, soloists can be highlighted, improvisation can be explored, and the energy level of some of the gospel songs is great for this age. We sometimes bring in a guest clinician and musicians (bass, drums, keyboard). There is a wealth of opportunity for teaching history, culture, style, ear-training, and the kids love to sing it! Gospel music is a way of bringing out even the most shy of singers!



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Porterfield:

- *Beau Soir*
Debussy/arr. Spevacek
(SSA; Hal Leonard - 08756903)

This is one of my favorite pieces for middle level girls' choirs. Great for teaching phrasing and vocal control. Expertly arranged, this is a wonderful piece to introduce your choir to the beauty of Impressionistic music and the exquisite French language.

- *Ticket to the Kingdom*
arr. Moore
(TTB; Alfred - SV9841)

Every choir I've conducted who has sung this piece loves it! It comes in a variety of voicings, but the TTB is perfect for middle level students. It's great for teaching diction and the boys love the fast tempo. It's repetitive enough so that it's relatively easy to learn and helps the young men's group experience success quickly.

- *Psalm 100*
Henderson
(SA; Hinshaw - HMC1170)

Incredible concert/festival/contest piece to help build the upper voice ranges of young voices. Most of this tune is written in a canon, so it's relatively easy to learn. The difficulty comes in singing with proper technique to achieve expres-

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sive phrasing. Great for teaching open vowels to achieve beautiful tone quality, balance, and blend. Accompaniment is of medium difficulty.

- *Exultate!*

Lightfoot

(Three-part mixed voices; Heritage Music Press - 15/1341H; also available SATB)

Every aspect of choral/vocal technique can be taught through this piece. Ranges are limited in all parts to help build confidence and the rhythmic aspect of the piece encourages good articulation of the Latin text.

- *Sing to the Lord from Three Meditations*

Goemanne

(SATB; Shawnee Press)

Great opening number in mixed meter. Incredible for teaching blend, diction, phrasing, and dynamics. I've used this piece numerous times and found it to be extremely successful. The students love singing it, and it's fun to conduct.

Shook:

- *I Will Rejoice*

Telemann/arr.

Perry & Perry

(SAB or SSA; BriLee - BL176)

This piece is a simple introduction to early music and three-part singing.

- *A Song in Every Heart*

Ruth Elaine Schram

(Three-part mixed; BriLee - BL324)

To sum up this piece is to read the text!

- *I Lift My Eyes to the Hills*

Kenney Potter

(SATB; Hinshaw - HMC1990)

This composition, with its lyrical lines and powerful message, really has become one of my favorite pieces to teach. The range is perfect for young voices and it is a great teaching tool for phrasing.

- *The Lord Is My Shepherd*

Allen Pote (SAT/SAB or SATB;

Choristers Guild - CGA551)

Most middle school teachers throw

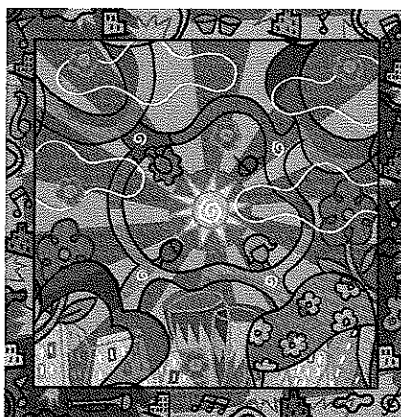
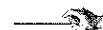
this in the "maybe later" pile because it is SATB; but, the composer has taken great care in doubling the few division sections that makes first time SATB singing easy!

- *Agnus Dei*

Butler

(SAB; Carl Fischer - CM8191)

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